

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



A STUDY ON BANGLADESH-MYANMAR RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SOUTHEAST BANGLADESH

Md. Masum Sikdar^{*1}; Jannatul Ferdous²;
Md. Noyon Hossain³

¹ Associate Professor, Department Political Science, University of Barishal, Bangladesh. & PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, India.

Email: mmsikdar@bu.ac.bd

² Research Associate, Study Center for Indo-Pacific and Middle-East Geopolitics, Chittagong, Bangladesh. Email: jannatulferdous669969@gmail.com

³ Research Assistant, Study Center for Indo-Pacific and Middle-East Geopolitics, Chittagong, Bangladesh. Email: hnoyon047@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

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Abstract

Bangladesh is a strategically significant South Asian country due to its geographic location, sharing a long border with Myanmar, a Southeast Asian nation. These two neighboring countries hold significant geopolitical and geostrategic importance in the region, particularly as both China and India maintain strong political and economic interests here. In addition to geographic proximity, Bangladesh and Myanmar share similarities in culture, religion, and historical experiences, while both border the Bay of Bengal, a crucial maritime zone. Rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and agricultural assets, both countries possess strong potential for economic cooperation and regional integration. Myanmar's Kachin State, for instance, is abundant in minerals such as gold, silver, and jade, while Bangladesh has substantial reserves of natural gas and fertile agricultural land. Their shared access to the Bay of Bengal further enhances their strategic value in global maritime trade routes, which connect South Asia and Southeast Asia with the broader global economy. Major power such as China and India actively seek influence in this region through trade, investment, infrastructure development, and strategic partnerships. China's growing economic presence, often described through its debt-driven diplomacy, contrasts with India's regional engagement policies. Meanwhile, the United States also aims to assert influence through diplomatic and strategic initiatives, recognizing the Indo-Pacific region as vital to global power dynamics. This study examines the geopolitical importance of southeastern Bangladesh and northwestern Myanmar, focusing on how both countries can navigate regional and global power competition. It explores bilateral relations, regional security, and economic opportunities, while also addressing the role of international actors. Ultimately, the paper highlights pathways toward fostering cooperation and building a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Geostrategic, Southeast Bangladesh, Indo-Pacific, Regional Security, Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations, Economic Corridor.

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Introduction

Over the past seven decades, Myanmar has faced persistent challenges in building a stable nation-state amid deep ethnic diversity and recurring political conflict. At the same time, the southeastern region of Bangladesh, particularly Bandarban, Rangamati, and Cox's Bazar, has remained a sensitive and strategically significant area for the government, shaped by ethnic dynamics, security concerns, and developmental disparities (Ahamed, 2020). Both southeastern Bangladesh and the adjoining regions of Myanmar, especially Rakhine and Chin States, are rich in natural resources and hold significant importance in domestic as well as international politics. Their geographic proximity, combined with shared socio-cultural linkages, places them at the center of regional geopolitical calculations. The Bay of Bengal, which connects these areas, further enhances their importance as a key maritime zone influencing global trade, energy routes, and strategic mobility. Myanmar's geographic configuration strengthens its strategic relevance. The country borders China to the north and northeast, Laos to the east, Thailand to the southeast, and Bangladesh and India to the west, while its southern coastline opens to the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. This positioning makes Myanmar a natural bridge between South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Its long coastline provides access to major sea lanes, reinforcing its role in regional trade and connectivity. The administrative shift of Myanmar's capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw in 2006 reflects its evolving strategic priorities and governance structure.

Bangladesh, similarly, occupies a crucial position in regional geopolitics. Surrounded largely by India and sharing a southeastern border with Myanmar, Bangladesh serves as a gateway between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Its access to the Bay of Bengal places it along one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes, enhancing its significance in global commerce and regional security frameworks. Historically, Bangladesh and Myanmar share complex yet interconnected trajectories. Myanmar gained independence in 1948 following British colonial rule, while Bangladesh emerged as an independent country in 1971 after its war of independence. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were formally established in 1972, followed by a bilateral trade agreement in 1973. Since then, their relationship has evolved through phases of cooperation and tension.

