



FORGING SHIELDS: BANGLADESH'S DEFENCE PARTNERSHIPS AND THE PATH AHEAD

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh's increasing defence deals can be counterproductive as the country battles internal security challenges and lacks a steady political leadership.

Devyani Kumare

Research Fellow, Foresight

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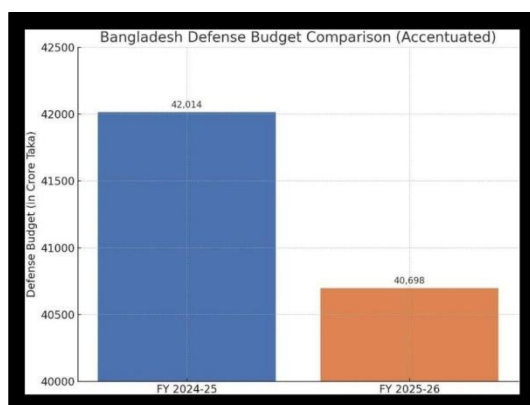
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Forging Shields: Bangladesh's Defence Partnerships and the Path Ahead

Hypothesis

Bangladesh recently has been actively engaging and strengthening its defence ties with various countries to enhance its military capabilities through defence partnerships. This strategic shift can be sourced with the intention to modernize defence infrastructure, and to reduce dependence on traditional allies, like India. In September 2025, Bangladesh engaged in alarming deals related to defence and by deepening ties with the United States, Australia, Italy, and Turkey. Bangladesh is acquiring the RQ-21A through U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF). This decision hints at Bangladesh's intention of shifting from traditional partner like India to other emerging nations to play a stronger role in regional security cooperation. Bangladesh's defence budget for the fiscal year 2025-26 is approximately Tk 40,698 crore (~\$4.7 billion), despite a budget cut compared to previous year, the defence budget still accounts for about 9.1% of the total national budget, reflecting its significant share in government spending. China's influence by provides huge loans for infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with estimated loans around \$6.1 billion mainly for BRI projects, However, this will contribute more into the already existing internal security challenges wherein with an unstable political system, it will hinder the country's economic growth on a large scale.



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Key Predictions for Bangladesh Politics

1. Electoral Timeline and Reform Deadlock

The interim technocratic government under Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus will face persistent disputes over sequencing reforms versus holding elections, likely prompting the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to pressure for an early February 2026 vote while Yunus delays to complete institutional changes.

2. BNP's Resurgence and Internal Strains

The BNP, led by acting chair **Tarique Rahman**, will head into the election as the principal challenger but risks falling short of an outright majority due to fragmentation with Islamist factions and new student-led groups that split the anti-Hasina coalition.

3. Islamist Parties' Strategic Alliances

Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamist formations will leverage the transitional volatility to deepen grassroots networks and form tactical pacts—potentially boosting their parliamentary share though without capacity to govern alone.

4. Awami League in Exile and Shadow Politics

Banned from contesting and beset by in absentia trials, Sheikh Hasina's Awami League will operate clandestinely, relying on loyalist networks and diaspora lobbying to undermine the interim government and position itself for a post-election comeback once legal barriers ease.

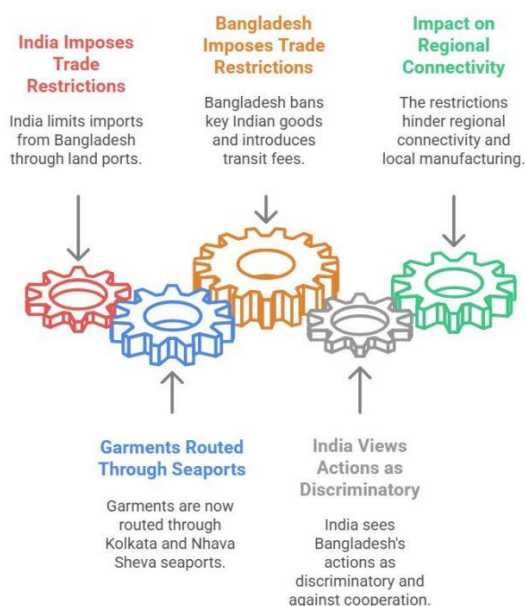


Analysis

Bangladesh is an immediate neighbour of India, and India's recent trade restrictions are impacting the bilateral relations negatively. India is strengthening its border security by fencing and surveillance. Dhaka has raised concerns and argued that it infringes on the rights of the local communities, further straining relations. This combination of political distrust and economic disagreements has sourced Bangladesh's current distancing and occasional hostility toward India. India has traditionally had deep ties with the Hasina government and did not diversify its engagements with other political groups. The interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, has publicly criticized India's stance on the 2024 student protests

