



## INDIA AND BANGLADESH RELATIONS – MAJOR ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN CONTEXT OF REALITY

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260402087>

#### Abstract

India and Bangladesh share a long border (over 4096km). India and Bangladesh share a close relationship based on history, culture, and geography. In recent years, their ties have improved through cooperation in trade, connectivity, and security. However, in the context of changing global and regional realities, several issues and challenges still affect their relationship. One of the major problems is the sharing of river water, especially the Teesta River, which has not yet been resolved. Border management is another concern, including illegal migration, smuggling, and occasional clashes. There is also a trade imbalance, where Bangladesh imports more from India than it exports, creating economic concerns. Political factors and internal issues in both countries sometimes influence relations. In addition, the Rohingya refugee crisis has put pressure on Bangladesh and requires regional cooperation, including support from India. The growing influence of other global powers, especially China, in the region has also added a strategic challenge. Furthermore, both countries face climate change problems like floods and cyclones, which may increase migration and resource conflicts in the future. Although India and Bangladesh maintain friendly relations, these challenges need careful management through dialogue, mutual trust, and cooperation to ensure stable and strong relations in the changing world.

**Keywords:** *Diplomacy, Foreign policy, Human trafficking, Illegal migration, Neighborhood policy, Regional Cooperation, Smuggling, Strategic partnership*

#### Introduction

Bangladesh was created in 1971 with strong support from India and Bangladesh share a closed relationship based on history culture and geography since both countries have cooperate in many area light trade security and connectivity. India shares a world long land border with Bangladesh. India and Bangladesh share their border across five Indian states-

West Bengal about 2,217 km,

Assam about 262 km,

Meghalaya about 443 km,

Tripura about 856 km,

Mizoram about 318 km.

They make of the 4096 km total border. In India West Bengal share largest border with Bangladesh with water and land. In the present reality, the relationship between India and Bangladesh is both strong and complex. On one hand, there is cooperation in areas like trade, transport, security, and cultural exchange. On the other hand, there are several important issues that create challenges between the two countries. These issues include water sharing of common rivers, border management, illegal migration, trade imbalance, environmental problems, and regional political pressures. One of the main reasons for these challenges is that both countries depend on shared resources like rivers and border areas, which sometimes leads to conflict of interest. At the same time, internal political situations and public opinion in both countries also influence their relationship. In addition, the involvement of other powerful countries in the region makes the situation more complicated. Even though there are challenges, India and Bangladesh continue to engage in dialogue and cooperation to solve their problems peacefully. Their relationship is important not only for the two countries but also for peace and development in South Asia. In simple terms, India–Bangladesh relations are a mix of friendship and challenges, where both countries need mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation to manage their differences and build a stronger partnership in the future.

### **Recent Political Shift**

In present scenario India Bangladesh relation are largely positive and cooperative but not without challenges. In early 2026, India Bangladesh relations are entering a “reset” phase following the February 2026 general election in Bangladesh. After a period of High tension following the 2024 change in government, both nations are now moving towards a more pragmatic stable. The political situation between India and Bangladesh is changing slowly in recent years. Earlier, the relationship was very friendly and stable, especially during the time of close cooperation between India and the government of Bangladesh led by Sheikh Hasina. India supported Bangladesh in many areas like trade, security, and connectivity, and both countries worked together to reduce problems like terrorism and border conflicts. But now, some political shifts are visible. One important change is that Bangladesh is trying to maintain a balance between India and other powerful countries like China. China is investing in infrastructure and development projects in Bangladesh, which is slowly increasing its influence. Because of this, India is becoming more careful and attentive in its relationship with Bangladesh. Another shift is related to internal politics in both countries. In India, political discussions sometimes focus on issues like illegal migration from Bangladesh, which creates tension in public opinion. In Bangladesh, some political groups and citizens feel that India gets more benefits in certain agreements, especially in water sharing and trade. This creates a feeling of imbalance among some people. Border issues and incidents also affect the political mood. Even though both governments try to maintain peace, occasional clashes or problems at the border can create negative reactions in both countries. At the same time, cooperation is still strong in many areas. Both countries continue to work together in trade, transport, energy, and regional development. Connectivity projects like roads, railways, and waterways are improving, which shows that the relationship is still important for both sides. In simple words, the present political shift in India-Bangladesh relations is not a complete change, but a gradual adjustment. The relationship is still friendly, but both countries are becoming more cautious, balancing their own national interests while continuing cooperation.