One of the most critical challenges affecting bilateral relations is the Rohingya crisis, which has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh. This issue has created humanitarian, political, and security pressures, complicating diplomatic engagement between the two nations. Despite these challenges, both countries share significant opportunities for cooperation. Areas such as trade expansion, agricultural development, energy collaboration, and climate change adaptation offer pathways for mutual benefit. For Bangladesh, Myanmar provides a potential land bridge to Southeast Asia and China, which could enhance regional connectivity and economic integration (Maung, 2024).

In this context, Bangladesh–Myanmar relations must be understood not only as a bilateral issue but as part of a broader geopolitical framework involving major regional and global powers. Their cooperation, if effectively managed, can contribute to regional stability, economic growth, and the development of a more integrated Indo-Pacific region.

However, by exploring emerging trends in international relations, regional dynamics, and technological advancements, this study identifies potential challenges such as increased competition for resources, shifts in alliances, and the rise of non-traditional security threats. Furthermore, this paper climaxes various opportunities for our country, Bangladesh to influence its geo-strategic location, economic and trade potentials and politico-diplomatic advantages to increase its position on the international platform. Through an inclusive assessment of these key issues, this paper aims to provide visions for policymakers to direct the difficulties of the surfacing geopolitical landscape and efficiently advance Bangladesh's national interests in the upcoming years (Salam, M. F, 2024).

Study Objectives

Bangladesh shares borders with both India and Myanmar, with Myanmar forming the southeastern boundary. The regions of Chin and Rakhine in Myanmar maintain ethnic and cultural connections with the people of Cox's Bazar, as well as with Bandarban and Rangamati in Bangladesh. This interconnectedness makes the geopolitical context of southeastern Bangladesh and western Myanmar highly significant in both regional and global politics. The southeastern region of Bangladesh holds particular strategic value due to its economic and geopolitical significance. A large portion of the country's international trade is conducted through Chattogram Port, located in this region. As one of the principal maritime gateways of Bangladesh, the port plays a central role in national economic growth and regional connectivity (Saha, 2019). Similarly, the Chin and Rakhine States of Myanmar are increasingly important due to their economic potential and proximity to major trade routes.

This study aims to examine Bangladesh–Myanmar relations with a specific focus on the strategic importance of southeastern Bangladesh. It seeks to explore how this region contributes to broader geopolitical dynamics, particularly in relation to development prospects, security concerns, and regional integration between South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The key objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the geopolitical importance of southeastern Bangladesh and its connection with Myanmar's border regions.
- To evaluate bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Myanmar in terms of trade, security, and diplomacy.
- To assess regional challenges, including ethnic conflict, cross-border security threats, and political instability.
- To explore opportunities for cooperation, such as economic partnerships, connectivity initiatives, energy collaboration, and cultural exchange.
- To examine the influence of external powers on Bangladesh-Myanmar relations within the broader Indo-Pacific context.
- To identify strategies for promoting stability, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence in the region.

In addition, the study considers how hostile relations between the two countries may create opportunities for insurgent groups in the Chattogram Hill Tracts, thereby affecting national security (Patwary, 2019). Therefore, understanding and improving bilateral relations is essential not only for economic progress but also for maintaining regional stability.

Ultimately, this research aims to highlight the growing importance of Bangladesh and Myanmar in global politics and economics, and to propose pathways for fostering a more peaceful and cooperative Indo-Pacific region.

Literature Review

Over the past two decades, South Asia has gained increasing significance in global academic and policy discussions, particularly due to its evolving geopolitical dynamics. Scholars from both within and outside the region have examined the strategic positioning of countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, emphasizing their growing relevance in regional trade, security, and international relations. A number of studies focus specifically on the Bangladesh-Myanmar relationship, highlighting its complexity and strategic significance. For instance, Rashid, Ahamed, and Rahman, in their study on transnational organized crime along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, identify security challenges such as smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal cross-border activities. Their work underscores the need for stronger bilateral coordination to manage border security effectively.

