

INDIA-PAKISTAN CRISIS AND BANGLADESH'S ANTI-INDIA RHETORIC

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INTRODUCTION

The ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 triggered a significant escalation in anti-India rhetoric in Bangladesh, with specific statements and actions posing direct threats to India's territorial integrity and security, particularly in the northeastern region. This article examines the most critical anti-India rhetoric from Bangladesh's government officials between August 2024 and May 2025, focussing exclusively on statements and actions that could imply military threats or challenges to India's sovereignty. The objective is to highlight the strategic risk that pro-Pakistan elements in Bangladesh, emboldened by this rhetoric, could be leveraged by Islamabad to destabilise India's Northeast, especially the vulnerable Siliguri Corridor (popularly referred to as Chicken's Neck), in the event of a crisis with Pakistan.

The article situates the Bangladeshi rhetoric within Pakistan's broader strategic objectives to destabilise India. The study also

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attempts to elucidate China's multifaceted influence in amplifying the threat through economic, military, and infrastructural engagements in Bangladesh.

PAKISTAN'S USE OF ISLAMIST MILITANCY IN EASTERN INDIA: BACKGROUND

Prior to the 1947 partition, Pakistan's leadership ardently advocated for the inclusion of an undivided Assam within its borders. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, despite his later affinity for India, was a firm proponent of partition and argued in 1944 that Assam's incorporation into Eastern Pakistan was essential for economic and territorial viability, citing its abundant forests, mineral resources, coal, and petroleum.¹ The failure to secure Assam during the partition process remained a persistent grievance for Pakistan's leadership. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, in his work, *The Myth of Independence*, emphasised that alongside the Kashmir dispute, the issue of Assam and adjacent Indian districts was equally significant,² reflecting Pakistan's irredentist ambitions toward India's Northeast. This region, historically untouched by Islamic rule, presented a unique challenge and opportunity for Pakistan's strategic objectives.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) adopted a distinct strategy for Northeast India, leveraging proxy warfare to destabilise the region and, by extension, India itself. This approach, a hallmark of Pakistan's military strategy, was evident as early as 1949 with the orchestration of a covert operation framed as a tribal revolt in Kashmir.³ In the Northeast, Pakistan's engagement with insurgent groups began in the 1950s, notably through support for the Naga insurgency in Nagaland.⁴ Under General Ayub Khan's influence,

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1. Manju Singh, *Politics of Migration & Quest for Identity* (Assam: Anita Publications, 1990), p. 168.
 2. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, *The Myth of Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 16.
 3. Dr Shalini Chawla and Priyadarshini Baruah, "Challenges of Islamist Radicalisation in Assam and Secularisation of Education," *Issue Brief*, Centre for Air Power Studies, May 27, 2024, p. 2, https://capsindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CAPS_IB_SCPB_27_5_24_NIS.pdf. Accessed on May 12, 2025.
 4. "ISI's Links with Northeast Insurgent Groups", Institute of Conflict Management, South Asia Terrorism Portal, https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/papers/Pakistan_report/Anex_G.htm. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

the ISI cultivated ties with local Muslim population, encouraging their tacit support for groups like the Naga National Council (NNC). This policy of employing militant groups as strategic assets laid the groundwork for the proliferation of extremism and anti-India sentiments in the region.⁵

The ISI's role in fostering insurgent organisations in Assam and other northeastern states was instrumental in amplifying regional instability. By providing logistical and ideological support, Pakistan sought to exploit ethnic and cultural faultlines, thereby weakening India's territorial integrity. This calculated strategy not only reflected Pakistan's broader geopolitical ambitions but also underscored the historical significance of Northeast India as a contested space in the India-Pakistan rivalry.⁶ The legacy of these efforts continue to shape the security dynamics of the region, highlighting the enduring impact of Pakistan's covert operations in fostering militancy as a tool of statecraft and injecting anti-India rhetoric via Bangladesh.