Today the Bangladesh nationalist party (BNP) lead by prime minister Tarique Rahman owns a landslide victory in February 2026. India swiftly congratulation the new leadership. The Ganga water treaty (1996) in due to expire in December 2026, making its renewal a critical upcoming diplomatic task. The long-standing Teesta River dispute also remains unsolved.

### **Major Issue and Challenges**

#### **Water sharing**

India and Bangladesh share total 54 rivers, so water is a permanent part of their tie up.

#### **Teesta River**

The Teesta River dispute is the poster child of India Bangladesh water tension. The river flows from Sikkim through West Bengal into Bangladesh’s Rangpur region. Bangladesh wants a guarantees split roughly 50-50 during dry month (December – March) to irrigate crops. But West Bengal State block a formal treaty, so the Teesta remains unsolved since 2011. Recent talks in 2024 to restart negotiation haven’t produce a formula yet. The Teesta River is one of the most important rivers shared by India and Bangladesh. It starts from the Himalayas in the Indian state of Sikkim, flows through West Bengal, and then enters Bangladesh. For both countries, this river is very important because many people depend on it for farming, fishing, and daily water needs. The problem begins during the dry season, when the water level in the Teesta River becomes very low. At this time, both India and Bangladesh need water for agriculture. India uses a large part of the river water for irrigation in West Bengal, while Bangladesh also depends on the same river to grow crops, especially in its northern region. Because the amount of water is limited, it becomes difficult to satisfy the needs of both sides. Bangladesh often feels that it is not getting a fair share of water, especially in the dry months. This creates dissatisfaction and tension between the two countries. India, on the other hand, also has its own needs, particularly for farmers in West Bengal, and this makes the situation more complicated. Although both countries have discussed the issue many times and even tried to make an agreement, a final solution has not yet been reached. One of the main reasons is that water sharing is not only an international issue but also a domestic issue within India, where state governments like West Bengal play an important role in decision-making. In simple words, the Teesta River water sharing problem is about how to fairly divide limited water between two neighboring countries that both depend on it. Until a proper agreement is made, this issue will continue to be an important challenge in India–Bangladesh relations.

#### **Ganga / Farakka**

Ganga water sharing treaty signed 1996 at Farakka. It fixes how much water is country get during the dry season at the Farakka barrage. Both sides called it “workable”. And it runs for 30 years. So, it’s valid until 2026.

#### **Border Management Problems**

The India–Bangladesh border is about 4,096 km long, making it one of the longest borders in the world. Issues like illegal crossing, cattle smuggling, and human trafficking are common in some areas. There have been incidents of firing and deaths at the border, which create tension. Managing the border is difficult because many people live very close to it. Maintaining security while also protecting human rights and good relations:

#### **Illegal Migration**

Illegal migration is one of the most sensitive issues in the relationship between India and Bangladesh. It mainly refers to people crossing the border without proper documents or legal permission. India shares a long and porous border with Bangladesh, and in many places- it is difficult to control movement completely. Because of this, some people from Bangladesh enter India in

