

Bangladesh and India's new strategic dilemma



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A new phase of distancing between Bangladesh and India has been brought on by recent changes in bilateral trade along their shared border. Although India has traditionally viewed Bangladesh as a significant ally in South Asia, its current steps appear more severe, even punitive. Its displeasure with Dhaka's political shift has been demonstrated by Delhi's employing a range of strategies, including sudden trade restrictions, public demonstrations, and heightened strategic posturing.

India appears to be unhappy about the collapse of the Awami League government and the emergence of an interim government led by Dr Muhammad Yunus, despite it being a domestic issue. Delhi now faces a less predictable opponent after years of supporting the previous government. Border pressure, a diplomatic freeze, and trade retaliation seem to be more reactive than proactive.

Since May 7, India's border force is said to have pushed more than 1,600 individuals into Bangladesh, including Indian citizens and the displaced Rohingya. Such actions are against international norms. During a vulnerable time of political transition, these unannounced arrivals have placed strain on Bangladesh's internal security and the local government. This has also led to public discontent and instability. When pressure is put on Bangladesh's security forces to react, there is a greater chance that the situation

may escalate. The tactic fits into what some argue is a broader pattern in India's regional playbook that disseminates political concepts through strategic pressure.

The issue is exacerbated by India's aggressive efforts to upgrade its infrastructure. Over the past decade, India has effectively encircled Bangladesh with an extensive network of rivers, trains, and roads, connecting the northeast to the mainland. India possesses significant logistical capabilities, thanks to projects such as the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit via Myanmar and transportation corridors through Bangladesh.

Dr Yunus's statement that "Bangladesh is their sole path to the sea" was viewed as a strategic issue in Delhi due to the "landlocked" nature of the northeastern Indian provinces. In response, India has resumed military preparations around key locations and reactivated the airbase in Kailashahar, Tripura. Delhi is even more uneasy about Bangladesh's decision to revive Lalmonirhat airport, given its proximity to the Siliguri Corridor.

Critical supply networks for Bangladeshi exports, which primarily include processed foods, apparel, and home goods, have been impacted by India's sudden restrictions. Order delays and stopped shipments are affecting small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly those that supply to northeastern India.

This move, which is sometimes interpreted

as a response to Bangladesh's ban on importing Indian yarn, highlights the significant trade imbalance. In FY2023-24, Bangladesh exported less than \$1.6 billion worth of goods to India, but imported approximately \$9 billion worth of goods from there. Indian traders are also facing shortages and higher prices in West Bengal and the northeast. Electricity is another weakness. Approximately 2,500MW, or 17 percent of Bangladesh's total electricity

Not to be overlooked are Dhaka's recent diplomatic engagements with Pakistan and China. Proposals for a humanitarian channel/corridor to Myanmar's Rakhine state and preliminary talks on infrastructure cooperation between the three countries have heightened Indian concerns. Delhi is concerned about a shift in the strategic centre of the Bay of Bengal as it may diminish India's long-standing influence over the region.

Bangladesh and India have a complex and multifaceted connection. Bangladesh provides India with essential access to its northeast, and India remains Bangladesh's most significant regional business partner. However, the relationship is unbalanced. Bangladesh's heavy reliance on Indian energy, trade, and transportation puts it at risk. Given their proximity and shared history, Dhaka should treat Delhi strategically.

Can Bangladesh and India put aside temporary solutions and create a cooperative, long-term partnership? This important topic has been brought to light by the current tensions.

Dialogue must be the first step in resolving the problem. Bangladesh should initiate high-level talks with partners in both public and private sectors. For managing border and trade challenges, a collaborative framework is essential. Countermeasures or retaliation would not work.

Dhaka must also increase its diplomatic, energy, and commercial alternatives. One way to reduce an excessive dependence on any one source country is to participate in the forums of ASEAN partners, such as SAFTA and BIMSTEC.

At the same time, accepting the new political realities in Dhaka without seeing them as threats is the best course of action for India.

There are other ties between the two countries besides trade and treaties. Historical events, waterways, and cultural relations are all comparable. However, both sides now need to be mature enough to sustain this relationship. The current circumstance is a test of vision, strategy, and diplomacy. The choices made in Dhaka and Delhi will have an impact not only on their bilateral relationship but also on the larger South Asian regional order.