Historical perspectives on Myanmar have been extensively discussed by scholars such as Maung Htin Aung and David I. Steinberg. Their analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of Myanmar's political evolution, administrative structure, and internal conflicts. These historical insights are essential for understanding current geopolitical tensions and the role of ethnic diversity in shaping state policies. Several studies also highlight the economic and strategic importance of natural resources in both countries. Open-access platforms like Wikipedia and various economic reports point out that resource abundance, such as gas, minerals, and agricultural assets which plays a dual role: it supports economic development while also attracting the attention of major global powers, sometimes leading to political tensions.

The importance of maritime infrastructure, particularly Chattogram Port, has been emphasized by Razon Chandra Saha (2019). His research demonstrates how the port contributes significantly to Bangladesh's economy and its regional trade connectivity. Similarly, reports from maritime and economic research platforms highlight the growing importance of projects like the Matarbari Deep Sea Port in enhancing Bangladesh's logistical capacity and economic growth.

Security dimensions of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations have been further analyzed by O. H. Patwary (2019), who discusses how ethnic groups and insurgent activities in border areas can exploit weak bilateral relations. His work suggests that political instability and conflict in these regions can have broader implications for national and regional security. The geopolitical importance of Bangladesh in South Asia and Southeast Asia has been discussed by scholars such as Shahnawaz A. Mantoo, who emphasizes Bangladesh's strategic location and its significance to major global powers. He also points out the security concerns involving India's northeastern region and the implications for Bangladesh's sovereignty.

Tourism and economic development in southeastern Bangladesh have been explored by researchers like Chowdhury and Paul (2010), who highlight the sector's contribution to GDP and employment. Additional reports from sources such as *The Business Standard* further demonstrate how infrastructure development and tourism growth are shaping the regional economy. Ethnic conflict and identity politics in the Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT) have been analyzed through theoretical frameworks provided by scholars like Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Clifford Geertz. Their works on ethnicity and nationalism help explain the deep social and political dynamics that influence conflicts in the region.

Recent studies and reports also emphasize the growing geopolitical interest of major powers in the Bay of Bengal and the Indo-Pacific region. Scholars such as Dr. Shariful Islam and Dr. Anuradha Oinam highlight how global actors, including the United States, China, and India, are increasingly engaged in this region due to its strategic significance in maritime trade, energy security, and regional influence. Furthermore, policy-oriented researches from organizations like the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and international journals such as *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* examine the broader geopolitical competition shaping Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. These works emphasize the role of initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and regional security frameworks in influencing bilateral and multilateral dynamics.

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that Bangladesh-Myanmar relations are shaped by a complex interplay of historical ties, economic interests, security concerns, and geopolitical competition. While significant research has been conducted, there remains a need for a more integrated analysis that connects the strategic importance of southeastern Bangladesh with broader regional and global developments, an area this study aims to address.

Research Method

This study, titled “A Study on Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations in the Context of the Geopolitical Importance of Southeast Bangladesh,” is primarily qualitative in nature and is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. A historical research approach has been adopted to examine the evolution of diplomatic relations, geopolitical dynamics, and regional developments involving Bangladesh and Myanmar. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how past events and policies continue to shape present-day interactions between the two countries.

The study relies significantly on secondary data, collected from a wide range of sources including academic journals, books, research reports, newspapers, and credible online platforms. Key sources include publications from international research organizations, government reports, and recognized databases such as IJSBAR, Britannica, and the Journal of Asian Studies. Additional insights have been drawn from reports published by media outlets like *The Daily Star*, *Dhaka Tribune*, and *The Business Standard*, as well as from maritime and economic research platforms. Primary data has also been considered where accessible, particularly through official documents such as policy statements, memoranda, and reports from government institutions. These include materials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Commerce of Bangladesh, as well as information from the Embassy of Myanmar in Dhaka.