search of better jobs, education, or living conditions. Poverty, population pressure, natural disasters like floods and cyclones, and lack of opportunities are some of the reasons that push people to migrate. From India's point of view, illegal migration creates several concerns. It can put pressure on jobs, land, and public services in border states like Assam and West Bengal. It also becomes a political issue, as many people feel that it changes the demographic balance of certain areas. Because of this, India has taken steps like building border fencing, increasing security, and updating citizenship records through processes like the NRC (National Register of Citizens). On the other hand, Bangladesh usually does not accept that large numbers of its citizens are migrating illegally to India. It often says that the issue is exaggerated or politically motivated. This difference in views creates tension between the two countries and makes it difficult to find a clear solution. Illegal migration is also connected to other problems like human trafficking, smuggling, and fake identity documents. These activities make border management more complex and require cooperation between both countries' security forces. At the same time, this issue is not only about security but also about human lives. Many migrants face dangerous journeys, exploitation, and poor living conditions. So, it is also a humanitarian concern. In simple words, illegal migration affects India-Bangladesh relations because India sees it as a serious security and economic issue, while Bangladesh often disagrees with this view. Because of this difference, the issue remains sensitive and requires careful discussion, cooperation, and trust-building between the two countries.

### **Security Concerns**

Problems like drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and fake currency exist along the border. In the past, there were concerns about extremist groups using border areas. Cooperation has improved, but risks still remain. Ensuring peace and security while maintaining trust.

### **Political and Diplomatic Issues**

Political and diplomatic issues between India and Bangladesh are important because the two countries share history, culture, and a long border, but they also have some disagreements that affect their relationship. One major issue is related to the border. India and Bangladesh share a very long border, and sometimes problems like illegal crossing, smuggling, and border violence happen. There have been cases where people were injured or killed during border tensions, which creates anger and mistrust among people in Bangladesh and sometimes affects diplomatic relations. Both countries try to manage this through talks between border forces, but the issue still exists. Another important issue is water sharing. Rivers like the Teesta are very important for both countries, especially for farming. Bangladesh often feels that it is not getting enough water during the dry season, while India also has its own needs. Because of this, agreements on water sharing sometimes get delayed, which creates political tension and public dissatisfaction in Bangladesh. Migration is also a sensitive topic. India is concerned about illegal migration from Bangladesh, especially in border states like Assam and West Bengal. On the other hand, Bangladesh often denies large-scale migration and feels that the issue is sometimes exaggerated. This difference in views creates political debates and affects trust between the two countries. Trade and economic relations are generally strong, but there are still some challenges. Bangladesh sometimes faces trade imbalance because it imports more from India than it exports. There are also issues related to border trade rules, infrastructure, and customs delays. These problems can create frustration even though both countries want better economic cooperation. Another political issue is related to regional and global diplomacy. Bangladesh tries to maintain balanced relations with countries like China, while India is sometimes cautious about China's influence in the region. This can create some strategic concerns, although both countries continue to cooperate in many areas. Internal politics in both countries also affect their relationship. Changes in government, political pressure, and public opinion can influence how leaders deal with each other. Sometimes political parties use India-Bangladesh issues to gain support, which can increase tension. In simple words, political and diplomatic issues between India and Bangladesh come from border management, water sharing, migration, trade concerns, and regional politics. Even though these challenges exist, both countries continue to talk and cooperate because they understand that a peaceful and friendly relationship is important for their development and stability.

### **Regional and Global Cooperation**

Regional and global cooperation between India and Bangladesh is very important because both countries are close neighbors and share history, culture, rivers, and economic interests. Their cooperation is not only limited to their borders but also extends to regional and global levels. At the regional level, India and Bangladesh work together through organizations like SAARC and BIMSTEC. These organizations help countries in South Asia and the Bay of Bengal region to cooperate in areas like trade, security, transport, and development. Through these platforms, both countries try to improve connectivity by building roads, railways, and waterways. This helps in easier movement of goods and people, which increases trade and economic growth. India and Bangladesh also cooperate in managing shared natural resources, especially rivers like the Ganges River and Teesta River. They work together to solve water-sharing issues and to reduce the impact of floods and climate change. Since both countries face similar environmental challenges, regional cooperation becomes very important. In terms of security, India and Bangladesh support each other in maintaining peace and stability in the region. They work together to control terrorism, smuggling, and illegal migration. This cooperation helps in building trust and improving relations between the two countries. At the global level, India and Bangladesh cooperate in international organizations like the United Nations. They often support each other on issues like climate change, sustainable development, and peacekeeping. Both countries are also part of global discussions on trade and economic development, where they try to protect the interests of developing nations. They also cooperate in global peacekeeping missions, where both countries contribute troops to maintain peace in conflict areas around the world. In addition, they work together to address global problems like climate change, as both are vulnerable to rising sea levels and natural disasters. Overall, regional and global cooperation between India and Bangladesh helps in strengthening their relationship, improving economic

growth, ensuring security, and addressing common challenges. This cooperation is important not only for the two countries but also for the stability and development of the whole region and the world.

