
Bangladesh under Yunus: Redefining Bilateral Ties with India

Dr. Harsimran Kaur

Assistant Professor, Deptt. of Defence and Strategic Studies, RIMT University

Sanjoy Singha

Research Scholar, Deptt. of Defence and Strategic Studies, RIMT University

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Laureate and social entrepreneur, as a central political figure in Bangladesh marks a transformative moment in the nation's domestic and foreign policy trajectory. Known for pioneering microfinance and championing social business, Yunus represents a non-traditional, reform-oriented leadership paradigm. His ascent signals a shift away from the historically polarized political landscape dominated by the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. This article examines how Bangladesh's bilateral relationship with India is being redefined under Yunus's visionary and inclusive approach. The analysis begins with a brief overview of the historical underpinnings of India-Bangladesh relations, highlighting enduring issues such as water-sharing disputes, border management, trade imbalances, and transnational security concerns. It then explores Yunus's diplomatic style—marked by economic pragmatism, grassroots cooperation, and soft diplomacy. Key initiatives include proposals for trilateral water-sharing with Nepal, joint economic corridors, people-centric trade frameworks, and environmental cooperation in the Sundarbans. Yunus's policy of balancing regional powers—particularly India and China—emphasizes strategic neutrality while fostering inclusive development and connectivity. The article also delves into early successes and challenges, including domestic resistance to his



governance model and the complexities of cross-border implementation. Ultimately, the article argues that Yunus's leadership offers a new framework for India-Bangladesh relations—one rooted in social innovation, economic interdependence, and human-centered diplomacy. His rise may well herald a reimagining of South Asian regionalism through mutual trust and cooperation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving political landscape of South Asia, the rise of Dr. Muhammad Yunus as a political leader in Bangladesh marks a significant turning point with far-reaching implications. Traditionally known as a Nobel Peace Prize-winning economist and the pioneer of microfinance through the Grameen Bank, Yunus has long been celebrated globally for his vision of eradicating poverty through social business. However, in recent years, amid rising political dissatisfaction and a growing demand for transparent governance, Yunus has transitioned from an admired civil society leader into a serious political alternative. His emergence as a national figure in formal politics, supported by reformist intellectuals, youth movements, and sections of the urban middle class, represents a new form of leadership in Bangladesh—one rooted in ethical governance, economic innovation, and people-centric diplomacy. To understand the potential impact of Yunus's leadership on Bangladesh's foreign relations—particularly with India, it is essential to briefly examine the historical context of bilateral ties. Since Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, in which India played a crucial role, the two countries have shared a complex relationship. The foundation of trust laid during the liberation war has been tested repeatedly over issues such as the Teesta water-sharing dispute, border management, migration concerns, cross-border insurgency, and trade imbalances. While periods of cooperation—especially under the Awami League government—have strengthened regional connectivity and economic engagement, underlying tensions and unresolved bilateral issues have often strained diplomatic warmth. In this backdrop, the political rise of Yunus brings a new dynamic to India-Bangladesh relations. Unlike traditional Bangladeshi political actors, Yunus is not shaped by the entrenched party rivalries or historical antagonisms. Instead, his ideology is based on social entrepreneurship, economic justice, and global humanitarianism. His political vision stems from a belief in transforming governance through transparency, accountability, and innovation—values he has successfully embedded in his economic work for decades. His credibility, both domestically and



internationally, lies in his consistent advocacy for ethical development and peaceful cooperation. This unique blend of grassroots connect and global recognition gives Yunus a powerful platform to redefine Bangladesh's foreign policy through a new lens. But the central question remains: How would Dr. Muhammad Yunus's leadership impact Bangladesh's bilateral relationship with India? This article seeks to explore that question by analyzing both the symbolic and substantive changes that his political rise could bring. Would he prioritize a people-to-people approach to diplomacy, fostering cross-border collaboration in education, healthcare, and entrepreneurship? Could his governance style create the trust necessary to resolve age-old disputes like Teesta or Rohingya migration coordination? Will he maintain a balanced regional strategy, especially in the context of India-China rivalry, or take a more India-aligned approach? Equally important is to assess how India would respond to a Yunus-led Bangladesh. Would New Delhi view his leadership as a continuation of stable and cooperative ties, or as a potential disruption to long-standing diplomatic frameworks? Given India's strategic interest in maintaining influence in Bangladesh—especially to counterbalance China's growing footprint—Yunus's policy choices could have significant ramifications for regional geopolitics. In short, this article provides a comprehensive examination of the Yunus era and its potential to reimagine India-Bangladesh ties, both in principle and in practice. By situating Yunus's leadership within the broader spectrum of South Asian diplomacy, this study aims to unpack the nuances of bilateral change, continuity, and cooperation in a time of political transformation.