Data collection involved reviewing, classifying, and organizing information from these sources to ensure relevance and consistency. The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively, using comparative and interpretative methods. Cross-referencing of sources was applied to

maintain accuracy and reduce bias. And narrative analysis was used to explain complex geopolitical and historical developments. To ensure the reliability of findings, efforts were made to minimize bias by consulting multiple sources and perspectives. Analytical tools such as comparative analysis and logical reasoning were employed to interpret the data and draw balanced conclusions.

The research of Selimul haque and Akkas Ahamed explains the significant of the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor. It focuses on regional connectivity, trade, and development cooperation in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Overall, this methodological framework supports a comprehensive examination of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations by integrating historical context, geopolitical analysis, and contemporary developments.

Limitations of the Study

This study faces several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, due to time constraints and the geographical sensitivity of the region, it was not possible to conduct extensive fieldwork or collect a wide range of primary data. As a result, the research relies heavily on secondary sources such as academic articles, journals, reports, and newspaper publications. Second, access to official documents was limited. The researcher was unable to obtain all relevant primary materials from institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh and corresponding authorities in Myanmar. This restricted the depth of primary-source analysis in certain areas. Third, financial and logistical constraints prevented a comprehensive examination of all dimensions of Bangladesh-Myanmar relations. The study, therefore, focuses on selected aspects-particularly geopolitical importance, regional security, and economic cooperation-rather than covering every bilateral issue in detail. Finally, the rapidly changing political and geopolitical situation in the region means that some data and interpretations may evolve over time. This dynamic context poses a challenge to maintaining complete contemporaneity. Despite these limitations, careful efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy, balance, and reliability of the analysis by using multiple credible sources and maintaining a critical approach throughout the study.

Geopolitical Importance of the Region

The geopolitical importance of southeast Bangladesh and its adjoining regions with Myanmar can be understood at two interconnected levels: internal (domestic) and external (international). These dimensions together shape the political, economic, and strategic significance of the region. Major global powers, including China, the United States, and India, are increasingly interested in this area due to its strategic location, access to maritime routes, and resource potential. Their involvement through investment, trade, infrastructure development, and strategic alliances highlights the growing significance of this region in global geopolitics (Mantoo, 2024). The region is also connected with South, Southeast Asia and China with having access to the Bay of Bengal. That's why the region is equally important for both Europe and America alongwith China, Japan, Korea, Australia and Russia for regional connectivity, trade and investments and port facilities.

Internal Importance

Internal Importance of Southeast Bangladesh

The southeastern region of Bangladesh, particularly the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), holds significant strategic importance for national stability and sovereignty. This region is geographically connected to the mainland through narrow corridors, making it sensitive from both security and administrative perspectives. Historically, ethnic tensions and demands for autonomy in the CHT have posed challenges to the state. To address these issues, the government signed the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord in 1997, aiming to bring stability and political settlement (CHT, 1997.) However, despite more than two decades since the agreement, full implementation remains incomplete, and occasional conflict continues to affect the region. In addition to ethnic tensions, the area faces challenges such as illegal cross-border activities, including drug trafficking and smuggling. These issues not only threaten local stability but also have broader implications for national security. A balanced and inclusive development approach is therefore essential to ensure long-term peace and integration of this region into the national framework.

