

**NATIONAL SEMINAR**  
**PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH RELATIONS:**  
**PATH TO PROGRESS & STABILITY**

**POST SEMINAR REPORT**

16 December, 2024



# *Conversations*



**@Foothills**

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# Introduction

Pakistan and Bangladesh share a deep-rooted history marked by periods of both cooperation and conflict. In recent years, shifting geopolitical dynamics, economic priorities, and diplomatic engagements have opened new avenues for strengthening bilateral relations. The evolving regional landscape following the political transition in Bangladesh has provided an opportunity for both nations to address past grievances and focus on shared interests, including trade, cultural exchange, and strategic collaboration.

In this context, the Institute For Strategic Studies Research And Analysis (ISSRA), National Defense University, organized a seminar titled **“Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations: Path to Progress and Stability” on 16 December 2024**. The seminar aimed to foster a constructive dialogue on the future trajectory of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations.

The seminar commenced with recitation of Fatiha in honour of the martyrs of Pakistan, followed by an introduction of the distinguished panel. The event featured four distinguished speakers and chief guest, who provided valuable insights on key aspects of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations.

- East Pakistan Crisis: A Realistic Perspective by Ambassador Afrasiab Mehdi, Former High Commissioner to Bangladesh
- Bangladesh of 2024: Evolving Dynamics by Dr. Shahid uz Zaman, Professor Dhaka University
- Shared Culture: Pakistan and Bangladesh by Dr. Maria Sultan, President SASSI
- Contemporary Geopolitics around Pakistan-Bangladesh Future Relations by Lt Gen Amir Riaz (Retd), Former President NDU
- Keynote address by the chief guest Mr. Javaid Jabbar, Former Senator

The seminar was attended by diverse participants, including subject matter experts, policymakers, civil society representatives, and over 250 students from various universities of Islamabad. Overall, the seminar provided a platform for students and the experts to engage in an intellectually rewarding discourse.

# Key Takeaways

- Although the events of 1971 have strained relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh, acknowledging past mistakes and making a pledge to move forward should be addressed through a mutually agreed approach.
- History has been misconstrued in the context of Pakistan - Bangladesh, there is dire need for establishing fact-based historical accounts in textbooks, so as to reinvigorate the sense of common understanding of development and progress.
- Pakistan and Bangladesh need to move forward from their past, rediscover their commonalities, and reaffirm their shared identity—one nation with a common culture, separated by geography but united by a collective vision for peace, progress, and equal opportunities for their peoples. Today's Bangladesh is a testament to this vision.
- It is high time for Pakistan and Bangladesh to strengthen people-to-people contact by promoting academic, cultural and student exchange programs. In this regard establishment of direct flights between Pakistan and Bangladesh can usher a new era of enhanced cultural and economic ties.
- Bangladesh's decision to reduce tariffs on Pakistani goods not only presents promising opportunities for trade expansion but also marks a renewed commitment from both sides to acknowledge past mistakes and move forward.
- To revitalize SAARC and overcome regional challenges, Pakistan and Bangladesh should work together to strengthen economic integration, with a focus on technological innovation, trade expansion, defence cooperation and collective strategies to tackle Indian hegemonic threats to our sovereignty.
- To secure a peaceful and prosperous future, Pakistan and Bangladesh must take a strategic yet balanced approach, as the intensifying US-China rivalry threatens to draw them into its geopolitical crossfire— particularly in security, economic, technological, and knowledge domains.

# Summary Of The Proceedings

- Pakistan and Bangladesh share a diverse set of historical, cultural and religious connections, but above all their common struggle for independence from British Raj strengthens all points of convergence.
- Initiated with establishing the All India Muslim League in Dhaka, the collective struggle for independence from the British Raj forged deep-rooted historical, cultural, and religious ties between Pakistan and Bangladesh. Historical figures like Bakhtiar Khilji, Dudu Miya, and Haji Shariatullah symbolise this shared legacy.
- The issue of language had been exaggerated beyond proportion. Quaid's vision for Pakistan was of a nation free from parochialism—a forward-looking country that upheld equal respect and recognition for all regional languages. Urdu, unlike any other language, was widely familiar to the masses, making it a practical choice for being the national language of Pakistan.
- The events of August 2024, present that the people of Bangladesh have reclaimed their identity, their independence and their common desire for an objective understanding of the past.
- Today's Bangladesh is a testament to the Two-Nation Theory. The growing Indian interference in Bangladesh's affairs led to the realization, in Bangladesh, that India's aspirations were centred on hegemonizing the country rather than developing it.
- The bond between the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh remains strong despite political challenges as they continue celebrating each other's achievements in economics and sports. However, external forces continue to exploit national vulnerabilities, making it crucial for both nations to foster unity and counter disinformation.
- The world today is greatly compromised in the information domain. Disinformation war has been a constant tactic of enemy, and Pakistan and Bangladesh are subject to Indian demonization of our culture, identity and unity.
- Reciprocation of violent youth movements is never the solution to a deficient governance, it is the reflection of the context of the problem, understanding the solutions and institutional implementation of the reforms that can bring lasting betterment.
- The events of 1971 have strained Pakistan-Bangladesh relations, the current domestic, regional and geopolitical environment requires a common acknowledgement of the missteps and a pledge to move forward.
- The lack of communication at the cultural level between Pakistan and Bangladesh has created a wide ridge for enemy propaganda to exploit. There is a need to establish media collaboration between the two countries and broadcast each other's content.