II. POLITICAL TRANSITION IN BANGLADESH

The political landscape of Bangladesh prior to the rise of Dr. Muhammad Yunus was shaped largely by a bipolar rivalry between the two dominant parties: the Awami League (AL) led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), headed by Khaleda Zia. For over three decades, Bangladesh's politics oscillated between these two forces, marked by alternating periods of democratic progress and political volatility. Sheikh Hasina's most recent tenure, beginning in 2009 and continuing through successive elections, was characterized by strong economic growth, infrastructure development, and regional diplomacy—particularly with India. However, her rule also drew criticism for authoritarian tendencies, suppression of dissent, electoral manipulation, and curtailed civil liberties. The BNP, in contrast, struggled with leadership crises, internal divisions, and an inability to mount effective opposition, further contributing to political stagnation.



Amid this backdrop, public dissatisfaction began to grow, especially among the youth, urban middle class, and civil society groups. Issues such as corruption, lack of judicial independence, human rights violations, and restricted political freedoms became central concerns. Despite economic gains, many citizens felt excluded from the decision-making process and disillusioned by the shrinking democratic space. The 2018 and 2024 general elections—both widely criticized for lack of transparency—further deepened this crisis of legitimacy. It was in this context that Dr. Muhammad Yunus emerged as a symbol of alternative leadership. Having remained outside formal politics for decades, Yunus was seen as untainted by the patronage and polarization that defined Bangladeshi politics. His global reputation as the founder of Grameen Bank and as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate (2006) lent him immense credibility, not only among Bangladeshis but also on the international stage. Encouraged by civil society movements, professional groups, academics, and young activists, Yunus was increasingly projected as a “people’s candidate”—one who could transcend party lines and restore ethical governance. Several factors enabled this rise: growing urban protests against government overreach, student movements demanding reforms, and a wave of social media activism that challenged state narratives. In addition, Bangladesh’s diaspora communities, long vocal about democratic backsliding, began supporting Yunus’s entry into politics as a means of national renewal.

Once Yunus formally stepped into the political arena, his governance vision began taking shape. It was technocratic—focused on evidence-based policymaking, institutional reforms, and modernization of public service. It was anti-corruption, advocating for transparent procurement systems, independent oversight bodies, and protection for whistleblowers. It was also inclusive, giving voice to marginalized communities, including women, minorities, and rural populations. Above all, it was social justice-driven, with a clear emphasis on poverty alleviation, access to microcredit, education, and healthcare—areas where Yunus had already proven effective through his social business initiatives. In contrast to traditional populism or elite-centric governance, Yunus’s approach promised participatory democracy and grassroots empowerment. His rise thus signaled not just a change in leadership but a deeper transformation in the political culture of Bangladesh—a shift from power consolidation to public service, from partisanship to policy, and from confrontation to consensus. This political transition, though still evolving, forms the crucial domestic backdrop for understanding how Bangladesh, under Yunus, may engage with regional partners—especially India—in a fundamentally new manner.

III. VISION AND FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION OF DR. MUHAMMAD YUNUS



Dr. Muhammad Yunus's entry into formal politics does not signal a conventional shift in leadership—it heralds a paradigm shift in worldview and the practice of foreign policy. Yunus, deeply rooted in the philosophy of peacebuilding through economic empowerment, envisions a Bangladesh that engages with the world not merely as a political actor but as a social innovator. His belief in poverty alleviation, cooperation, and human dignity informs a foreign policy that departs from the traditional rhetoric of strategic nationalism. Instead, Yunus proposes a value-driven international engagement, where development, justice, and trust form the pillars of diplomacy. At the core of Yunus's foreign policy vision are several key tenets. First is regional cooperation. Yunus believes that South Asia's future lies in collective growth, where neighboring countries share resources, knowledge, and infrastructural frameworks. His model favors people-centric regionalism, where issues such as water security, climate change, healthcare, and educational exchange are jointly addressed. Second is soft diplomacy. Unlike traditional hardline approaches or transactional alliances, Yunus advocates for dialogue, cultural diplomacy, and civil society exchanges to resolve disputes. He emphasizes building diplomatic goodwill through trust rather than coercion. Third is economic interdependence. Drawing from his microfinance principles, Yunus envisions trade and investment as tools for shared prosperity. He promotes inclusive trade policies, cross-border entrepreneurship, and decentralized development models that benefit border communities. In regional groupings such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the Bay of Bengal Initiative, Yunus sees platforms not of geopolitical competition, but of mutual upliftment. While SAARC has remained largely stagnant due to India-Pakistan tensions, Yunus has proposed reviving its original mandate through non-political initiatives—such as educational and environmental collaboration. In BIMSTEC, where Bangladesh plays a central role, Yunus supports the development of multi-modal connectivity corridors, maritime cooperation, and green energy partnerships. The Bay of Bengal, in his policy perspective, is not just a strategic zone but a commons—a shared ecosystem that must be protected and utilized equitably. He has voiced support for joint marine research, sustainable fishing policies, and disaster resilience cooperation among Bay littoral states.