Economic Importance of Southeast Bangladesh

The southeast region plays a crucial role in the national economy of Bangladesh. One of the most significant assets of this region is its access to the Bay of Bengal, which supports maritime trade, fishing, energy resources, and transportation. The region is also rich in natural resources, including natural gas, fisheries, and salt production (Chowdhury, 2010). Chittagong Port serves as the primary maritime gateway of Bangladesh, handling approximately 90% of the country's international trade (TBS, 2024). Its strategic location makes it vital not only for Bangladesh's economy but also for regional trade connectivity across South and Southeast Asia. In addition, the region has emerged as a growing hub for industrial and infrastructural development. The Matarbari Deep Sea Port project represents a major step forward in enhancing Bangladesh's maritime capacity (Business inspection, 2023). Approximately, 7394 employees work in the power plant of matarbari, including skilled and unskilled labor as well as technical and non –technical employees (BSS, 2021). Unlike traditional ports, it is designed to accommodate large vessels without dependence on tidal conditions, thereby increasing efficiency and trade volume, which increase the number of employment for people in this region (Maritime gateway, 2024). Tourism also contributes significantly to the regional economy. Areas such as Cox's Bazar, Rangamati, and Bandarban attract both domestic and international visitors due to their natural beauty. The tourism sector creates employment opportunities, generates foreign exchange, and supports local businesses (Aftab Hossain).

Overall, the economic potential of southeastern Bangladesh lies in its combination of maritime resources, infrastructure development, and tourism growth.



Source : <https://lightcastlepartners.com/insights/2024/07/insights-of-matarbari-deep-sea-port-in-bd/>

Figure 1. Matarbari Deep Sea Port: An Integrated Economic Zone

Political Importance of Southeast Bangladesh

Politically, southeastern Bangladesh is a highly sensitive and strategically significant region. Ethnic identity and nationalism play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Groups such as the Chakma and Tripura communities maintain distinct cultural identities, which sometimes lead to demands for greater autonomy or recognition (Erickson, 1993). Theoretical perspectives from scholars like Eriksen and Geertz help explain how ethnic identity influences political behavior and conflict in such regions. Recent incidents of violence and displacement in the CHT further highlight the fragile nature of peace in the area (Geertz, 1963). These incidents demonstrate that unresolved political and social issues can quickly escalate into broader security concerns. The region is also influenced by neighboring countries, particularly India and Myanmar. Cross-border ethnic ties and strategic interests often impact domestic politics, making the region a significant factor in Bangladesh's national security framework. Additionally, areas such as Saint Martin's Island hold strategic value due to their location in the Bay of Bengal, further increasing the geopolitical importance of southeastern Bangladesh.

External Importance

Economic and Geostrategic Importance

At the international level, southeast Bangladesh plays a vital role in global trade and regional connectivity. The Bay of Bengal is one of the most important maritime regions in the world, connecting South Asia, Southeast Asia, and beyond. A significant portion of global trade passes through this area, making it a center of economic activity.

Bangladesh's position in this region makes it a key player in the Indo-Pacific framework. Major Powers such as the United States, China, India, and Japan view Bangladesh as a strategic partner in maintaining trade routes, ensuring maritime security, and promoting economic cooperation. Initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Quadrilateral

Security Dialogue (Quad) reflect the growing competition and cooperation among global powers in this region (Shariful Islam, 2023).

Security and Geopolitical Importance

Security is a central aspect of the region's geopolitical significance. The Bay of Bengal faces multiple challenges, including piracy, illegal fishing, human trafficking, and climate change. Ensuring maritime security is essential for maintaining uninterrupted trade and economic stability. Bangladesh's role in promoting a rules-based international order, particularly through its Indo-Pacific Outlook, highlights its commitment to peace, cooperation, and non-interference. This approach positions Bangladesh as a responsible actor in regional and global politics. At the same time, geopolitical competition among major powers creates both opportunities and challenges (ORF, 2019). While foreign investment and partnerships can boost economic growth, excessive external influence may also affect national sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