and has demanded the extradition of Hasina, accusing India of shielding her. Another reason is Bangladesh shifting its foreign policy to reduce reliance on India in terms of their economy and trade.

India-Bangladesh Trade Restrictions



Bangladesh has been acquiring advanced military hardware from Turkey, including Bayraktar TB2 drones and TRG-300 multiple rocket launchers and the "Pacific Angel" exercise with the U.S. focuses on humanitarian assistance and disaster response, while the "Tiger Shark" exercise aims to deepen bilateral defence cooperation. There has been controversy surrounding prolonged stay of the US military officials in Chittagong, raising suspicion on the role of US in the domestic politics of Bangladesh.

On the other hand, violence against religious minorities even Muslim minorities has increased since the interim government came into office. The interim government was unable to bring about any major reforms to strengthen the political backbone, moreover the students and the military are disappointed in Yunus over his

favouring Arakan army, delay in elections, failure to prioritise internal security needs and at times playing puppet in the hands of the US.

Conclusion

From defaulted loans to the stock market crash, the country's economy is in a bad shape, according to *The Dhaka Tribune*. Over the past 16 years, the market has shrunk by about 38 per cent and when it comes to the estimates shared by the Bangladesh Bank, these defaulted loans have amounted to 6 lakh crore Taka by the end of June 2025. These military expenditures will further contribute in slowdown of economy. With political unrest on one side and potential economy collapse on the other, strategic investments in defence are not aligned with the priorities under Forces Goal 2030 program. If high level diplomatic meetings between India and Bangladesh aren't scheduled in near future to discuss important matters then the relations may remain tense, limiting cooperation in trade, border management, and regional security. Regarding the political stability of Bangladesh, the February 2026 election will determine if the system can transition to a stable and functioning parliamentary democracy after the 2024 uprising.

What's in it for India?

- India and Bangladesh had agreed to counter human trafficking, smuggling and cross border terrorism activities. Due to the political instability these priorities might take a back seat increasing security concerns for India.
- The planned February 2026 elections in Bangladesh are crucial. A stable and democratically elected government could restore the momentum in the bilateral relations whereas prolonged instability might strain the relations further.
- Without timely high-level dialogue and functional relations, India faces diminishing influence in Bangladesh, impacting regional stability and hindering progress on shared strategic priorities.
- Indo-Bangladesh trade rose to \$13 billion in 2023-24, without a pro-India Bangladesh government or a stable government, the trade is bound to be negatively impacted.

September's News Review

Sr No.	Date	Sector	News Headline	Source
1.	01/09/25	Politics	EC to include persons with disabilities in electoral process	Daily sun
2.	02/09/25		Chief adviser insists elections must occur in February; no viable alternative amid unrest	Prothom Alo
3.	03/09/25		Hasina, Kamal ordered shooting of July protesters	The Daily Star
4.	05/09/25		Bangladesh requests Interpol Red Notices against Sheikh Hasina and her son	Times of India
5.	05/09/25		Hasina's collaborators in administration ready to prevent govt from holding	dailysun
6.	06/09/25		BNP condemns attack, arson at Jatiya Party headquarters in Dhaka	Bdnews24
7.	08/09/25		With the path to implementation unclear, the July Charter may remain only	Bdnews_24
8.	08/09/25		Govt wants to preserve historic Teliapara bungalow, tea workers object	prothomalo
9.	09/09/25		Govt launches Tk43.5cr project to develop fish vaccines	The Daily Inqalab
10.	10/09/25		DUCSU Polls: Shadik elected VP, Farhad GS	The Daily Inqalab
11.	10/09/25		Sylhet DC directs complete ban on hill-cutting	unb
12.	11/09/25		S Martin's fishermen reinvent livelihood amid climate crisis	dailysun
13.	11/09/25		JUCSU election today after 33 years	prothomalo