Instead of writing provocatively, let us write the next chapter cooperatively and practically.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

supply, is sourced from imports from India. Any disruption in this may cause serious problems for the urban and industrial sectors in Bangladesh.

When evaluating India's current position, it is essential to consider broader geopolitical developments. Delhi is now on the defensive due to the Modi government's return with a smaller mandate and growing international criticism, particularly from the US, on issues of religious freedom and democratic backsliding.

Employed initially as a catchphrase supporting democratic rebirth, the term "New Bangladesh" has come to be seen by Indian observers as a rejection of India's long-standing role in Bangladesh. The diplomatic situation has become more complex as a result of this shift in narrative. Back-channel communication has deteriorated, and high-level visits have slowed. In response to Dhaka's repeated requests for cooperation based on respect for each other's sovereignty, India has, at best, been reticent.

Operation Rising Lion and its wider fallout in Israel-Iran conflict



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It all began with a simple business deal. In 2022, BAC Consulting, a small Hungarian management firm housed in a plain two-storey building in Budapest, reached out to Gold Apollo, a Taiwanese electronics manufacturer, to license its brand name for producing pagers. The request appeared straightforward—a European distributor seeking to manufacture communication devices for the Middle Eastern market. What Gold Apollo didn't realise was that BAC was secretly redesigning these pagers with a deadly twist: tiny amounts of explosives concealed inside what looked like ordinary, low-tech devices. These were then sold to unsuspecting Hezbollah members in Lebanon. Between 3:30pm and 4:30pm on September 17, 2024, thousands of the pagers detonated, killing at least 12 people, including eight Hezbollah fighters. This intricate deception is now considered one of the most sophisticated intelligence operations

in recent history.

A small quantity of PETN (pentaerythritol tetranitrate), a highly explosive compound, was placed in the batteries of the devices. They were detonated by remotely raising the battery temperature via radio signal—another novel design feature. Ironically, Hezbollah preferred these simple pagers precisely because they lacked advanced features, thus appearing safer from Israeli surveillance.

Few realised that BAC Consulting was a front for Mossad, Israel's national intelligence agency. The operation revealed Israel's strategic shift from traditional methods to a new era of advanced, tech-based intelligence warfare. Analysts now refer to this as "ungentlemanly warfare": the integration of cyber capabilities, miniaturised explosives, and supply chain infiltration. The execution of Operation Rising Lion marks a significant milestone in this evolving doctrine.

Israel's regional challenges over recent decades have exposed the limitations of conventional military tactics. In Lebanon, Hezbollah's asymmetric warfare repeatedly frustrated the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Gaza posed similar challenges, with Hamas's tunnel networks and urban guerrilla strategies. The Houthis in Yemen forced Washington

to employ asymmetric tactics, exploiting local terrain, and mobilising civilian support. They operated within complex political landscapes that rendered conventional warfare increasingly ineffective. This prompted a reassessment of Israel's strategic toolkit—an evolution that culminated in Operation Rising Lion.

The latest component of this

with Israeli aircraft operating almost unhindered in Iranian airspace. The mission involved around 200 combat aircraft—including F-15I, F-16I and F-35I jets—striking more than a hundred high-value targets deep inside Iran. It was the most significant assault on the country since the 1980-89 Iran-Iraq War.

The operation's success relied heavily on extensive espionage networks inside Iran, painstakingly built over many years. Apple TV's *Tehran* (TV series, 2020-) offers a glimpse into how such infiltration might have been executed. The first clear warning to Iran came in July 2024, when Israel assassinated Ismail Haniyeh—Hamas's top political leader and a guest of the Islamic Republic—in central Tehran, revealing Mossad's reach within the country's most secure zones. The September pincer explosions in Lebanon served as a second warning. It is no surprise, then, that Israeli operations have consistently demonstrated deep knowledge of personnel movements, security protocols, and infrastructure vulnerabilities.

