

From Old Wine to New Wine: Unveiling Bangladesh's geopolitical potentials and challenges in South Asia

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Abstract

The purpose of this positioning paper is to explore the geopolitical potentials and challenges of Bangladesh in the South Asia context. Employing a traditional comparative advantages and connectivity framework, this paper assesses how Bangladesh can play a geopolitically significant role in South Asia. This paper also discusses the geopolitical challenges that Bangladesh has faced and have possibilities to encounter. The paper argues that, despite its small geographic area, Bangladesh is becoming more influential and well-known globally as its economy expands and the balance of power shifts eastward. Bangladesh's topography plays a crucial role in world politics, as its position creates a natural bridge between South and Southeast Asia, advances regional integration, and enables all nearby regions to prosper. In addition, thanks to Bangladesh's geostrategic advantages, China

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is pursuing a soft balancing strategy, while India has already taken steps to deepen its relationship with Bangladesh. Furthermore, the paper contends that competition for connectivity development projects is a new kind of geopolitics in which political space has been significantly redefined, rather than just for connectedness and economic development. Such connectivity development efforts benefit Bangladesh's position even though they create uncertainty in relationships with other countries. The study concludes that, despite potential challenges, Bangladesh has a strong dominant position in geopolitics, not only because of its population, economy, and geopolitical circumstances, but also due to connectivity development projects in this South Asian region.

Keywords: Bangladesh Geopolitics, connectivity, Geography, Bay of Bengal, neighboring relations

Introduction

Ascent and descent of empires and civilizations are contingent upon the dialectic of “challenge and response” (Toynbee, 1987). In international politics, challenges have frequently manifested as emerging powers that disrupt or threaten to disrupt the current balance of power (Hall, 2014). The world has witnessed many rises and falls. While many geographically large countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, and Australia had never played a significant role in world politics, other relatively smaller countries, including England and Japan have been playing a great role in the world economy and had become a global dominant geopolitical players along with many large countries, including Soviet Union and the United States (Sempa, 2017) after the Second World War. However, there were aspirations for a new global order following the end of the Cold War, with a prediction that economics, especially “geo-economics,” will take the place of geopolitics as the primary driver in international politics (Luttwak, 1990). The global system also witnessed the rise of China in the East Asia-Pacific Rim region (Nautiyal, 2017). Morsalin (2022), in particular, have argued that the alliance between China and Russia has sparked a “new Cold War” by upending the existing global order against the USA. In addition to China becoming a gamechanger, India’s ascent to prominence has brought attention to Asia and South Asia on a global scale. Kissinger, (2014) argued that these two power balances have evolved in the current environment in this region, one in East Asia and one in South Asia.

In this balancing game, Bangladesh has become one of greatest interests in the world politics in South Asia from a geostrategic perspective and economic advantages. Many countries worldwide and in the region have shown a strong desire to deepen their connections with Bangladesh viewing it as a vital partner in the Indo-Pacific region. Bangladesh’s geographical setting, especially its land border and seaports, has made it a potential hub for commerce and a pillar of stability as the Bay of Bengal has recently caught China’s attention (Afzaal & Naqvi, 2024). Furthermore, Bangladesh’s geostrategic position allows it to help stabilize this crucial area by connecting the various regions (Andersen, 2012;

Hossain & Islam, 2021). Moreover, Bangladesh has been becoming a regional power in terms of geopolitics and economy, as evidenced by past attempts to include the country in initiatives and remarkable socio-economic development over the last two decades. Major international organizations and nations, including the United Nations, USA, and Japan have acknowledged Bangladesh and shown interest in the country, which only highlights Bangladesh's increasing geopolitical significance in this region.

Many scholars have argued that geopolitics is different and has taken a new shape in the twenty-first century (Plagemann, 2021; Sempa, 2017). While the geographical position and territorial size of states and empires were once considered significant factors in international geopolitics, their importance has recently declined for many reasons. Many scholars have contended that there are numerous factors that affect a country's ability to play a significant role on the world stage, including population growth, economic growth, technological advancements, military power and supremacy, and stable governing system (Sempa, 2017). Many scholars also argue that a state's geography, or its geographical position in relation to other countries, is more important than its size or territory, which presents opportunities and limits (Plagemann, 2021; Sempa, 2017). Moreover, globalization and economic interdependence have changed how a nation interacts with others in this century (Paul, 2019). The information revolution also changed the nature of interaction and connection of the states with other states and empires (Sempa, 2017). Moreover, the driving force of the twenty-first century is no longer the traditional zero-sum view of politics, but rather the concept of "connectivity," as emphasized in Parag Khanna's framework of *connectography* (Khanna, 2016).