### **Environmental and Climate Challenges**

Environmental and climate challenges play a very important role in the relationship between India and Bangladesh. Both countries are closely connected by geography, rivers, and climate, so any environmental problem in one country directly affects the other. One of the biggest challenges is climate change. Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change because it is low-lying and close to the sea. Rising sea levels can flood large areas of land, destroy homes, and force people to migrate. This migration can sometimes create pressure on border areas of India, especially in states like West Bengal and Assam. So, climate change is not only an environmental issue but also a social and political concern between the two countries. Another major issue is river water sharing. India and Bangladesh share many rivers, including the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Teesta. During the dry season, there is often not enough water, and both countries need it for agriculture, drinking, and daily use. Bangladesh sometimes feels that it is not getting a fair share of water, especially from the Teesta River. This creates tension and affects trust between the two countries. Flooding is also a serious problem. Heavy rainfall and melting glaciers in the Himalayas increase water flow in rivers, which leads to floods in both India and Bangladesh. Because Bangladesh is downstream, it suffers more when upstream areas in India release excess water. This creates the need for better coordination and information sharing between the two countries. Cyclones and natural disasters are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change. Coastal regions in both India and Bangladesh are often hit by strong cyclones, which damage crops, homes, and infrastructure. These disasters require joint efforts in disaster management, early warning systems, and relief work. The Sundarbans, a large mangrove forest shared by both countries, is also under threat. Rising sea levels, pollution, and deforestation are damaging this unique ecosystem. The loss of the Sundarbans can affect biodiversity, increase vulnerability to storms, and harm the livelihoods of people living there. Protecting this area requires cooperation between India and Bangladesh. Pollution is another shared concern. Industrial waste, plastic pollution, and untreated sewage flow into rivers that cross the border. This affects water quality, fish resources, and human health in both countries. Since rivers are shared, pollution control needs joint action. In simple words, environmental and climate challenges make India-Bangladesh relations more complex but also more important. These problems cannot be solved by one country alone. Both countries need to work together through cooperation, agreements, and mutual understanding to manage resources, reduce risks, and protect the environment for future generations.

### **Conclusion**

India and Bangladesh have a friendly and cooperative relationship, but several practical challenges still exist. These include border issues, water disputes, migration, trade imbalance, political tensions, and external influences like China. To improve relations, both countries need, regular dialogue, mutual trust, fair agreements, regional cooperation, a strong partnership will benefit not only these two countries but also the entire South Asian region. The relationship between India and Bangladesh has improved over time through several important areas of development. These “major ways” show how both countries are working together for mutual benefit in the present context. However, there are still some important problems that create tension between them. One major issue is water sharing, especially of rivers like the Teesta, which affects farmers and people in both countries. Another challenge is illegal migration, which creates political and social pressure in India. Border-related problems, including smuggling and occasional conflicts, also affect trust between the two countries. Political differences and changing governments sometimes slow down cooperation. Environmental problems like floods and climate change also create pressure on both countries, especially in border areas. Even with these challenges, both India and Bangladesh are trying to solve problems through discussion and cooperation. Their relationship is important for peace and development in South Asia. If both countries continue to build trust, respect each other’s needs, and work together, their relationship can become stronger in the future.

**Acknowledgment:** No

**Author’s Contribution:** *Anesha Khatun*: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

**Funding:** No

**Declaration:** The author has given consent for the publication.

**Competing Interest:** No

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