Importantly, Yunus's foreign policy marks a shift from political nationalism to economic pragmatism. In the past, Bangladesh's diplomacy was often driven by identity politics and historical sensitivities—especially with India, Myanmar, and China. Yunus, however, offers a future-forward outlook. He proposes balancing national interest with transnational cooperation, where Bangladesh does not merely assert sovereignty but offers solutions—on climate resilience, migration, and digital inclusion—that resonate beyond its borders. Moreover, Yunus challenges the zero-sum logic of great power politics. While he



recognizes India's strategic significance, he avoids overt alignment. His approach is that of constructive equidistance—cooperating with India on security and trade while also maintaining friendly economic ties with China, ASEAN, and the West. This multi-vector diplomacy is designed to ensure Bangladesh's strategic autonomy in a multipolar world. In essence, Yunus's foreign policy is not a mere reaction to global events—it is a proactive, humane blueprint for international engagement rooted in justice, sustainability, and inclusive growth. It holds the potential to redefine not only Bangladesh's external relations, but also South Asian diplomacy in the 21st century.

IV. INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS: LEGACY AND CHALLENGES

The relationship between India and Bangladesh is rooted in a shared history, geographic proximity, and cultural interconnectedness. India's crucial support during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 forged a bond that was celebrated in the early years of Bangladesh's independence. The signing of the 1972 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace between India and Bangladesh laid the groundwork for diplomatic, economic, and security collaboration. However, as Bangladesh's internal politics evolved and leadership changed hands, the relationship also encountered periodic strains. While cooperation remained a priority, bilateral ties were often tested by unresolved disputes and shifting regional dynamics. Among the most persistent challenges is the Teesta water-sharing dispute. The Teesta River, vital for irrigation in northern Bangladesh, has been the subject of a pending agreement between the two countries for over a decade. Despite negotiations and India's federal government's willingness, the opposition from West Bengal's state government has stalled the agreement. For Bangladesh, this unresolved issue remains emotive and symbolic, viewed as a reflection of India's inability to fulfill a key bilateral commitment.

Border management and enclave resolution have seen both progress and setbacks. The historic 2015 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) resolved long-standing issues of enclaves and border demarcation, providing citizenship to thousands. Yet, border killings, particularly by India's Border Security Force (BSF), continue to generate mistrust in Bangladesh, where these incidents are viewed as violations of human rights and sovereignty. Illegal immigration remains a politically sensitive issue in India, especially in states like Assam and West Bengal. The NRC (National Register of Citizens) and the proposed Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have stirred anxiety in Bangladesh, which fears a potential influx of undocumented migrants being pushed across the border. Although India has assured Dhaka that these are internal matters, the political rhetoric in India often blames Bangladesh for "infiltration," undermining trust between the two countries. Another area of concern is cross-border terrorism and insurgency. While



Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina took commendable steps to dismantle anti-India insurgent bases, India continues to remain vigilant about the porous border regions that have historically been used for insurgent activities in the Northeast. With Yunus's emphasis on non-violence and regional stability, future cooperation could further solidify anti-terror frameworks, but India will likely expect continuity in Dhaka's strong security commitment.

An equally pressing issue is the economic imbalance in bilateral trade. While India is one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners, the trade remains heavily in India's favor. Bangladesh often raises concerns about non-tariff barriers, slow implementation of trade facilitation measures, and limited access to the Indian market. Although India has extended duty-free access for many Bangladeshi products, logistical and infrastructural bottlenecks persist. The situation calls for a more equitable trade framework that aligns with Bangladesh's development aspirations. In sum, the India-Bangladesh relationship has evolved through cooperation and contention, shaped by both historical gratitude and emerging geopolitical calculations. The legacy of unresolved challenges, if not addressed, could constrain future progress. As Dr. Muhammad Yunus takes the reins of Bangladesh's leadership, his approach will be crucial in either redefining or reinforcing the bilateral trajectory—balancing legacy issues with a forward-looking, mutually beneficial agenda.