Competitive connectivity has emerged as a new form of global competition, functioning as a modern-day arms race that reshapes geopolitical power and contributes to the rise of new global and regional powers across different parts of the world (Khanna, 2016). While Plagemann and colleagues (2021) have argued that connectivity is not associated with any theory or conceptual framework in social science, many academicians, including Tellmann and colleagues (2012) refer to it as a "metaphor" or "theoretical tool". Connectivity is nothing new; rather, it has different interpretations and applications. An implicit interpretation of connectivity links it to a network, where nodes are

directly or indirectly connected through other nodes (Tellmann et al., 2012; World Bank, 2019; Kurmanalieva, 2006; 2020). While connectivity is as ancient as human relationships, the practice of connectivity as a strategy in geopolitics is new (Godehardt & Postel-Vinay, 2020). Godehardt and Postel-Vinay (2020) put forward three stages for the politicization of connectivity: creating a new international space outside of the area, strengthening regionalization through connectivity policies, and simulating rivalry in politicized connectivity. In other words, connectivity is “new wine” in “old bottles” in geopolitics (Godehardt & Postel-Vinay, 2020; Godehardt & Kohlenberg, 2020). Moreover, the geographical location, population and economy of a state influence a country’s positioning on the world stage (Sempa, 2017) though connectivity projects for economic gains.

This paper is a country positioning paper on Bangladesh’s geopolitical potential and challenges, with the goal of exploring how Bangladesh has demonstrated an incredible capacity to maintain its position in the South Asia region, what the primary sources of power are, and how this country may utilize its power and resources to balance conflicting geostrategic objectives in its favor. This paper shows how Bangladesh has the potential to gain a geopolitical position among regional and extra-regional powers, in addition to comparative advantages in resources and state positioning. Finally, this paper also shows how connectivity development projects in Bangladesh and its surrounding regions over the past two decades can play a significant role in gaining such dominant bargaining power in this region.

This paper has six sections. Following the introduction, the second section explains the research methodological approaches, including research approaches, objectives, and rationale for studying a particular case of this paper. The third section discusses the sources of comparative advantages of Bangladesh and its potential, and the following one discusses connectivity development projects and evaluates how these projects have created geopolitical potential for Bangladesh in this region. The last section explores numerous challenges Bangladesh faces and expects to face in the geopolitical game.

Methodological Approaches

This paper adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach to explore the potentials and challenges of Bangladesh in South Asia through existing conceptual and policy perspectives. In particular, this paper aims to explore the bargaining factors by which Bangladesh leverages its advantageous position in improving its great power competitiveness through connectivity investments, utilizing its intrinsic geopolitical setting. This paper also discusses numerous challenges that Bangladesh might face. This conceptual and interpretive approach, rather than a formal empirical or systematic review methodology, helps to advance theoretical understanding by synthesizing, critiquing, and integrating existing literature and knowledge (Jaakkola, 2020; Snyder, 2019). This approach also helps to identify key themes, conceptual relationships, and broader implications and allows for the integration of diverse perspectives and supports deeper theoretical reflection (Snyder, 2019).

This qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for exploring complex social, political, and institutional phenomena through critical interpretation and contextual analysis. This paper relies on secondary sources of data that include books, peer-reviewed articles, government documents, and newspaper articles. The selection of sources was guided by their relevance, scholarly contribution, and contextual significance to the subject. Therefore, the paper should be understood as a conceptual essay intended to contribute to scholarly dialogue and theoretical advancement rather than as an empirical investigation designed to produce generalizable findings. Through qualitative synthesis and conceptual analysis, the study seeks to understand how geopolitical shifts, infrastructure development, and regional cooperation shape Bangladesh's growing strategic importance within the South Asia region.

