

Bangladesh Elections And India

Why In News

- As Bangladesh votes in national elections on Sunday, India will be watching closely. The countries **share a 4,100-km border** and deep historical, cultural, and economic ties. A stable, prosperous and friendly Bangladesh is in India's best interests.
- Thus, India stands firmly behind the **incumbent Sheikh Hasina**. Seen as one of India's closest friends and allies, she has over the years fostered a friendly and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries.



India & Bangladesh

- Her relationship with **India dates back to the 1970s**, when India was the biggest backer of **Bangladesh's liberation movement**, led by her father Mujib.
- Her four terms in power have been extremely **fruitful in furthering the India-Bangladesh relationship** — most border issues have been sorted, economic cooperation has been furthered, and most importantly, Hasina has firmly supported India's national security interests.
- **Before Hasina came to power in 2009**, the previous Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government was quite hostile to India — and provided safe haven to numerous anti-India terrorist and militant groups.
- It allegedly also had **links to Pakistan's ISI**, and gave space to hardline Islamist radicals.

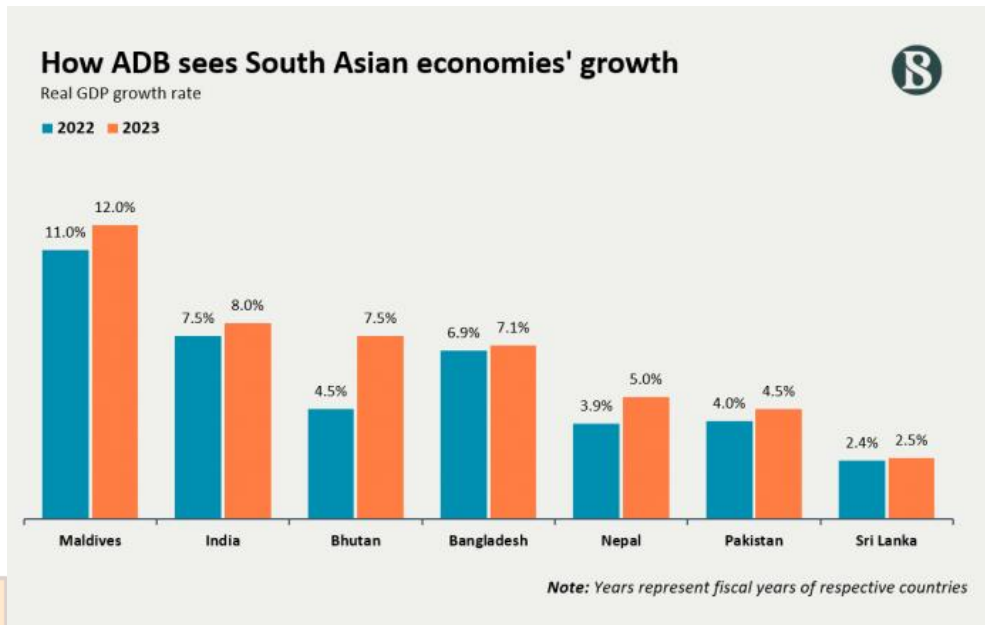


- Hasina has been a very cooperative leader who has dramatically eased India's security burden on its very long eastern border.
- Her crackdown on **anti-India elements and counter-terrorism cooperation** with India has single-handedly improved India's overall security situation over the last decade or so.
- Especially given the **deteriorating situation in Myanmar**, it becomes even more important that India and Bangladesh remain close security partners.
- One of the big changes in South Asia over the last few years is the economic rise of Bangladesh, which has replaced Pakistan as the second largest economy in the region.



- According to World Bank data, the **GDP of Bangladesh was \$460 billion** in 2022, more than Pakistan's \$375 billion.

- In 2022-23, **Bangladesh** was the fifth largest export destination for Indian goods, after the United States, the UAE, the Netherlands, and China.
- It accounted for more than **2.7 per cent of all Indian exports**, worth \$12.2 billion.



- Under Hasina, Bangladesh is facilitating efficient **connectivity to India's Northeast** through overland transit and inland waterways. Beyond the subcontinent, India would like Bangladesh to become a fulcrum for regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal littoral linking South and South East Asia.
- Dhaka hosts the secretariat of The Bay of Bengal Initiative for **Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation** (BIMSTEC) that connects the eastern subcontinent with Myanmar and Thailand. In recent years, many of India's friends such as Japan have invested heavily in Bangladesh.



China & Bangladesh

- Bangladesh's two-way trade with **China exceeded \$25 billion in 2022**. Bangladesh aligns strategically with China, which is helping transform its landscape through mega projects.
- Chinese investments in **BRI- Financed infrastructure** projects have surpassed \$10 billion.
- Bangladesh's nuanced approach towards India and China reflects the prioritizing of **mutually beneficial relationships** aligning with national interests over zero-sum strategic affairs.



- It leverages socio-economic, trade, and cultural ties with India for growth, but has significant military relations with China.
- Bangladesh is the **second largest importer of Chinese arms**. India too gave **\$500 million credit to Bangladesh** for defence imports.



- Both Asian giants have made substantial investments in Bangladesh, signifying the pivotal role the country plays in regional dynamics.
- Key agreements in power, **transport, and telecom underscore** the high stakes in ensuring Bangladesh's ongoing success. Some concerns have, however, emerged over the burden of Chinese debt and ecological considerations.

Sheikh Hasina's Approach

- Prime Minister Hasina's handling of **multiple partnerships has been adept**. Her strategic **autonomy doctrine**, which avoids exclusive alliances, offers smaller neighbours a good example for self-empowerment through **cooperation and collaboration** with major regional powers.
- Her consultative approach on global issues, like the Rohingya refugee crisis, too has elevated Dhaka's standing with the two Asian giants.



- In the pursuit of achieving **developed nation status by 2041**, Bangladesh has strategically harnessed economic and technological strengths of both India and China, balancing ties amid evolving dynamics.
- It has granted port access to both countries, fostering modernization in Mongla port under the banners of the BRI and **Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor (BCIM)**. A similar cooperative enhancement for Pyra port was undertaken, but India backed out due to the public-private partnership being granted to a Chinese company.
- **Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific outlook** draft underscores engagement with regional and global stakeholders for human security, connectivity, and the blue economy, while steering clear of geopolitical tensions.

- Bangladesh imports Indian electricity which currently stands at 1,160 MW, while enabling about **\$450 million of Chinese investments** into 1,845 MW domestic power generation as of 2021.
- The **surging demand for electricity** has necessitated an expansion of supply, and concurrent energy deals with both countries advance converging industrialization interests.



Conclusion

- Both India and China, deeply invested in **Bangladesh's stability**, are understandably wary of political and economic risks post-election.
- As Bangladesh confronts a potentially combustible electoral climate with far-reaching consequences, it is no wonder that both India and China have thrown their weight behind the incumbent.