ANTI-INDIA RHETORIC IN BANGLADESH (AUGUST 2024–MAY 2025)

The political upheaval following Sheikh Hasina's ouster in August 2024 rekindled historical tensions in India-Bangladesh relations, with specific grievances escalating into rhetoric that directly threatened India's territorial security. While issues like trade imbalances and border violence have long fuelled resentment, the interim government under Muhammad Yunus, installed on August 8, 2024, amplified anti-India sentiment with statements and policies suggesting military and strategic challenges to India, particularly in its northeastern region.

In early 2025, Home Advisor Jahangir Alam Chowdhury accused India's Border Security Force (BSF) of "trigger-happy and reckless" killings of Bangladeshi civilians along the border, framing India's border management as a deliberate act of aggression.⁷ This rhetoric,

5. Chawla and Baruah, n. 3.

6. Ibid.

7. "Home Adviser: Bangladesh's 'Tone' at BGB-BSF Conference to be Different," *Dhaka Tribune*, January 29, 2025, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/372206/home-adviser-bangladesh-s-tone-at-bgb-bsf>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

while not explicitly calling for military retaliation, heightened tensions along the 1,600 km border, raising the risk of escalatory incidents that could destabilise India's Northeast. The interim government's decision to increase border patrols in February 2025, citing alleged Indian support for smuggling, further signalled a confrontational posture that could precipitate cross-border skirmishes.⁸

The most alarming rhetoric emerged in May 2025, when Major General (Retd) ALM Fazlur Rahman, chairperson of the National Independent Commission of Inquiry and a close associate of Yunus, posted on Facebook: "If India attacks Pakistan, Bangladesh should occupy the seven states of Northeast India.⁹ It is necessary to start discussions on a joint military system with China".¹⁰ This statement explicitly threatened India's territorial integrity by advocating for the military occupation of its northeastern states, a region already vulnerable due to its geographic isolation via the Siliguri Corridor. Although Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) distanced itself from Rahman's remarks, claiming they did not reflect official policy, the statement's public nature and Rahman's prominence fuelled concerns about Dhaka's strategic intentions.¹¹

Yunus himself contributed to this threatening narrative during his visit to China in March 2025, where he described Bangladesh as the "only guardian of the ocean" for India's landlocked Northeast, implying a strategic leverage over India's access to its eastern states.¹² This statement, coupled with Bangladesh's growing military ties with Pakistan and China, raised fears of a coordinated effort to

8. "Push-ins by India Continues; BGB Strengthens Border Patrols," *The Business Standard*, May 11, 2025, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/push-ins-india-continues-bgb-strengthens-border-patrols-1139481>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

9. "Bangladesh Should Occupy NE States if India Attacks Pakistan": Yunus Aide on Pahalgam," *Firstpost*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/bangladesh-should-occupy-ne-states-if-india-attacks-pakistan-yunus-aide-on-pahalgam-13884732.html>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

10. Ibid.

11. Mallika Soni, "Yunus Aide's Brazen Call: 'Bangladesh Should Occupy Northeast if India Attacks Pakistan'", *News18*, May 2, 2025, <https://www.news18.com/world/yunus-aides-startling-claim-bangladesh-should-occupy-northeast-if-india-attacks-pakistan-9321094.html>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

12. Kaushik Deka, "Why India's Northeast Must Worry About Muhammad Yunus' Statement in China," *India Today*, April 1, 2025, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india-today-insight/story/why-indias-northeast-must-worry-about-muhammad-yunus-statement-in-china-2702439-2025-04-01>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

challenge India's sovereignty. For instance, Bangladesh's training of air force pilots on Chinese-Pakistani JF-17 jets and discussions for their acquisition signalled a deepening military alignment that could embolden anti-India actions.¹³ Additionally, plans for a military airstrip in Lalmonirhat, near the Siliguri Corridor, heightened India's concerns about a potential Bangladesh-Pakistan-China axis targeting its Northeast.¹⁴