Bangladesh has become a critical case for studying and analyzing various connectivity indicators in a geopolitical context. One argument is that the country has emerged as a strategically important hub linking South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the broader Indo-Pacific region. Positioned along the Bay of Bengal between South and Southeast Asia, Bangladesh occupies a critical geographic location that has increasingly attracted global economic, political, and strategic interest (Mahmud et al., 2026; Riaz, 2016). Moreover, the geographic positioning of this country has enhanced its role in regional

connectivity, maritime trade, energy security, transnational transportation networks, and international development cooperation. Moreover, Bangladesh represents a significant case due to its growing geopolitical importance, rapid socio-economic transformation, and expanding developmental potential. Despite remarkable human development and infrastructure development (World Bank, 2024), Bangladesh continues to face persistent challenges related to governance, inequality, environmental vulnerability, urbanization, and employment generation (Riaz, 2016). These simultaneous developments and constraints also make Bangladesh an important context for examining the complexities of connectivity, development, and regional integration. Furthermore, Bangladesh demonstrates substantial future potential due to its large youth population, expanding labor force, growing digital economy, and increasing regional influence within South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region (Mahmud et al., 2026). Moreover, Bangladesh's evolving role in regional geopolitics has further strengthened its relevance as a case study.

Following previous literature (Godehardt & Postel-Vinay, 2020; Godehardt & Kohlenberg, 2020; Khanna, 2016), this study examines Bangladesh's geopolitical significance from two perspectives: comparative advantages (referred to as old wine) and advantages derived via the connectivity framework (referred to as new wine). In addition to classical economic elements, the underlying argument is that competitive connectivity and connectivity projects can provide a window of opportunity for a geographically small entity like Bangladesh and the surrounding regions to maximize its returns by using its geostrategic connectivity without upsetting its relationship. In addition, the paper addresses several crucial factors of geopolitical connectivity, which Bangladesh can also help to boost in its international relations. Furthermore, this paper explores how a small geographic or territorial size plays a significant role in managing substantial investment and connectivity from a great power without falling into the strategic orbit of either power. This paper can also show how the majority of the smaller states in South Asia can avoid band wagoning and balancing in the traditional sense and can maintain their strategic autonomy to some extent, while the majority of structural theories—particularly neorealism—would anticipate that small nations would have little independent authority and influence over powerful ones, and small governments are typically anticipated to counterbalance large powers (Schweller, 1999).

Sources of comparative advantages (old wine) and Bangladesh's potential

Bangladesh has significant potential for its population, the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector and geopolitical positioning with neighboring countries. Bangladesh has almost 170 million people, the eighth largest in the world in terms of population, and in nominal terms, Bangladesh is the second-largest economy in South Asia with the highest per capita income, contributing to its geopolitical significance (Yasmin, 2023). This small geographic area is somewhat obscured by the population size, which represents the market's size (Anwar, 2019). Bangladesh's expanding workforce is one of the main drivers of the country's economic growth. If properly utilized, Bangladesh's demographic dividend—, which accounts for almost half of its population—could catalyze even more rapid growth in the future (Karim, 2023). Of the country's 180 million people, more than one-fourth are young people. There are 73.69 million people in the labor force, with a median age of 29.2 years, of which 48.25 million are male while 25.44 million are female (Sen et al., 2023). In addition, Bangladesh has developed into an export-oriented country, with the RMG sector generating the second-highest export revenue after China. Bangladesh achieved \$55.55 billion in export earnings in fiscal year 2022-23, with an annual growth rate of 6.67% driven by the garment sector (Hossain, 2023). Furthermore, nearly 13 million Bangladeshis are estimated to be living overseas, making their country the fourth most popular among the top 20 nations of origin for international migrants (Hasan, 2021). In 2023, Bangladesh received more than \$24 billion in remittances annually, ranking seventh globally and South Asia's third highest, contributing significantly to national development (Ullah, 2013). Moreover, ongoing participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations has allowed Bangladesh to establish itself as a force for keeping global peace and security (Yasmin, 2019). Therefore, these comparative advantages, skilled demography, and resources significantly influence the geopolitical potential of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is bordered geographically by India on three sides and Myanmar on one. China in the northeast, Nepal, Bhutan in the north, East Asia, and ASEAN states to the East make it a desirable partner for all nations. With growing strategic, political, and economic relations, Bangladesh has become India's most significant neighbor in the subcontinent in recent years, compared to any

other two countries in South Asia. Nonetheless, several issues remain unsolved in India, including water problems, border killings, religious tensions, and sea boundary disputes (Majumdar, 2014). Furthermore, a long-standing issue in Bangladeshi consciousness was the growing disparity in bilateral trade and the country's inability to access India's market.