The timeline of events reflects long-term strategic planning, not merely reactive measures. Rather than treating each regional challenge in isolation, Israel adopted a unified doctrine, viewing its adversaries as interconnected components of a broader regional threat landscape. Hamas's attack on Israel in October



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS
Operation Rising Lion's success relied heavily on extensive espionage networks inside Iran, painstakingly built over many years.

into negotiations as military operations failed to contain them. Meanwhile, Iranian influence in post-American Iraq underscored the limits of foreign military intervention.

These diverse experiences shared key traits: adversaries employing

campaign began in the early hours of June 13 this year. Swarms of small explosive drones, smuggled into Iran months earlier by Israeli commandos, first neutralised the country's air defence systems. This was followed by waves of air strikes,

2023 presented an opportunity for the IDF to launch an extensive campaign in Gaza, significantly weakening the group.

In 2024, Israel turned its attention to Hezbollah, assassinating its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, in air strikes near Beirut in September. The following month, Iran retaliated by launching around 180 ballistic missiles at Israel—most of which were intercepted, though a few did strike their targets. Later in October, Israel responded by destroying Iran's S-400 air defence systems that had been acquired from Russia. The stage was thus set for Operation Rising Lion.

Despite some criticism, Operation Rising Lion appears to have achieved its immediate goals. It reaffirmed Israel's conventional military superiority over Iran and underscored the importance of intelligence, surprise, and integrated air and missile defences. However, its impact on Iran's nuclear programme remains unclear.

The operation's long-term success is also uncertain, as many variables—some still unknown—will shape its effectiveness. Nonetheless, Israel's shift from tactical stalemates to strategic assertiveness signals a broader transformation in the regional conflict landscape. How its adversaries adapt to this new reality may well determine the course of Middle Eastern security in the years to come.

MONDAY'S ANSWERS

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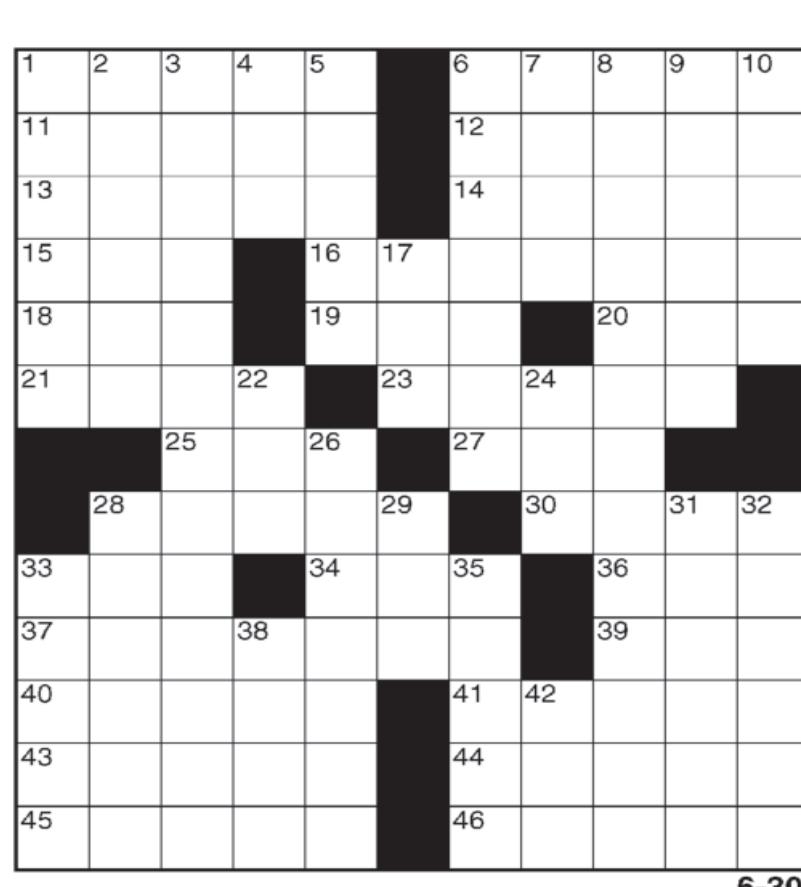
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ACROSS

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- 6 Buttes' cousins
- 11 Mink's cousin
- 12 Chosen few
- 13 Window cover
- 14 Supple
- 15 High rating
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