

DHAKA IS EMERGING AS A DIPLOMATIC HUB: INDIA AND PAKISTAN OPEN A NEW CHAPTER WITH BANGLADESH ON THE SAME DAY

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On October 6, during a one-hour meeting between India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and the Diplomatic Correspondents Association of Bangladesh (DCAB), India emphasized its support for free, fair, and inclusive elections scheduled to be held in Dhaka in 2026.

During the meeting, a number of issues related to Bangladesh were discussed. In particular, the issue of water sharing, which is becoming a key topic in relations with India, has caused serious concern for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh seeks to receive 50% of the Teesta River's water flowing from India, while India insists on retaining 75%. The river is vital for Bangladesh's Rangpur region; however, due to water shortages and declining rainfall, agricultural output in the region has sharply decreased.

One of the main reasons is that the Government of West Bengal, particularly Kolkata, uses a large portion of this water for agriculture and electricity generation. Additionally, with the 30-year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty set to expire in 2026, new negotiations are expected to begin around December.

India has also expressed its readiness to cooperate with Bangladesh's increasingly neutral new government. Previously, during nearly 21 years of Sheikh Hasina's rule, relations with India were warm and deeply interconnected. However, as these ties gradually weakened, India decided to pursue a renewed policy of engagement with Bangladesh. Over the past year, several reforms implemented by Muhammad Yunus and improvements in Bangladesh's global image have contributed to opening a new chapter in South Asia.

For example, on June 19, a meeting was held in China's Yunnan Province involving China's Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, Bangladesh's Acting Foreign Secretary Ruhul Alam Siddique, and Pakistan's Additional Secretary for Asia-Pacific Imran Ahmed Siddiqui. The introduction of this trilateral mechanism significantly alarmed India. Bangladesh's improving relations with Pakistan and its complex engagement with China have made India feel increasingly isolated. During the October 6 meeting, Vikram Misri left unanswered questions regarding Bangladesh's growing closeness with Pakistan.

On the same day, Pakistan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Lieutenant General Tabassum Habib, arrived in Dhaka on a four-day official visit. This was the largest military visit since the overthrow of Sheikh Hasina's government in 2024 and signaled the formation of a strong strategic partnership between the two South Asian countries. The visit focused on experience-sharing and defense cooperation. Trade relations

have also expanded, including the revival of maritime shipping routes between the ports of Karachi and Chittagong.

Earlier, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's official visit to Dhaka in August marked a new phase in bilateral relations. Discussions covered trade, economic, and military cooperation. Both sides agreed to revive the Joint Working Group on Trade and the Joint Economic Commission, expand trade in cement, sugar, leather, and pharmaceuticals, and reduce customs and logistics barriers. In the defense sphere, regional security, counterterrorism, and cooperation in UN peacekeeping missions were emphasized. Pakistan also offered training programs for Bangladeshi military personnel, reinforcing defense ties.

In contrast, relations with India have faced setbacks. In July 2024, the Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina signed a \$21 million contract with India's Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE) to build tugboats for Bangladesh's navy. However, in 2025, the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus canceled the deal, citing shifting economic priorities. In reality, the decision was linked to rising trade tensions and declining diplomatic trust. Indian restrictions on Bangladeshi exports-especially garments and food products-further strained relations. As a result, the new government began reviewing agreements with India and strengthening cooperation with China, Turkey, and Middle Eastern countries, signaling a shift toward a multi-vector foreign policy less dependent on India.

On September 29, 2025, Muhammad Yunus gave an interview to the Zeteo platform, discussing current India-Bangladesh diplomatic relations, the Sheikh Hasina issue, and the situation of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

He acknowledged India's long-standing support for Sheikh Hasina, stating that "they may keep her, as they have always supported her." Yunus described the Hasina issue as a "legal bilateral matter" and dismissed reports of attacks against Hindu minorities as "fake news," emphasizing his government's commitment to intercommunal harmony.

However, in October 2025, during a UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session, international activists sharply criticized Yunus's government. They cited reports of over 2,000 attacks against Hindu minorities and more than 600 deaths, accusing the government of "covering up violence." Activists warned that Bangladesh risked becoming a "proxy battleground" against India, with the growing influence of religious extremist groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami threatening regional stability.

Indian representatives supported these concerns, stating that political instability in Bangladesh negatively affects South Asia's security architecture. Consequently, Yunus's claims of maintaining communal harmony were not widely accepted internationally.

Nevertheless, at an official meeting in New Delhi on October 6, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri reiterated India's willingness to work with Yunus's government on these sensitive issues and recalled that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first to congratulate Muhammad Yunus as interim leader. Yunus, in turn, emphasized the importance of maintaining diplomatic relations with India.

Conclusion



Dhaka appears eager to move beyond the legacy of the 1971 events with Pakistan, while continuing cooperation with India and expanding trade ties with China.

If Muhammad Yunus's interim government wins the 2026 elections, Bangladesh may emerge with a new image in South Asia. Strengthening relations with Pakistan and China could pave the way for new regional alliances.

For instance, on September 3, 2025, Myanmar's Ambassador to Bangladesh, U Kyaw Soe Moe, met Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Imran Haider, in Dhaka to discuss bilateral cooperation, trade, defense, and regional stability regarding the Rohingya issue.

Bangladesh is also actively engaging Myanmar to resolve the Rohingya crisis and stabilize border security.