Conversely, India has a constant problem with the Siliguri corridor because it is one of India's most significant geographical constraints. The entire Indian Mainland and Northeastern area were divided by this tiny corridor. Being the only little piece of land connecting India's northeastern provinces makes it extremely sensitive to real estate (Nautiyal, 2017). For instance, Agartala is 1,650 km from Kolkata and 2,637 km from New Delhi through Shillong and Guwahati, which makes Bangladesh a more significant link between the Indian subcontinent and the Northeastern region, and the distance between Agartala and Kolkata via Bangladesh is only about 550 miles (Kumari, 2022). However, Bangladesh and northeastern India are similarly locked, opening up trade and economic activities in the area (Murshid, 2011). Finally, Bangladesh's geographic position became significant, and the political, economic, and physical utility of Bangladesh became apparent to India's great power ambition.

Bangladesh and Myanmar are both at significant geopolitical crossroads, which gives Bangladesh some tactical advantages. A more extensive communication network between Bangladesh and South-East Asian nations may result from this road link. Bangladesh would have an equal potential to benefit by fostering a cordial relationship with Myanmar if China and India came forward to cut connections related to trade investments and economic development projects in Myanmar. Furthermore, Bangladesh can gain from it economically and politically if it maintains a cordial relationship with Myanmar, which has abundant natural resources in the state of Rakhine, becoming increasingly significant due to its expanding geostrategic importance. In this perspective, finding a peaceful solution to the Rohingya situation is essential to fostering an environment that supports such positive ties. Bangladesh and Myanmar conduct commerce through unofficial channels, as there are not sufficient banking institutions or transportation infrastructure. Relaunching the 2005-initiated Bangladesh-Myanmar Friendship Line had great advantages, which has made little headway. Once properly built, this road connection will

have the ability to strengthen Bangladesh's total road connectivity by opening access for exporting commodities to Southeast Asia via Myanmar in addition to future roads and railway communications with Myanmar. Moreover, they could act as a crucial link between South and Southeast Asia, two regions that are linked by shared historical and cultural civilizations rather than by geographical disparities (Sharmeen, 2017; Paul, 2019; Rajah, 2020).

Connectivity development and geopolitical potentials

Connectivity development projects

This region has several development and connectivity projects and strategic plans surrounding the Bay of Bengal and the land. The Bay of Bengal (BoB) has become one of the sources of power to control geopolitics over the years for a big power's security and for its commercial value that encircles the Andaman Sea, Malaccan Straits, and Arabian Sea (Ferdous & Islam, 2020). Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka are in strategically advantageous positions and share nearly the entire Bay, which is located at the meeting point of South Asia and East Asia. Bangladesh borders it to the north, Myanmar and the northern portion of the Malay Peninsula to the east, and Sri Lanka and India to the west (Morgan, 2024). While the BoB fosters interactions between cultures and civilizations as a major maritime hub for trade and transportation (Basu, 2018), Bangladesh has the potential to emerge as a dominant player in geopolitics. Bangladesh maintains three ports toward the sea: Chattogram, Mongla, and Payara. Considering Bangladesh's geostrategic significance, China has suggested building a Deepsea port on Sonadia Island in terms of commercial viability and geopolitical factors. While Sonadia Island's ecosystem's vulnerability forced a delay in making a final decision on the port, Bangladesh has involved in other port construction initiatives with Japan, such as the Matar Bari Port in the Mahesh Khali neighborhood of Cox's Bazar. This project has gained momentum from a geostrategic perspective. The port could be considered a potential connection point for sustainable energy supply and transportation networks (Afzaal & Naqvi, 2024).

To boost economic activity in the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar

(BCIM) sub-region, the BCIM economic corridor (BCIM-EC) was initially created, leveraging Bangladesh's hard and soft connectivity strategy in this region. With resources from the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, it serves as the center of the world's marine trade (Li, 2017). Bangladesh is the center of the BCIM region from a geopolitical perspective. Jessore, Dhaka, and Sylhet are the three main regions of Bangladesh that are connected by the BCIM-EC. The BCIM sub-regions must work together to establish an integrated transportation network for an overland route that would shorten the time it takes to travel from China to Kolkata, India via Kunming, Myanmar, and Bangladesh; link pharmaceutical, information technology, and agricultural product markets for mutual access; cooperate on energy issues about oil and natural gas, coal, minerals, and water resources for the generation of hydroelectricity; cooperate in the tourism sector and increase people-to-people connectivity; and establish mutual political trust to build security and transparency to alleviate the underdeveloped BCIM sub-region (Marchang, 2021). Additionally, it might open new doors for Bangladesh's industrial sector and draw in more foreign direct investment.