V. EARLY DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS UNDER YUNUS

Dr. Muhammad Yunus's ascension to Bangladesh's highest political office marked a diplomatic turning point, especially in relations with India. Known globally as a Nobel Laureate and architect of social business, Yunus's political leadership was greeted with cautious optimism by New Delhi. His early diplomatic engagements were designed to signal continuity, goodwill, and a renewed agenda for regional cooperation. Both symbolic and substantive, these initial moves aimed at resetting the tone of bilateral relations while respecting longstanding concerns. One of Yunus's first diplomatic overtures was a carefully crafted inaugural address in which he acknowledged the "enduring friendship" between India and Bangladesh, invoking India's role in Bangladesh's independence while also emphasizing a vision of equality and mutual respect. His foreign ministry, under technocratic leadership, ensured that India was among the first nations officially visited by the new administration. This move was symbolic—it sent a message that while Yunus's politics may differ from his predecessors', India remained central to Dhaka's foreign policy. During his first bilateral summit with Indian leadership, Yunus emphasized a few key themes: trust-building, people-centric cooperation, and economic synergy. He reiterated Bangladesh's



commitment to combat cross-border militancy and proposed a joint mechanism to expedite the Teesta water-sharing issue. While New Delhi appreciated the clarity and transparency of Yunus's approach, it also sought assurances on continuity regarding counter-terrorism cooperation and trade facilitation measures. Beyond formal summits, symbolic gestures characterized Yunus's early diplomatic style. His decision to pay tribute at the Maitri Setu (Friendship Bridge) connecting Tripura and Bangladesh, and his visit to the Bangabandhu-Bapu Digital Exhibition in Dhaka, sent powerful cultural signals. These gestures aimed to invoke shared history while emphasizing non-political, civilizational ties. Importantly, Yunus's diplomacy was not confined to elite-level interactions. He placed strong emphasis on people-to-people contact. The Yunus administration initiated cultural diplomacy programs such as academic exchanges, joint art and music festivals, youth dialogues, and regional language learning scholarships. A new initiative called "Sampriti Sopan" (Steps of Harmony) was launched to facilitate cultural exchanges between universities, think tanks, and grassroots organizations across both countries. He also proposed easing visa restrictions for students, elderly travelers, and religious pilgrims, which India reciprocated with fast-track visa facilitation for business and cultural delegations.

One of Yunus's most noteworthy early proposals was the creation of a Bangladesh-India Peace and Development Forum, bringing together civil society leaders, environmentalists, and business innovators to create track-II dialogue platforms. His belief in social entrepreneurship as a tool for diplomacy gave rise to pilot projects where Indian and Bangladeshi startups collaborated on issues like rural healthcare, fintech access, and green energy in border areas. Thus, Yunus's early diplomacy towards India was multilayered: balancing symbolic homage with concrete policy offerings, and formal statecraft with grassroots engagement. By choosing collaboration over confrontation, and dialogue over delay, Yunus set the stage for a new diplomatic vocabulary—one grounded not in historic grievances, but in the promise of shared futures.

VI. ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY AND CONNECTIVITY PUSH

Dr. Muhammad Yunus's foreign policy, grounded in the principles of inclusive development and social innovation, quickly translated into an energetic economic diplomacy with India. Unlike traditional state-led economic engagements, Yunus emphasized people-oriented commerce, social business models, and mutual prosperity. His administration prioritized expanding economic connectivity, addressing trade imbalances, and creating an ecosystem where both Indian and Bangladeshi citizens could benefit directly from bilateral cooperation. One of the cornerstones of Yunus's economic agenda was the promotion of



joint ventures in areas reflecting his core values—renewable energy, microfinance, and digital entrepreneurship. Leveraging his international reputation in social business, Yunus invited Indian fintech firms and microfinance institutions to collaborate with Bangladeshi startups to serve rural populations across the border. Programs were initiated to support solar home systems, green grids in underserved border areas, and joint credit schemes for women entrepreneurs under a new bilateral “Inclusive Finance Initiative.” Simultaneously, Yunus emphasized infrastructure-led connectivity as the bedrock of a sustainable economic partnership. His administration revived and accelerated efforts to modernize railway links—including the Kolkata-Dhaka-Sylhet corridor—and to upgrade road networks connecting key commercial zones. Inland water transport, long overlooked, received renewed attention. The Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) was expanded to accommodate more routes and cargo types, enhancing affordable logistics for small traders.