14.	11/09/25		Polytechnic students in Rangpur	Mzamin
15.	11/09/25		A 4 -hour strike demanding the meeting of 4 parliamentary seats in Bagerhat	Mzamin
16.	11/09/25		Procurement reforms aim to cut graft	Dailystar
17.	12/09/25		Divergence grows on how to amend Constitution for 19 fundamental reforms	Bdnews_24
18.	13/09/25		Nahid accuses interim government of silence over attacks on Adviser Mahfuj	Dailystar
19.	13/09/25		July Charter: BNP ready to sign; Jamaat, NCP hesitant	Dailystar
20.	14/09/25		Rizvi warns of rising 'dangerous forces' endangering democracy	BanglaPress24
21.	14/09/25		Salahuddin sees security risks if polls miss February deadline	BanglaPress24
22.	15/09/25		Is Chhatra Shibir's sweeping victory in DUCSU, JUCSU elections sparking worry in	bdnews_24
23.	15/09/25		Fair, festive February polls depend on consensus	Daily sun
24.	15/09/25		All union committees of Manikganj Sadar Upazila Volunteer Party are abolished	mzamin
25.	15/09/25		July charter: Jamaat wants constitutional order or referendum	TheDailystar
26.	16/09/25		Government extends National Consensus Commission's term by a month	bdnews_24
27.	17/09/25		Govt pushes UN for 3-year LDC delay amid tariff fears	Daily sun
28.	18/09/25		51% of the population, but Islamist parties resist even 5% direct quota for women	bdnews_24
29.	18/09/25		Constitutional order, referendum proposed	The Daily Inqalab
30.	22/09/25		Jamaat is not an alternative to the united BNP	mzamin
31.	22/09/25		My Village, My Town: Big promises, small delivery	The Daily Inqalab

32.	24/09/25		EC publishes list of 115 electoral symbols, "Boat" symbol suspended	BanglaPress24
33.	25/09/25		Govt pushes new telecom licensing policy amid industry concerns	The Inqalab Daily
34.	27/09/25		World shocked by violence unleashed on Sanatan Dharma followers in Bangladesh: Former PM Hasina	indiatribune.
35.	04/09/25	Economy	Rural non-food inflation overtakes urban level	Daily sun
36.	05/09/25		Five weak banks are to be merged into a larger Islamic bank. But will the ploy work	bdnews_24
37.	08/09/25		Merger deadlock puts 18,000 bank employees in limbo	The Inqalab Daily
38.	09/09/25		Oasis Accessories to invest \$4.8m in BEPZA EZ for packaging production	The Inqalab Daily
39.	10/09/25		Chevron collects Tk 3.66b in penalties under pressure	prothomalo
40.	12/09/25		Bank deposits rise Tk73,000cr in three months	dailysun
41.	15/09/25		Fuel deficit sparks concern over Boro harvest in Rangpur region	The Inqalab Daily
42.	18/09/25		Bangladesh steps into global antibiotics market with landmark penicillin plant	Daily sun
43.	18/09/25		Rising deposits signal renewed confidence in banks	The Inqalab Daily
44.	21/09/25		Bangladesh needs \$116.8bn to implement NDC 3.0: Adviser Rizwana	unb

45.	21/09/25		Commerce Adviser stresses surplus economy for sustainable growth	Unb
46.	22 /09/25		Revenue collection rises 21% in July-August	Dailystar
47.	22/09/25		Why hilsa is disappearing from menu of the middle class?	The Inqalab Daily
48.	22/09/25		Bangladesh is Ad Marine Vessels 'Pragati of Bengal', 'Nav Yatra of Bengal' is a	bdnews_24
49.	23/09/25		Savings certificates should be tradable in secondary market: BB governor	The Inqalab Daily
50.	25/09/25		Wheat imports to rise amid falling output and growing demand	The Inqalab Daily
51.	05/09/25	Foreign affairs	US firm to launch portable AI ultrasound device in Bangladesh	banglapres24
52.	05/09/25		Opinion: Strategic opportunity to rebalance Bangladesh's foreign policy	AsiaTimes
53.	05/09/25		Bangladesh to send emergency aid to earthquake-hit Afghanistan	Dailysun
	06/09/25		Bangladesh's-potential-role-in-a-non-nato-peacekeeping-mission-in-ukraine	Bdmilitary
54.	08/09/25		Bangladesh for working closely with Brazil for climate action at COP30	BSS NEWS
55.	08/08/25		Hilsa diplomacy back on plate: Bangladesh clears 1,200 tonnes ahead of Durga	Times of India