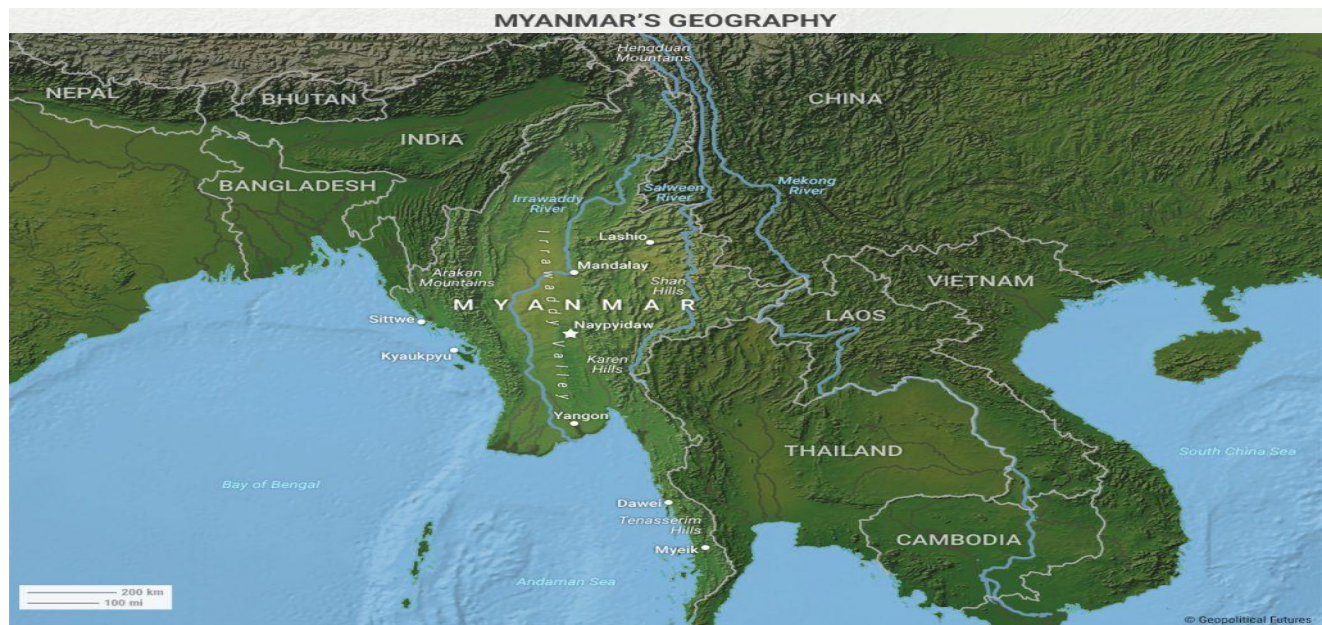
Concern of BCIM economic corridor

BCIM corridor connects four countries of South and Southeast Asia: Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar. China has a strong economic impact in this region, and India has a large population with a growing economy. Bangladesh is a developing country, and Myanmar also needs investment and development. All these countries can benefit from cooperation through the BCIM economic corridor. However, in these four countries, the southeastern part of Bangladesh has an important role in the context of the BCIM corridor. China is pouring a lot of money into this, as it tries to connect Asia with Europe and Africa. Projects like the Belt and Road Initiative are evidence of this. BCIM corridor provides China a effortless access to the Bay of Bengal, which reduces the cost and time of international trade. The geographical location of Bangladesh is strategically significant, which is crucial for economic development and regional security. It has access to the Bay of Bengal and works as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. This gives Bangladesh revenue from ports and trade routes. It can also attract foreign investment and modern technology to sustain and develop these sectors, which will help improve its economy rapidly. (Ahmed Akkas)There are many benefits of the BCIM corridor. It can increase trade and investment. It can improve infrastructure like roads, ports, and energy systems. It can also create jobs and strengthen relationships between two countries. People-to-people contact will also increase.

Geopolitical Importance of Myanmar

Myanmar holds a highly strategic position in Asia due to its geographic location and resource potential. It serves as a significant bridge connecting South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The country shares borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand, while its coastline opens to the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. This position gives Myanmar direct access to major maritime trade routes and makes it a key player in regional connectivity (Anu Radha, 2024). Its territory also lies along significant economic and strategic corridors, which increases its importance to both regional and global powers. In addition to geography, Myanmar is rich in natural resources, including oil, natural gas, jade, and other minerals. These resources attract foreign investment and strategic interest, particularly from countries seeking energy security and economic expansion. However, Myanmar's internal political instability—especially following the 2021 military coup—has complicated its geopolitical role. Ongoing domestic conflicts, ethnic

insurgencies, and governance challenges create uncertainty, making the country both strategically valuable and politically fragile.