Further escalating tensions, senior Pakistani military and intelligence officers visited Bangladesh's Rangpur district near the Siliguri Corridor in January 2025,¹⁵ a move interpreted as a provocative signal of intent to exploit India's strategic vulnerability. The resumption of direct sea trade with Pakistan in November 2024, granting Pakistani vessels access to Chittagong¹⁶ and Mongla ports that have been modernised with Chinese assistance, raised additional concerns about the ports serving as logistical bases for anti-India operations in the Bay of Bengal.¹⁷ On May 11, 2025, Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Syed Ahmed Maroof, abruptly left Dhaka for "consultation,"¹⁸ amid speculation that his active role in

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13. "India Alarmed by Bangladesh's Interest in JF-17 Fighter Jets Amid Growing Strategic Realignment with China and Pakistan," *Defence Security Asia*, March 31, 2025, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/india-alarmed-by-bangladeshs-interest-in-jf-17-fighter-jets-amid-growing-strategic-realignment-with-china-and-pakistan/>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.
 14. Major General SB Asthana, "Why India Must Act Now? The Escalating Security Risks from Bangladesh," *Wion*, April 13, 2025, <https://www.wionews.com/opinions/why-india-must-act-now-the-escalating-security-risks-from-bangladesh-8957667/amp>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.
 15. Chandan Nandy, "Pakistan Army Team in Bangladesh's Rangpur, Close to 'Chicken's Neck'," *Northeast News*, January 23, 2025, <https://nenews.in/neighbours/pak-army-team-in-bangladeshs-rangpur-close-to-chickens-neck/18873/>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.
 16. Dr Shalini Chawla, "Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations – Friends in Need?" *Expert View*, Centre for Air Power Studies, March 28, 2025, <https://capsindia.org/pakistan-bangladesh-relations-friends-in-need/>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.
 17. "After Chittagong Port, Pakistan gets Access to Bangladesh's Mongla Port," *The Economic Times*, March 4, 2025, <https://infra.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/ports-shipping/after-chittagong-port-pakistan-gets-access-to-bangladeshs-mongla-port/118695549>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.
 18. "Pakistan Envoy to Bangladesh goes on Sudden Leave, Sparks Speculations," *The Times of India*, May 14, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/pakistan-envoy-to-bangladesh-goes-on-sudden-leave-sparks-speculation/articleshow/121150853.cms>. Access on May 12, 2025.

fostering Pakistan-Bangladesh ties was part of a broader anti-India strategy.

CONTEXTUALISING THE THREAT WITHIN PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC AMBITIONS

The anti-India rhetoric from Bangladesh, particularly statements and actions threatening India's territorial integrity, needs to be analysed within the broader context of Pakistan's strategic objectives to destabilise India, especially in its Northeast. The Siliguri Corridor, a 20-km-wide strip connecting India's mainland to its Northeast, is a critical vulnerability that Pakistan and its ally, China, have historically targeted to weaken India's regional control. Bangladesh's alignment with these actors, as evidenced by its military and economic engagements, amplifies the risk of a coordinated threat, particularly in a crisis with Pakistan.

Pakistan's renewed engagement with Bangladesh since August 2024 has been marked by strategic moves that directly challenge India's security. The January 2025 visit by Pakistani military officials to Rangpur, near the Siliguri Corridor, suggests an intent to exploit this chokepoint, potentially through insurgent support or cross-border operations.¹⁹ The proposed Lalmonirhat airstrip, located strategically close to the corridor, could serve as a staging ground for anti-India activities, especially if supported by Chinese logistics.²⁰ Major General (Retd) ALM Fazlur Rahman's call for Bangladesh to occupy Northeast India in a conflict with Pakistan aligns with Islamabad's historical strategy of fomenting instability in India's border regions, as seen in its support for insurgencies in Assam and Nagaland during the 1970s and 1980s.²¹

Pakistan may also leverage pro-Pakistani elements in Bangladesh to facilitate illicit drug trafficking into India's Northeast, exacerbating social and economic instability. The porous India-Bangladesh

19. Ritu Sharma, "India-Bangladesh Row: Pakistani Military Officials Visit Border Region Near North-East; Threaten India's 'Chicken's Neck'," *The Eurasian Times*, January 27, 2025, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/india-bangladesh-row-pakistani-military-officials/>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

20. Asthana, n. 14.

21. Chawla and Baruah, n. 3.

border, coupled with Bangladesh's strategic port access, provides an ideal conduit for smuggling narcotics, which could fund insurgent groups/terrorist organisations or destabilise local communities, aligning with Pakistan's asymmetric warfare tactics.²² This threat compounds the risk of cross-border operations, as drug networks often overlap with insurgent and terrorist financing channels.