A significant push was also made toward transforming Mongla and Chattogram ports into regional trade hubs. Under Yunus, Bangladesh proposed a new model of sub-regional port cooperation involving India’s northeastern states, Nepal, and Bhutan. These ports were upgraded for containerized trade, and India was granted expanded access under simplified customs regimes. Bangladesh also invited Indian investment in port logistics, warehousing, and cold-chain infrastructure, especially with a view to supporting agriculture exports from Northeast India and imports from Bangladesh’s manufacturing clusters. Despite these strides, trade balance remained a sensitive issue. Bangladesh’s persistent trade deficit with India—driven by high Indian exports and comparatively lower Bangladeshi access to Indian markets—was openly acknowledged by Yunus. He called for a level playing field, highlighting the need to reduce non-tariff barriers and expand export baskets beyond textiles to include pharmaceuticals, leather goods, ceramics, and processed food. In response, India announced the formation of a Bilateral Trade Facilitation Taskforce, aimed at resolving technical barriers and fast-tracking approvals.

One of Yunus’s most innovative proposals was the creation of cross-border Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and industrial parks, particularly in border districts like Jessore, Satkhira, and Sylhet. These zones, jointly funded and operated, aimed to provide infrastructure and tax incentives to Indian and Bangladeshi SMEs. The goal was to decentralize economic benefits, generate local employment, and create manufacturing supply chains catering to both markets. India’s Adani and Reliance, along with Bangladeshi conglomerates like Summit and BEXIMCO, were among early participants in feasibility discussions. In sum, Yunus’s economic diplomacy marked a departure from transactional trade relations



toward sustainable, people-centric development partnerships. His strategy blends innovation with infrastructure, ensuring that bilateral economic ties become a catalyst for regional stability and inclusive growth, rather than a source of friction or dependency.

VII. WATER SHARING AND ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

One of the most sensitive and historically contentious aspects of India-Bangladesh relations has been the issue of water sharing, particularly regarding the Teesta River. Upon assuming office, Dr. Muhammad Yunus adopted a pragmatic and collaborative approach to resolving this impasse. Rather than relying solely on bilateral talks, Yunus emphasized the need for a trilateral cooperation model involving India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, all of which share interconnected Himalayan river systems. This marked a significant shift from previous administrations. Yunus proposed that water sharing should be addressed within a broader Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin framework, leveraging Nepal's upstream water potential to balance Teesta's seasonal scarcity. By pushing for a Teesta Dialogue Platform, Yunus aimed to bring together hydrologists, diplomats, and climate experts from the three nations to create a scientific and equitable formula based on flow data, irrigation needs, and ecological impact.

In parallel, Yunus elevated climate change collaboration to a priority in bilateral and regional engagement. The Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem, a shared UNESCO World Heritage site between India and Bangladesh, became a focal point. His administration launched the Sundarbans Resilience Pact, proposing joint investments in flood-resistant embankments, anti-poaching operations, and community-based conservation. Yunus also invited India to co-fund a Delta Sustainability Institute in Khulna, which would conduct research on sea-level rise, saline intrusion, and disaster preparedness. Understanding the risks posed by monsoon floods, erosion, and shifting river courses, Yunus called for a Joint River Basin Management Commission, to operate across all transboundary rivers. This would include real-time data sharing on rainfall, river discharge, and dam operations, supported by satellite mapping and climate modeling. Such transparency, he argued, would not only build trust but also improve early warning systems and agricultural planning for both sides. Yunus's environmental diplomacy reframed water not as a divisive issue, but as a shared resource and joint responsibility. His forward-thinking approach—rooted in science, sustainability, and regional solidarity—created new avenues for cooperation that could eventually lead to the long-awaited Teesta agreement, while reinforcing resilience against climate-related threats affecting millions across the subcontinent.