- No external power can mediate the enhancement of ties; it has to be a bilaterally developed resolve to share a common future.
- Enhanced engagements between Pakistan and Bangladesh in the economic, cultural, environmental, technological and security domains can contribute to strengthening bilateral relations, and the reduction of tariffs on Pakistani products portrays Bangladesh's initiative to strengthen the ties.
- There is a need to reinvigorate people-to-people contact between the two countries, here educational exchanges, cultural exchanges and tourism can be fruitful. In this regard, the establishment of direct flights between Pakistan and Bangladesh can usher a new era of enhanced cultural and economic ties.
- The Climate Risk Index, lists Pakistan and Bangladesh in the top 10 highly risked countries for climatic dangers, therefore, a regional approach spearheaded by the two can bring positive results.
- Naval cooperation is another avenue of deepening the relationship between the two countries. In this regard, it is essential to preserve open sea lines of communication to secure a prosperous economic future.
- Pakistan and Bangladesh, together form a crucial crossroads between East and West. This strategic positioning makes them highly susceptible to being drawn into the US-China geopolitical rivalry. To safeguard their interests, both nations must adopt a balanced and strategic approach to navigate these global power dynamics effectively.
- The inability of global institutions like the UN and multilateral organisations to resolve global conflicts, including Jammu and Kashmir, highlights the need for an alternative framework, which in the current environment is through reinforcing the bilateral relations.
- To revitalize SAARC and overcome regional challenges, Pakistan-Bangladesh collaboration is essential. Although there have been multiple structural issues but the regional power dynamics have primarily undermined the performance of SAARC, which can be addressed through an alternate approach of bilateral first and multilateral afterwards.
- Bangladesh and Pakistan share a common geopolitical vision that recognises China as a strategic partner. So, both countries should strengthen their partnership to balance regional power dynamics and foster lasting peace in South Asia.
- The US Indo-Pacific strategy, centred on containing China through initiatives like AUKUS, will impact both nations, necessitating stronger Pakistan-Bangladesh collaboration in all domains.

# Conclusion

The political mistakes of 1971 have strained Pakistan-Bangladesh relations, but the political change of August 2024 in Bangladesh through a student-led movement, offers a window of opportunity for reconciliation. It is the time for both nations to prioritise reconciliation and strengthen collaboration in trade, education, and regional connectivity to enhance bilateral cooperation and revive SAARC. Both nations should safeguard peace by addressing internal vulnerabilities and promoting a unified regional response amidst US-China geopolitical contestation. Pakistan and Bangladesh can collaborate to tackle external threats, acknowledging their strategic significance in South Asia and on the global stage. Ultimately, by deepening economic and people-to-people ties, both nations can pave the way for a more stable and prosperous future.

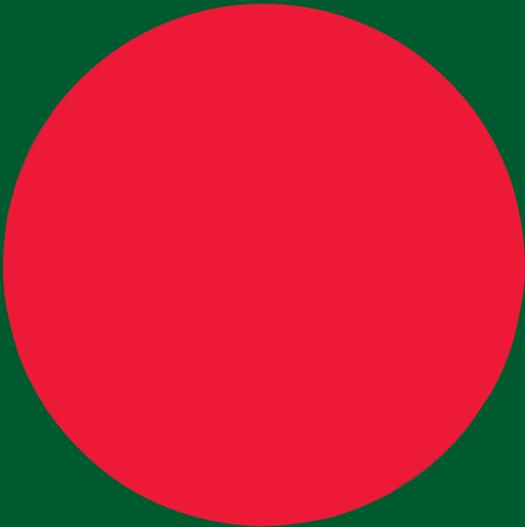












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