Source : <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/myanmars-role-chinas-trade-plans/>

Figure 2. Myanmar's Geography: Strategic, Security, and Economic Interests

Role of Global Powers in the Region

The geopolitical importance of Bangladesh and Myanmar has drawn significant attention from major global powers, each pursuing its own strategic, economic, and security interests in the region.

The United States' Interests in the Region

The United States views the region as a critical part of its broader Indo-Pacific strategy. Its primary objective is to maintain a balance of power and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific, particularly in response to China's growing influence. Myanmar and southeastern Bangladesh are important to the U.S. due to their proximity to major maritime routes and strategic position in the Bay of Bengal. The U.S. has used diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and humanitarian assistance to influence political developments in Myanmar, especially after the 2021 military coup (Survival, 2012). The Rohingya crisis has also been a major concern for the United States. It has provided significant humanitarian aid and has taken measures to hold Myanmar's military accountable for human rights violations (AP, 2024). At the same time, the U.S. has shown interest in the broader region, including areas like Saint Martin's Island, due to their strategic value in monitoring maritime activities and maintaining regional security (Scroolin, 2024).

China's Geopolitical and Economic Interests in the Region

China is one of the most influential actors in the region, driven by its economic ambitions and strategic goals. Myanmar plays a crucial role in China's regional strategy, particularly as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through infrastructure projects, pipelines, and port development, China seeks to secure alternative trade routes that reduce its dependence on the Strait of Malacca (Ritu sharma, 2024). China has also made significant investments in Bangladesh, including infrastructure and defense cooperation. Its involvement in projects such as submarine bases and port development highlights its long-term strategic interests in the Bay of Bengal. Additionally, China maintains close ties with Myanmar's military government, often prioritizing stability and strategic access over political reforms. This approach allows China to maintain strong influence in the region, even amid political instability (Pederson, 2000).

India's Position in terms of Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations

India considers Myanmar and Bangladesh essential to its regional strategy, particularly in the context of its "Act East Policy" (formerly Look East Policy). Myanmar serves as a land bridge connecting India's northeastern states with Southeast Asia. Strengthening connectivity through Myanmar allows India to expand trade, improve infrastructure, and enhance regional integration (Steignberg, 2012). At the same time, India is concerned about China's growing influence in Myanmar and Bangladesh. As a result, it actively engages with both countries through trade agreements, infrastructure projects, and security cooperation. For Bangladesh, India is a major economic partner and plays a significant role in trade, energy cooperation, and regional security. Collaboration between the two countries is particularly important for managing border security and countering insurgent activities (Aparna Pande, 2023).

Geostrategic and Economic Interests of Russia

Russia's involvement in the region is primarily driven by strategic and economic interests. Both Bangladesh and Myanmar serve as important partners for Russia in areas such as defense cooperation, energy investment, and arms trade. Russia has supplied military equipment to both countries and has invested in major projects, including nuclear energy development in Bangladesh (Nadkarni, 2010). In addition, Russia seeks to expand its influence in Asia as part of its broader geopolitical strategy to balance Western dominance. Its engagement with Bangladesh and Myanmar reflects its interest in maintaining a presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Geopolitical Competition among Major Powers and Regional Impact

The involvement of multiple global powers has transformed the region into a field of strategic competition.

- The United States aims to maintain a rules-based order
- China seeks economic expansion and strategic access
- India focuses on regional connectivity and security
- Russia pursues strategic partnerships and economic opportunities

This competition creates both opportunities and challenges for Bangladesh and Myanmar (Pranab kumar, 2012). While foreign investment and partnerships can support economic growth, excessive dependence on external powers may risk undermining national sovereignty.