Economic vulnerabilities in both Bangladesh and Pakistan, exacerbated by their reliance on International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans in 2025,²³ may amplify anti-India rhetoric as a populist tool to deflect domestic criticism. The interim government's ties with Islamist parties like the Jamaat-e-Islami, which share ideological affinities with Pakistan,²⁴ further increase the risk of pro-Pakistan elements mobilising against India. During an India-Pakistan crisis, Bangladesh could potentially serve as a secondary front, with anti-India rhetoric providing the ideological cover for actions like supporting insurgents, terrorist organisations, facilitating cross-border incursions, sabotaging critical infrastructure, or channelling illicit drugs into the Northeast to undermine India's stability.

CHINA'S ROLE IN AMPLIFYING THE THREAT

China's deepening involvement in Bangladesh significantly complicates the strategic threat to India, particularly in the context of Bangladesh's anti-India rhetoric and its alignment with Pakistan. Through economic, military, and infrastructural engagements, China is enhancing Dhaka's strategic capabilities, potentially enabling Bangladesh to act as a proxy for Beijing's and Islamabad's interests

22. Muqtedar Khan, "Bangladesh and Pakistan are Changing South Asia's Geopolitical Landscapes," *The Diplomat*, January 31, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/01/bangladesh-and-pakistan-are-changing-south-asias-geopolitical-landscape/>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

23. Sudeshna Ghoshal, "IMF Approves Bailouts for Pakistan, Bangladesh: When is it Provided to a Country and What are the Lending Conditions?" *Mint*, May 16, 2025, <https://www.livemint.com/economy/imf-approves-bailouts-for-pakistan-bangladesh-when-is-it-provided-to-a-country-and-what-are-the-lending-conditions-11747317017624.html>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

24. "What is Jamaat-e-Islami? 'Pakistan-Backed' Political Party that Brought Down Sheikh Hasina Govt in Bangladesh," *The Times of India*, August 6, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/what-is-jamaat-e-islami-pakistan-backed-political-party-that-brought-down-sheikh-hasina-govt-in-bangladesh/articleshow/112317218.cms>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

in a crisis, with direct implications for India's territorial integrity, especially in the Northeast. This multifaceted Chinese influence, rooted in geopolitical ambitions to counter India's regional dominance, amplifies the risk of a coordinated Bangladesh-Pakistan-China axis targeting India's vulnerabilities, such as the Siliguri Corridor.

The modernisation of Chittagong port, a critical node in the Bay of Bengal, with Chinese financial and technical assistance, exemplifies Beijing's strategic investment in Bangladesh. Under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has poured billions into upgrading the port infrastructure, including deep-water berths and logistics facilities, to enhance its maritime presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).²⁵ This development not only strengthens Bangladesh's economic capacity but also positions Chittagong as a potential logistical hub for Chinese naval operations, raising concerns about its use for anti-India activities. The port could facilitate the movement of military supplies or provide berthing for Chinese or Pakistani vessels, threatening India's maritime security and supply lines to the Northeast region of India.²⁶

Bangladesh's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) extends beyond Chittagong, encompassing projects like the Padma Bridge and railway networks that enhance connectivity but also increase Dhaka's dependence on Chinese financing.²⁷ This economic leverage gives Beijing significant influence over Bangladesh's strategic decisions, potentially encouraging the interim government to adopt a more confrontational stance towards India. Muhammad Yunus' March 2025 remarks during a visit to China, describing Bangladesh as the "only guardian of the ocean" for India's landlocked Northeast, underscore this leverage.²⁸ By highlighting Bangladesh's geographic proximity to India's Northeast, Yunus signalled a willingness to