Conversely, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a strategic plan for trade and investment flows that has since unfolded as a master plan to advance a Chinese world order (Sarkar, Xie, & Rahman, 2022; Yasmin, 2019). The Kunming project is undoubtedly one of the two primary economic marine corridors for the BRI (Sarkar, Xie, & Rahman, 2022). Under the BRI and other joint venture projects, China has pledged US\$39 billion to Bangladesh and Bangladesh has been keen to join both the BRI and the India-Japan initiative, which connects Northeast India and Southeast Asia (Mirdha, 2016). After signing a memorandum of understanding in October 2016, Bangladesh received US\$37.6 billion in Chinese support, consisting of US\$24 billion in bilateral assistance for around 34 projects and an additional US\$13.6 billion in Chinese investment for joint ventures (Paul, 2019; Hasan, 2024).

Moreover, the enlargement of the BCIM economic corridor is the main goal of BRI's regional connectivity with Bangladesh. Many tiny littoral and island states will be needed to contribute to the success of BRI, particularly the Indian Ocean maritime component, which gives them an edge (Rajah, 2020). In response to potential pressure from an active relationship between China and Bangladesh, India had already loosened its stance toward Bangladesh and signed a border

settlement agreement in November 2011 that was ratified in June 2015, allowing for the exchange of 162 territorial enclaves located on both sides of the border (Paul, 2019; Hasan, 2024). Border connectivity and hydroelectric power generation were also part of the Indian commitment to Bangladesh. Therefore, the development of diplomatic and strategic ties with Bangladesh is currently a top priority for China and India.

Moreover, the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway network are part of the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development project, which was approved in 1992 by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The Asian Highway project was initially launched in 1959 to encourage international road transportation in Asia (Fünfgeld, 2019; Madhur et al., 2009). In 2003, the Asian Highway was formalized with the Intergovernmental Agreement on Asian Highway Network (Parpiev & Sodikov, 2008). By signing the regional instrument in 2009, Bangladesh formally approved the highway network's entry (Rahman 2021). New means of transportation between Asia and Europe are being created as the trade structure changes and Asian countries grow their industries. The most typical project for increasing operational effectiveness, economic significance, and commercial usage of the rail transport infrastructure is the Trans-Asian Railway (Fünfgeld, 2019). These initiatives might hold the key to Bangladesh's overall geopolitical significance. There are 88 distinct routes in the Asian Highway network now, including three of these routes—AH1, AH2, and AH41—in Bangladesh (Adhikary 2022). These routes might have a direct connection to Europe.

Furthermore, Bangladesh may see an influx of foreign direct investments from Asian countries, including Thailand, India, and other Asian countries, due to the liberalized trade system and the possibility of simple market access to India and the neighboring sub-region. To be connected to the Asian Highway Project, Bangladesh will build the ports, railroads, and roadways outlined in the Ten-Year Perspective Plan (Rahman et al., 2014). The strategy states that “Bangladesh Railway will encourage international rail ties to support regional/sub-regional connectivity and Trans-Asian Railway, and will deliver safe, dependable, effective, and efficient rail transport services (Rahman et al., 2014). Another UN plan to create an interconnected railway network across Asia, the Padma Bridge, the longest in Bangladesh, opens a new path for the Trans-Asian Railway

(TAR) network (Adhikary 2022). Additionally, the bridge is crucial for regional communication between Mongla Port and India, Nepal, and Bhutan (Rahman et al., 2014). As a result, Bangladesh plays a critical role in the endeavor to establish regional and global transportation connectivity, which seeks to develop land routes that connect East and South Asia through Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's Geopolitical Significance

Bangladesh can also be a key player in geoeconomics and geoconnectivity due to its significance as a maritime nation occupying a strategic location. A long-standing rivalry between two big powers, such as China and India, over control on land and at sea has been the dynamic of regional politics in Asia and the Pacific (Li, 2017; Sahoo, 2013). To counterbalance China, India also wants to foster close ties with neighboring countries and countries in Southeast Asia (Sundaraman 2018). Since China seeks to leverage the BoB's maritime dominance as a vital gateway to the Middle East and Europe, it has attempted to control the Bay by forging strong, stable ties with Bangladesh and other bordering states to sustain the BRI (Godehardt & Kohlenberg, 2020). Even though Bangladesh does not share a border with Nepal or Bhutan and is a remarkably close neighbor (Kabir, Islam, & Akter, 2018), they are particularly interested in exploiting Bangladesh's seaports to expand their trade because of their geographic isolation and lack of access to the sea (Sharmeen, 2017). Therefore, the BoB may provide the impetus needed to overthrow Indian hegemony and has provided the smaller nations in the area some leverage when negotiating with the major powers (Nautiyal, 2017; Riaz, 2022; Hasan, 2024).