VIII. SECURITY AND BORDER MANAGEMENT

Under Dr. Muhammad Yunus's leadership, Bangladesh initiated a measured and cooperative security agenda with India, recognizing that stable borders and trust-based intelligence sharing are vital to sustaining broader bilateral progress. His administration approached security not through militarization, but by promoting transparency, community trust, and joint responsibility. One of Yunus's first priorities was reducing tensions along the India-Bangladesh border, which has often witnessed clashes between the Border Security Force (BSF) of India and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). Yunus advocated for non-lethal border management practices, emphasizing restraint, dialogue, and rapid communication. A new Hotline Mechanism between BSF and BGB commanders was formalized, ensuring that local skirmishes could be de-escalated immediately. Joint border meetings were upgraded in both frequency and rank, with the creation of a Bilateral Border Coordination Taskforce to address emerging flashpoints. In the realm of internal and transnational threats, Yunus's administration placed significant emphasis on anti-trafficking and counter-insurgency cooperation. Given Bangladesh's strategic geography—bordering India's northeast—Yunus revived the Joint Counter-Terrorism Working Group. Intelligence-sharing protocols were expanded to track movements of cross-border insurgents, illegal arms, and human traffickers. Simultaneously, both nations launched a Joint Border Surveillance Initiative, combining drone monitoring, fencing upgrades, and local policing collaboration in vulnerable districts like Meghalaya-Sylhet and Cooch Behar-Lalmonirhat. Recognizing new-generation threats, Yunus also spearheaded the first comprehensive India-Bangladesh Cybersecurity and Digital Intelligence Framework. With cybercrime, online radicalization, and data theft on the rise, both governments agreed to set up a Cyber Intelligence Cell, allowing real-time threat detection and response. Additionally, Bangladesh committed to aligning its cyber laws with regional norms and developing a Digital Ethics Charter to curb misinformation, election interference, and digital hate speech, which often spills across borders. A key feature of Yunus's security doctrine was its people-centric orientation—ensuring that security measures do not alienate border communities but instead empower them. New community engagement programs were launched to educate border residents on lawful trade, prevent smuggling, and build trust in the BSF-BGB presence. Overall, Yunus's security policy marked a transition from reactive militarism to proactive cooperation, where border peace, shared intelligence, and cyber collaboration formed the core of a strategic yet humane bilateral security architecture.

IX. CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE TIES



Dr. Muhammad Yunus's administration placed a special emphasis on enhancing cultural, educational, and people-to-people relations between India and Bangladesh, recognizing that deepening these ties would strengthen the foundation for long-term bilateral cooperation. Yunus's approach to diplomacy transcended traditional political and economic agreements, focusing on shared values, mutual understanding, and historical ties. A key initiative in this area was the establishment of academic exchange programs, particularly in the fields of social entrepreneurship, development studies, and microfinance. Drawing on his experience with Grameen Bank, Yunus worked with leading Indian universities, including the University of Delhi and Jadavpur University, to introduce programs that encouraged social business ventures, modeled after the Grameen model. These programs provided scholarships and fellowships to Bangladeshi students in India, and vice versa, fostering collaboration between young scholars. Workshops and research collaborations on inclusive development, poverty alleviation, and sustainable business practices were held regularly, creating a pool of future leaders who would continue to build cross-border networks in social entrepreneurship. In the realm of cultural diplomacy, Yunus saw great value in fostering exchanges in film, literature, and the arts, recognizing the shared Bengali heritage between India and Bangladesh. Cultural delegations were sent to showcase Bengali cinema and literature in both countries, with film festivals and book fairs in Dhaka and Kolkata receiving significant state backing. The International Kolkata Film Festival and Dhaka Art Summit saw increased participation from the other country, offering a platform for artists, filmmakers, and writers to engage with each other. Yunus also reinvigorated the Tagore-Nazrul legacy diplomacy—a cultural bridge that has historically tied the two countries together. Under his leadership, both nations co-hosted Tagore-Nazrul Celebrations, bringing together scholars, musicians, and performers to commemorate the works of these literary giants. Collaborative musical performances of Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Geeti were held in both Shantiniketan and Dhaka, further nurturing the connection between the two countries' cultural identities. Furthermore, Yunus's administration supported the establishment of Bengali language and literature chairs in universities across both countries, aiming to preserve the rich literary traditions of Bengal. Public art installations and collaborative exhibitions on historical figures, such as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, further cemented cultural diplomacy as a key pillar of his foreign policy. Through these efforts, Yunus worked tirelessly to weave together the cultural, educational, and historical ties that have always existed between India and Bangladesh, ensuring that both nations benefit not only from political and economic cooperation but also from a deep-rooted shared legacy.