25. Sujit Kumar Datta, "A Visit to China Invigorates Relations with Bangladesh," *China US Focus*, April 9, 2025, https://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/a-visit-to-china-invigorates-relations-with-bangladesh?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

26. Khan, n. 22.

27. "Bridging Prosperity: The Transformative Impact of Bangladesh's Padma Bridge Rail Link," *The Civil Engineer*, January 3, 2025, <https://www.thecivilengineer.org/index.php/news/bridging-prosperity-the-transformative-impact-of-bangladeshs-padma-bridge-rail-link>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

28. Deka, n. 12.

exploit this position to pressure India, likely emboldened by Chinese backing. Such rhetoric suggests that Bangladesh could disrupt critical access routes to India's eastern states, amplifying the threat to the Siliguri Corridor.

The evolving China-Bangladesh military cooperation raises concerns. The training of Bangladeshi Air Force pilots on Chinese-Pakistani JF-17 fighter jets, coupled with discussions for their acquisition, indicates a deepening military alignment that could embolden pro-Pakistan elements in Bangladesh.²⁹ China's supply of other military hardware, including frigates and missile systems, would strengthen Bangladesh's defence posture, making it a more formidable partner for Pakistan in anti-India operations.³⁰ This military cooperation, combined with Chinese logistical support via modernised ports, could facilitate coordinated actions, such as disrupting supply lines or supporting insurgencies/Islamist terror outfits in India's Northeast.

China's strategic calculus is driven by its broader rivalry with India, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. By bolstering Bangladesh's capabilities, Beijing seeks to encircle India, creating a pressure point on its eastern flank while Pakistan threatens the west. The proposed Lalmonirhat airstrip, near the Siliguri Corridor, reportedly benefits from Chinese technical expertise, raising fears of its use as a forward base for anti-India activities.³¹ According to Dr Sriparna Pathak, "Lalmonirhat could enable China to monitor Indian military movements or gather intelligence near the Siliguri Corridor".³² In a crisis, this axis could exploit Bangladesh's geographic advantage to choke India's Northeast, undermining its regional control and internal stability.

29. "Bangladesh Military Officials Express Interest in JF-17 Thunder Fighter Jet," *The Express Tribune*, January 15, 2025, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2522349/bangladesh-military-officials-express-interest-in-jf-17-thunder-fighter-jet>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

30. Asthana, n. 14.

31. *Ibid.*

32. "Dragon's Shadow Near Siliguri? China Aids Revival of WW2-Era Bangladeshi Airbase Near India's 'Chicken Neck'," *The Economic Times*, May 18, 2025, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/dragons-shadow-near-siliguri-china-aiding-revival-of-ww2-era-bangladeshi-airbase-near-indias-chickens-neck/articleshow/121246761.cms>. Accessed on May 12, 2025.

MEASURES INDIA COULD POTENTIALLY CONSIDER

To counter the threat posed by Bangladesh's anti-India rhetoric and its potential alignment with Pakistan and China, India needs to adopt a comprehensive strategy focussed on securing its territorial integrity and neutralising strategic risks through hard power and strategic measures.

Enhance the Security of India's Northeastern Region: India must prioritise fortifying the Siliguri Corridor, a critical chokepoint vulnerable to destabilisation. Deploying additional Border Security Force (BSF) and army units, equipped with advanced surveillance systems such as drones, radars, and thermal imaging, is essential to deter cross-border threats. Intensifying border checks and deploying specialised units to prevent illicit trade, including drugs and arms smuggling, will disrupt networks that could fund insurgencies/terrorist outfits or destabilise the region. Establishing permanent air bases and prepositioned supply depots in the Northeast will ensure rapid-response capabilities, enabling India to counter hostile actions, including potential insurgent incursions or sabotage, with overwhelming force.