56.	09/09/25		Bangladesh needs \$30b in climate funds, but struggles to get \$1-\$2b from IMF:	BanglaPress24
57.	12/09/25		Dhaka eyes 15% duty on exports as US trade team due on Sunday	dailysun
58.	16/09/25		Hold Israel to account, Bangladesh's interim FM urges Muslim world	bdnews_24
59.	17/09/25		Bangladesh competes with Cyprus, Palestine for UNGA Presidency 2026-27	Daily sun
60.	17/09/25		UK: Committed to inclusive development in Bangladesh	dhakatribune
61.	18/09/25		Bangladesh, US advance defense cooperation through Pacific Angel exercise	The Inqalab Daily
62.	18/09/25		Bangladesh-Myanmar border is unprotected, arms smuggling	mzamin
63.	21/09/25		No visa ban directive on Bangladesh, says Dhaka's ambassador to UAE	bdnews_24
64.	21/09/25		Court orders seizure of \$81mn from Philippines' RCBC over 2016 Bangladesh	bdnews_24
65.	23/09/25		Bangladesh fully prepared for fair, peaceful election in February: Yunus tells US	BanglaPress24
66.	23/09/25		Bangladesh, Australia launch Indo-Pacific Endeavour-2025 phase-1	BanglaPress24

67.	23/09/25		Australia reaffirms support for inclusive dev in Cox's Bazar through strengthening	The Inqalab Daily
68.	24/09/25		CA seeks WB help to modernise Ctg port, retrieve stolen funds	BanglaPress24
69.	24/09/25		CA seeks WTO support for Bangladesh's smooth LDC graduation	BanglaPress24
70.	25/09/25		Bangladesh, Italy eye expanded economic ties, safe migration	The Inqalab Daily
71.	25/09/25		Prof Yunus invited to join Club de Madrid	The Inqalab Daily
72.	05/09/25	Social	Act to avert mass hunger among the Rohingyas	Daily Star
73.	05/09/25		Shrine attack in Rajbari injures 50; vandalism and arson after protest	Prothom Alo
74.	14/09/25		Bangladesh issues flood alert for low-lying areas of nine districts due to heavy rain	bdnews_24
75.	15/09/25		Human Right	mzamin
76.	16/09/25		Cops crackdown on pry teachers' march to Jamuna	Daily sun
77.	16/09/25		Islamist parties launch protest progs for PR polls, other demands	The Inqalab Daily
78.	21/09/25		Dengue deaths hit record high in Bangladesh; 12 die in a single day	unb
79.	22/09/25		Scuffle over ward quota: RU teachers go on indefinite strike	Dailystar

80.	22/09/25		DU students held human chain protesting BNP leader Fazlul's statement	unb
81.	22/09/25		Yunus warns of an existential squeeze on Bangladesh	Jagonews24
82.	25/09/25		Illegal pharmacies boom around Ukhiya Rohingya camps	Dailysun
83.	02/09/25	Defence	Why Pakistan is rushing to mend fences with Bangladesh	Al Jazeera
84.	21/09/25		Bangladesh to Establish Joint Army-Navy RQ-21 Blackjack UAS Regiment with U.S.	BDMilitary
85.	23/09/25		Transitioning the Bangladesh Air Force Away from Russian Aircraft	BDMilitary
86.	24/09/25		Bangladesh Air Force Chief Meets Italian Ambassador to Strengthen Defence Ties	BDMilitary
87.	24/09/25		Bangladesh and Turkish Air Forces Strengthen Defence Ties	BDMilitary
88.	25/09/25		Bangladesh Navy Quietly Begins RQ-21 Blackjack Drone Operations in Bay of	BDMilitary

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