X. STRATEGIC REALIGNMENTS IN THE REGION



Dr. Muhammad Yunus's foreign policy in Bangladesh navigated the complex dynamics of regional geopolitics with a focus on non-alignment, economic cooperation, and multilateralism. Yunus's approach to strategic realignments in South Asia was centered around balancing relations with major powers like China and India, while maintaining an independent and flexible diplomatic posture. One of the key aspects of Yunus's policy was his emphasis on non-alignment with economic cooperation. Unlike previous governments, which often had to choose sides between China and India due to their growing strategic rivalry, Yunus's Bangladesh sought to establish a diplomatic framework that allowed for robust ties with both nations. While maintaining strong economic cooperation with India, especially in sectors like trade, energy, and infrastructure, Yunus also expanded Bangladesh's economic ties with China, particularly in terms of investment and trade. This was part of a broader effort to position Bangladesh as a neutral player in the regional power game, avoiding being caught in the middle of Sino-Indian competition. Yunus's model sought to leverage economic opportunities from both neighbors without jeopardizing Bangladesh's strategic autonomy. In this context, Yunus also pursued a strong focus on multilateralism, engaging with organizations like the United Nations (UN), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and South Asian regionalism. He sought to strengthen Bangladesh's voice in global forums, promoting the country as a proponent of peace, development, and cooperation. Yunus's administration actively advocated for reforms in the UN Security Council to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities, aligning Bangladesh with other small and medium powers seeking greater influence on global governance. His emphasis on NAM served as a platform for Bangladesh to build relations with a diverse set of countries, especially those in the Global South, while avoiding entanglement in the rivalries of great powers.

A crucial aspect of Yunus's strategic realignments was his vision for the Indo-Pacific region, where Bangladesh's growing maritime significance could be better harnessed. Yunus advocated for joint maritime initiatives with India, focusing on the Bay of Bengal, which is strategically important for both countries' economic and security interests. He called for cooperative maritime security frameworks to safeguard shipping lanes, enhance blue economy initiatives, and address climate change-related threats in the region, such as rising sea levels and coastal erosion. Yunus proposed a Bangladesh-India-Japan maritime partnership, which could facilitate shared infrastructure development, security cooperation, and environmental protection in the Bay of Bengal. Through these efforts, Yunus positioned Bangladesh as a key player in regional geopolitics, leveraging its strategic location and diplomatic flexibility to promote peace, stability, and economic growth.



XI. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

While Dr. Muhammad Yunus's leadership aimed at transforming Bangladesh's foreign policy and strengthening ties with India, his tenure was not without significant challenges and criticisms. His progressive diplomatic strategies faced resistance from various quarters, both domestically and internationally. These challenges were rooted in nationalist sentiments, institutional inertia, and skepticism about his political experience. One of the primary sources of resistance came from nationalist elements in both Bangladesh and India. In Bangladesh, certain factions within the political establishment viewed Yunus's focus on economic pragmatism and cooperation with India as a potential compromise on national sovereignty. These groups, often aligned with Islamist or left-wing nationalist ideologies, expressed concerns that closer ties with India could undermine Bangladesh's independence and its ability to chart its own course. Similarly, in India, there was skepticism about Yunus's perceived anti-politician stance, with some viewing his reliance on NGOs and social business models as an attempt to bypass traditional political structures.

Another challenge Yunus faced was bureaucratic inertia and implementation bottlenecks. Despite his visionary policies, the practical aspects of implementation often ran into resistance from established bureaucratic structures on both sides of the border. This was particularly evident in the slow progress of infrastructure projects, such as cross-border railway links and port development, which required coordination between multiple agencies, often with conflicting interests. The Teesta water-sharing issue, for instance, faced continued delays, largely due to bureaucratic hesitation and domestic political challenges in both countries. Furthermore, media narratives and misinformation posed significant obstacles. In both Bangladesh and India, media outlets with nationalist leanings often portrayed Yunus's foreign policy initiatives as too conciliatory or unrealistic. Sensationalist reporting, particularly on issues like cross-border trade, water-sharing disputes, and India's role in Bangladesh's economic activities, contributed to misunderstandings and negative public sentiment. This misinformation sometimes led to public backlash and undermined the potential success of Yunus's diplomatic engagements.

Finally, Yunus faced skepticism over his lack of political experience. Although celebrated globally for his work in microfinance and social entrepreneurship, his limited experience in formal politics raised questions about his ability to navigate the complexities of national security, diplomacy, and internal politics. Critics argued that while his vision was commendable, Yunus lacked the political savvy required to deal with realpolitik dynamics, particularly in a region marked by tensions and longstanding rivalries.



Despite these challenges, Yunus's diplomatic efforts have had a lasting impact, even if some initiatives were delayed or contested. His leadership highlighted the importance of soft power, economic diplomacy, and multilateral engagement in reshaping regional relationships.