Strengthen Intelligence Monitoring: India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) must intensify real-time surveillance of Bangladesh-Pakistan-China military engagements, particularly activities near the Siliguri Corridor, such as the Lalmonirhat airstrip and Pakistani visits to Rangpur. Deploying satellite imagery and signals intelligence will enhance early warning systems. Establishing dedicated task forces for cross-border threat assessment, in coordination with the regional governments of the Northeast could be seriously considered.

Engage in Targeted Diplomacy: India should pursue discreet, high-level diplomatic channels to pressure moderate factions within Bangladesh's interim government, emphasising the consequences of aligning with Pakistan and China. Issuing clear warnings against provocative actions, such as military posturing near the border, will deter escalation.

Development of Naval Base: India must expedite the development of its naval base in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, particularly at INS *Kohassa* in Shibpur, to counter China's growing influence

in Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal. Accelerating infrastructure upgrades, including extended runways and deep-water berths, will enable India to deploy advanced warships and maritime patrol aircraft, enhancing surveillance of Chittagong and Mongla ports that have been modernised by China. This strategic presence will deter their use for anti-India logistics.

Prepare for Multi-Front Scenarios: India's military must conduct frequent, large-scale war-gaming exercises simulating a two-front crisis involving Pakistan and Bangladesh, focussing on scenarios like simultaneous border incursions or attacks on the Siliguri Corridor. Upgrading infrastructure, including fortified roads and rail links in the Northeast, will ensure logistical resilience. Strengthening coordination with the Eastern Command and Northeast state governments will enable rapid mobilisation, allowing India to neutralise threats through decisive military action.

Economic Coercion as Leverage: India should leverage its economic dominance over Bangladesh, which relies on Indian trans-shipment facilities and energy supplies, to deter hostile actions. Temporarily suspending trade concessions or restricting access to Indian ports could pressure Dhaka to curb anti-India rhetoric and military alignment with Pakistan and China. Targeted sanctions on Bangladeshi officials promoting territorial threats, such as ALM Fazlur Rahman, will signal India's resolve to counter provocations without escalating to open conflict.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh's anti-India rhetoric since August 2024 represents a strategic challenge to India's territorial integrity, particularly in its vulnerable Northeast region. The ousting of Sheikh Hasina catalysed a surge in provocative statements and actions, exemplified by Major General (Retd) ALM Fazlur Rahman's call to occupy India's northeastern states and Muhammad Yunus's assertion of Bangladesh's strategic leverage over India's eastern access routes. These, combined with the interim government's military and economic alignment with Pakistan and China, signal a dangerous geopolitical shift. As discussed, the resumption of sea trade with Pakistan, the Chinese-backed modernisation of Chittagong and Mongla ports, and the

plans for a Lalmonirhat airstrip near the Siliguri Corridor underscore the potential for a coordinated Bangladesh-Pakistan-China axis to exploit India's geographic vulnerabilities.

During an India-Pakistan crisis, pro-Pakistan elements in Bangladesh, emboldened by the anti-India rhetoric and supported by Chinese logistics, could attempt to destabilise India's Northeast through cross-border incursions, insurgent support, or illicit drug trafficking, targeting the critical Siliguri Corridor. Pakistan's historical strategy of fomenting instability in India's border regions, coupled with China's rivalry-driven encirclement tactics, amplifies this threat. The interim government's ties with Islamist parties like the Jamaat-e-Islami further heighten the risk of ideological mobilisation against India.

India could respond to the challenge with a multifaceted strategy. Fortifying the Northeast with enhanced military deployments, intensifying intelligence surveillance, and expediting the INS *Kohassa* naval base development are critical to deter hostile actions. Targeted diplomacy and economic coercion can pressure Bangladesh to curb its alignment with adversarial powers, while robust war-gaming can prepare India for multi-front scenarios. By integrating these hard power measures, India can safeguard its eastern frontier, neutralise the emerging axis, and maintain regional stability in the face of escalating geopolitical tensions.