Bangladesh–Myanmar Relations in the Context of Economic Cooperation and Diplomatic Ties

Bangladesh and Myanmar are significant neighboring countries whose relationship are shaped by geography, history, and shared strategic interests. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972, the two countries have experienced a mix of cooperation and tension. On one hand, there are areas of mutual interest such as trade, border management, energy cooperation, and regional connectivity. On the other hand, persistent challenges - most notably the Rohingya crisis - have strained bilateral relations and created humanitarian, political, and security pressures. Geographically, the two countries share both land and maritime boundaries. This proximity makes cooperation essential in areas such as border security, prevention of transnational crime, and management of shared resources. Regular communication between border forces and diplomatic channels has contributed to maintaining a degree of stability, although tensions occasionally arise. Military and security cooperation has also developed over time, including training exchanges and formal agreements on security dialogue (Ministry of foreign Affairs). These mechanisms help build trust and improve coordination between the two countries, particularly in addressing cross-border threats. Despite these efforts, unresolved issues continue to hinder the full development of bilateral relations. The Rohingya crisis remains the most critical obstacle, affecting not only diplomatic relations but also regional stability.

Areas of Cooperation

There are several fields where Bangladesh and Myanmar can strengthen cooperation for mutual benefit:

- **Trade and Economic Development:** Expanding bilateral trade can unlock economic potential and reduce dependency on external markets.
- **Connectivity and Transportation:** Improved Road, rail, and maritime links can enhance regional integration between South Asia and Southeast Asia.
- **Energy Cooperation:** Joint initiatives in natural gas and energy resources can support sustainable development.
- **Agriculture and Resource Management:** Sharing knowledge and resources can improve productivity and food security.
- **Climate Change and Environmental Protection:** Both countries face similar environmental challenges and can collaborate on mitigation strategies.
- **Cultural and Educational Exchange:** Strengthening people-to-people connections can build trust and long-term cooperation.

Additionally, both countries are members of regional platforms such as BIMSTEC, which provides opportunities for broader multilateral collaboration.

Policy Recommendations

To improve bilateral relations and for ensuring regional stability, the following policy measures are recommended:

1. **Peaceful Resolution of the Rohingya Crisis:**
Both countries must engage in constructive dialogue, supported by international organizations, to ensure safe, voluntary, and sustainable repatriation of refugees.
2. **Strengthening Diplomatic Engagement:**
Regular high-level meetings and diplomatic communication should be enhanced to address misunderstandings and build mutual trust.
3. **Enhancing Border Security Cooperation:**
Joint efforts should be made to combat illegal activities such as trafficking, smuggling, and insurgency along the border.
4. **Promoting Economic Partnerships:**
Bilateral trade agreements and joint investment initiatives can create economic interdependence and reduce political tensions.
5. **Balancing External Influence:**
Both countries should carefully manage their relationships with major powers to avoid overdependence and protect national sovereignty.
6. **Developing Regional Connectivity:**
Infrastructure projects linking Bangladesh and Myanmar can strengthen their roles in regional trade networks and the Indo-Pacific framework.

Conclusion

Bangladesh and Myanmar occupy a strategically significant position in the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. Their geographic proximity, shared resources, and access to the Bay of Bengal make them key players in regional and global dynamics. While their relationship has been shaped by both cooperation and conflict, the future depends largely on their ability to address existing challenges, particularly the Rohingya crisis, and to build a foundation of mutual trust and collaboration. The growing interest of major global powers in the region further increases the importance of Bangladesh–Myanmar relations. Managing this external influence while safeguarding national interests will be critical for both countries. Economic opportunities, regional connectivity, and shared development goals offer a strong basis for cooperation. By prioritizing dialogue over conflict and partnership over competition, Bangladesh and Myanmar can transform their relationship into a source of stability and progress. Ultimately, a cooperative and balanced approach between the two nations can contribute not only to their own development but also to the broader goal of a peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. The governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar should co-operate each other on all aspects of bilateral cooperation including economic, political, security, regional and global issues.

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