Balanced land-sea distribution allows Bangladesh to profit from ground transit to Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Myanmar thanks to the open south side that meets the BoB. The country may traverse the world and uncover the benefits of the mostly untapped blue economy. Few countries on the earth have such strong linkages to Asia's rich countries, notably China and India, two of the rising giants in the world (Nautiyal, 2017; Hasan, 2024). China's eastern provinces may easily access the coast from this point rather than taking a lengthier path through western China.

The BRI seeks to connect regions socially, economically, physically, and digitally through its core connectivity idea. It is also often contemplated as the 'project

of the century' and is a part of greater connectivity plans between China and the rest of the world, such as South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe (Choudhury, 2023). In South Asia, the emergence of China with its BRI has not only brought further attention to this region but also the fast-developing bilateral relations between China and South Asian nations have created new types of calculations for the region and globally as well (Godehardt & Kohlenberg, 2020; Rajah, 2020; Choudhury, 2023). BRI has always been more than just a program to build network connections; it was always meant to be a bigger picture. In addition to this plan of connectivity, Bangladesh has been globalizing in terms of extra-regional trade and economic ties. It has also been particularly active in building strong trade ties with China, the Asian economic superpower; on the other hand, it has engaged in a careful balance of power with India.

Geopolitical challenges

Although in this age of connectivity as a small country Bangladesh leveraging its geopolitical advantages through physical and non-physical geostrategic from several angles, Bangladesh may face a formidable challenge in juggling its connections with powerful nations, preserving its sovereignty, and promoting regional stability. One of the major challenges would come from the Western bloc in the name of human rights and democratic practices. For example, Bangladesh's prime minister and her administration have been under heavy fire from the US due to issues of human rights and the contentious elections during national elections in 2014 and 2018, expecting to continue. In addition, the elite paramilitary unit of Bangladesh, Rapid Action Battalion, was subject to sanctions by the United States in 2021, on the grounds of suspected extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and abuses of human rights (Mahmud, 2021). Moreover, Bangladesh was left out of US President Joe Biden's 110-nation Summit for Democracy that same year, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared a new visa policy in May 2023 intending to promote democratic elections in Bangladesh (Samaranayake, 2024). According to this policy, the US may impose visa restrictions on anybody it deems accountable for sabotaging Bangladesh's democratic electoral process, which stands as a new challenge in the geopolitical relations of Bangladesh.

Because of its strategic position and growing economic potential, Bangladesh

is subject to several geopolitical concerns and pressures from China, Russia, and India. China has made significant infrastructure investments in Bangladesh as part of the BRI, hoping to strengthen its position and ensure access to the Indian Ocean for ships. Bangladesh's independence in foreign policy may be restricted by its financial reliance, particularly when it comes to matters that China finds sensitive. A further layer of complication may be added by Russia's emphasis on energy agreements and military collaboration with Bangladesh, which risks entangling Bangladesh in geopolitical conflicts between Russia and Western nations.

Bangladesh has served as a rail and inland canal transit route between the two areas of India since its independence. India benefits from it through faster goods transfers and lower freight costs. India is quite interested in using the port of Chittagong and obtaining corridor facilities via land highways. Being the upstream state, India's operations, such as the construction of dams and barrages, the joining of or the digging of canals, or its extensive water use, might affect the flow of river water into Bangladesh, making it another unusual challenge for Bangladesh. For Bangladesh's foreign policy decision-makers, resolving and alleviating other issues such as water and border disputes, and trade deficits with India, have been greatly aided by these transit facilities—or, more accurately, the corridor that India proposed. Moreover, the Siliguri Corridor, a narrow stretch of territory that connects Nepal and Bhutan, divides Bangladesh and Bangladesh suffers another geopolitical setback as a result. Bangladesh has hence a security concern because of the “Chicken's Neck” or Siliguri Corridor.