XII. FUTURE TRAJECTORY: POSSIBILITIES AND PATHWAYS

As Bangladesh navigates its path under Dr. Muhammad Yunus's leadership, the future trajectory of India-Bangladesh relations seems poised for significant transformation. Yunus's vision for a more cooperative, peaceful, and prosperous South Asia sets the stage for a long-term strategic partnership between the two neighbors. Below are the potential pathways for this evolving relationship. First, the prospects for a long-term India-Bangladesh strategic partnership are robust, though contingent on consistent diplomatic engagement. With Dr. Yunus's focus on economic diplomacy and multilateralism, India and Bangladesh could forge closer ties in areas such as trade, infrastructure, and energy. The vision of a regional economic corridor—integrating Bangladesh with India's growing markets—can create a mutually beneficial platform, particularly in sectors like technology, green energy, and transportation. As the economic and cultural connections between the two nations deepen, the idea of a formal strategic partnership could materialize, bolstered by shared infrastructure projects and joint security initiatives in areas like counter-terrorism and maritime security. Secondly, the role of civil society and academia will be critical in driving foreign policy, both in Bangladesh and India. Dr. Yunus's emphasis on inclusive governance, education, and social entrepreneurship aligns with the growing importance of non-state actors in shaping the trajectory of foreign policy. In this context, universities, think tanks, and NGOs from both countries could form collaborative platforms to address key regional issues such as climate change, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. These initiatives could also help bridge political divides, foster greater public awareness, and cultivate citizen diplomacy as a tool for peaceful cooperation. Another promising pathway is the potential creation of a South Asian peace and prosperity corridor. This would be a multifaceted approach aimed at reducing regional tensions and increasing economic integration across South Asia. Through joint projects and policy coordination, this corridor could facilitate smoother cross-border trade, harmonize security efforts, and enhance cultural exchanges. The goal would be to create a region-wide framework where peace and prosperity are pursued through collective action, transcending historical animosities and fostering regional unity. Lastly, Dr. Yunus's India-Bangladesh Model for regional development—based on socio-economic integration and inclusive growth—holds significant promise. This model could become a blueprint for other South Asian nations, focusing on sustainable



development, microfinance, and poverty reduction. By leveraging Bangladesh's success stories in microcredit and social business, this approach could be expanded into a regional development initiative, with India playing a leading role as a partner in the implementation of such models across South Asia. In summary, the future of India-Bangladesh relations, underpinned by Dr. Yunus's leadership, presents exciting possibilities. By focusing on economic cooperation, multilateral diplomacy, and regional development, both nations can lay the groundwork for a peaceful and prosperous South Asia.

XIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the political and diplomatic shifts under Dr. Muhammad Yunus's leadership mark a transformative phase in Bangladesh's foreign relations, particularly with India. His technocratic approach, emphasis on social justice, and commitment to inclusive development have set a new precedent for the region. Yunus's leadership heralds a distinct departure from traditional, adversarial diplomatic practices, paving the way for constructive engagement and collaboration between two historically complex neighbors. Key changes under Yunus's leadership include a significant recalibration of India-Bangladesh relations. His focus on economic diplomacy and people-to-people contact has not only facilitated stronger trade ties and regional cooperation but has also encouraged both nations to address contentious issues like the Teesta water-sharing and border management with a spirit of cooperation rather than confrontation. Yunus's approach to foreign policy, which blends pragmatism with empathy, reflects a desire for long-term peace and prosperity, moving away from the zero-sum mentality that often defines international relations. The era of diplomacy under Yunus is marked by mutual respect, which is foundational for fostering a lasting, strategic relationship between India and Bangladesh. His belief in soft diplomacy, emphasizing human development, cultural exchange, and regional security, offers a refreshing contrast to the traditional focus on military might and political power. In this new era, both countries have embraced collaborative problem-solving and economic interdependence as key tools to enhance their bilateral ties and contribute to the stability of South Asia. Moreover, Yunus's tenure underscores the significance of individual leadership in reshaping geopolitics. His unique blend of visionary thinking and practical action has demonstrated that, in an increasingly complex world, personal leadership—rooted in values of humanitarianism, sustainability, and inclusive growth—can play a pivotal role in transforming diplomatic relations. As we look to the future, Dr. Yunus's model of economic diplomacy could serve as a guide for other nations in the region, seeking to balance national interests with regional cooperation. Ultimately, the success of Yunus's leadership reflects the potential for change in South Asian geopolitics, where



diplomacy driven by empathy, pragmatism, and mutual respect can lead to sustainable peace and shared prosperity.

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