In addition, the ongoing Rohingya refugee problem is another significant diplomatic obstacle for Bangladesh. More than a million Rohingya refugees from neighboring Myanmar are currently living in the country, which is hindering the development of connectivity between the two countries. Likewise, countries that pursue economic expansionism cannot ignore the risks posed by piracy, illicit fishing, maritime terrorism, pollution, irregular maritime migration, illegal drug trafficking, and small arms trafficking. Similarly, Bangladesh faces the conventional challenges posed by these hazards for maritime users outside the region.

Internal economic issues, such as the dollar crisis and inflation, as well as

governance, may also impact the country's stability, which can be another reason for the country's geopolitical challenges. While the government of Bangladesh seeks to assign blame for the country's struggling economy to COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine crisis, many argue that the current economic situation has worsened due to widespread corruption and poor governance. Further raising concerns about debt sustainability and the risk of falling into a debt trap are government loans for major infrastructure projects such as the Padma Bridge and Payra Port, which are frequently financed by countries like China. These problems are exacerbated by widespread corruption; for instance, claims of graft in the banking industry have undermined financial stability and led to non-performing loans. Progress is further hampered by poor governance practices, such as opaque public procurement and ineffective public administration. These difficulties are highlighted by the World Bank (2020) rankings, where a challenging business climate is created by bureaucratic red tape and lax contract enforcement, discouraging both local and international investment.

Concluding remarks

Bangladesh has become a strong, sought-after partner in the region's dynamic geopolitical environment due to its advantageous location as a link between South Asia and the rest of the Indo-Pacific. The country, which was formerly associated with natural calamities and poverty, has experienced a dramatic change and has progressed in many social and public health indicators. In particular, the country has established a path toward sustainable growth by prioritizing human capital development, diversification, infrastructure investments, and poverty alleviation. Moreover, Bangladesh serves as a symbol of optimism for South Asia, with an impressive economic boom that has drawn attention from across the globe.

Notwithstanding ongoing difficulties, including wealth disparity, climate change, and corruption, Bangladesh has proven its capacity to overcome barriers and adjust to shifting conditions. If Bangladesh keeps going in this direction, it might grow into a major regional economic force and serve as an example for other developing countries. However, many of the unfavorable elements of the nation may be apparent when the political backdrop and economic issues are disrupted. In short, Bangladesh has potential and is well-known

for being the source of the Bay of Bengal, an area in which both the USA and China are particularly interested in geostrategic, mineral, and transportation reasons. Therefore, Bangladesh should uphold its commitment to “Friendship Towards All, Malice Towards None” by maintaining robust diplomatic and trade ties with major world economies. Notwithstanding the intricate geopolitical circumstances in the area, the nation needs to handle its partnerships with China and India with competence.

Since India and Myanmar find themselves at a significant geopolitical juncture, it is essential to find a peaceful solution to unresolved issues to foster such positive connections. Therefore, the region’s political and decision-making elites must collaborate to put aside differences and seize the opportunities that lie ahead. For example, to expedite the repatriation process of Rohingya, decisive diplomatic measures must be taken, and Bangladesh must concentrate on using its capacity for wise diplomacy. To be more competitive in trade, Bangladesh needs to expand its manufacturing base such as Building a deep seaport at Matarbari, Cox’s Bazar, will also provide more benefits. Another potential remedy to lessen maritime dangers in the Indian Ocean would be implementing appropriate Maritime Domain Awareness systems. In this case, the best course of action is diplomacy and multilateral solutions. To address this issue, Bangladesh must be interconnected and disregard personal rivalry.

Moreover, to reduce the possibility of fragmentation brought on by rival commercial alliances; Bangladesh should push for greater regional multilateralism while simultaneously maintaining strong ties with its two most significant neighbors, China, and India. Resolving the many issues that lay ahead will need regional collaboration with Bangladesh, which serves as a vital link between the South Asia and Southeast Asia sub-regions. Finally, Bangladesh has the potential to establish itself as a center for connectivity in the area and attract substantial investments in infrastructure and communications. Bangladesh’s role in reviving regional connectivity, which has global implications, makes it a significant element in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific region.

Ethics Statement

This study did not include human participants and therefore did not require ethical approval.

Use of Generative AI

During the writing phase, the authors used Claude (Sonnet 4.5) to assist in refining sentences without altering the manuscript's conceptual content and logical structure. The authors take full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Each author contributed equally to the study and the manuscript.

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