



Türkiye's Economic and Strategic Relations with Asia: The Case of Bangladesh

Türkiye'nin Asya ile Ekonomik ve Stratejik İlişkileri: Bangladeş Örneği

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Abstract

Türkiye's growing relations with Asian countries, especially under the “Asia Anew Initiative” (*Yeniden Asya Girişiminin*), marking a strategic shift aimed to restoring historical, economic and diplomatic ties with Asian countries. This study examines dramatically rising economic and strategic partnerships between Türkiye and Asian countries with particularly focusing on Bangladesh as a case study. Historically, the relations between Türkiye and Bangladesh along with south Asian Muslims, dates back to pre-Islamic times and was strong during ottoman and Mughal era because of mutual cultural, religious, and political cooperation. In the Modern era, Turkish foreign policy has goon several changes especially from 2002 under the Recep Tayyip Erdogan administration which some experts named as neo-Ottomanism. This study discusses a comprehensive analysis of Türkiye's soft power approach and its multidimensional bilateral relations with Bangladesh examining socio-cultural, economic, trade and geopolitical dimensions. By exploring the historical roots, present strategic initiatives, the study seeks to emphasize Türkiye's position as a rising regional actor in Asia

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and its potential advantages in shaping mutually beneficial partnerships. The study uses qualitative case study methods. This paper firstly discusses Türkiye Bangladesh historical relations and its development. Then, it seeks to make understanding how Türkiye's Asia Anew Initiative policy impacts Türkiye-Bangladesh economic and strategic relations. Finally, the study discusses future prospect for both countries bilateral relations after political transformation on 5th August in Bangladesh. The findings conclude that Türkiye and Bangladesh are well positioned to develop their strategic collaboration, providing a great paradigm for South-South cooperation in the changing global order.

Keywords: Asia Anew Initiative, economic ties, strategic ties, Türkiye, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India.

Öz

Türkiye'nin Asya ülkeleriyle gelişen ilişkileri, özellikle “Yeniden Asya Girişiminin” (*Asia Anew Initiative*) kapsamında, tarihi, ekonomik ve diplomatik bağların yeniden tesis edilmesine yönelik stratejik bir yön değişimini işaret etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye ile Asya ülkeleri arasındaki hızla artan ekonomik ve stratejik ortaklıkları incelemekte olup, özel olarak Bangladeş'i bir vaka çalışması olarak ele almaktadır. Tarihsel olarak, Türkiye ile Bangladeş arasındaki ilişkiler güney Asya Müslümanlarıyla birlikte İslam öncesi dönemlere kadar uzanmakta ve Osmanlı ile Babür dönemlerinde kültürel, dini ve siyasi iş birlikleri sayesinde güçlü bir yapı kazanmıştır. Modern dönemde ise Türk dış politikası özellikle 2002 yılından itibaren, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan liderliğindeki yönetimle önemli değişimlere uğramış ve bazı uzmanlar tarafından bu yönelim “Neo-Osmanlılık” olarak adlandırılmıştır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin yumuşak güç yaklaşımını ve Bangladeş ile çok boyutlu ikili ilişkilerini, sosyo-kültürel, ekonomik, ticari ve jeopolitik boyutlarıyla kapsamlı bir şekilde analiz etmektedir. Tarihsel köklerden başlayarak günümüzdeki stratejik girişimleri ele alan çalışma, Türkiye'nin Asya'da yükselen bölgesel bir aktör olarak konumunu ve karşılıklı faydaya dayalı ortaklıklar geliştirme potansiyelini vurgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi ve vaka çalışması yöntemi kullanılmıştır. İlk olarak Türkiye-Bangladeş tarihi ilişkileri ve bu ilişkilerin gelişim süreci ele alınmakta, ardından Türkiye'nin Yeniden Asya Girişimi politikasının Türkiye-Bangladeş ekonomik ve stratejik ilişkilerine etkileri değerlendirilmektedir. Son olarak, 5 Ağustos'ta Bangladeş'te gerçekleşen siyasi dönüşüm sonrası iki ülke arasındaki ikili ilişkilerin geleceği tartışılmaktadır. Elde edilen Bulgular,

Türkiye ile Bangladeş'in stratejik iş birliğini geliştirme konusunda güçlü bir konumda olduklarını ve değişen küresel düzende Güney-Güney iş birliğine yönelik anlamlı bir *paradigma* oluşturdıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeniden Asya Girişiminin, ekonomik ilişkiler, stratejik ilişkiler, Türkiye, Bangladeş, Pakistan, Hindistan.

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving global order, Asia has become a focal point of economic dynamism and strategic competition. Countries around the world are increasingly redirecting their attention to Asia, not only for trade and investment but also for improving long term strategic partnerships. Türkiye, which traditionally given importance to Europe and Middle East in its foreign policy orientation, has recalibrated its strategic focus in recent years. This shift was officialized through the announcement of the Asia Anew Initiative (Yeniden Asya Girişiminin) in 2019, aiming to deepen cooperation with Asian countries across multiple sectors, including economy, education, defense, and culture (Aslan, 2022). While the broader discourse on Türkiye's engagement with Asia frequently emphasizes relations with major actors such as China, India, and Japan, the growing relationship between Türkiye and Bangladesh remains comparatively underexplored. Bangladesh as an emerging power in South Asia, possesses vibrant demographic structure, a growing economy, and an increasing influence in regional and global forums (Bazaluk et al., 2024). Moreover, Türkiye and Bangladesh share profound historical and cultural ties that trace back to the Ottoman Empire and the Bengal Sultanate. Historical evidence points to cultural solidarity and mutual support during critical periods, such as the contributions of Bengali intellectuals Ismail Hossain Siraji and Kazi Nazrul Islam during the Turkish war of independence (Al Mahmud, 2022; Sarker et al., 2022). These deep-rooted connections, reinforced by shared religious and cultural values, form a robust foundation for contemporary diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The significant of this study lies in its focus on an understudied yet increasingly relevant dimension of Türkiye's broader Asia policy. By analyzing Türkiye's engagement with Bangladesh, this research not only highlights the nuances of the Asia Anew Initiative but also sheds light on the growing patterns of South-South cooperation between two non-Western,

Muslim majority nations. This bilateral relationship demonstrates how historical solidarity can be effectively transformed into comprehensive strategic partnerships encompassing diplomacy, economic collaboration, defense cooperation, and cultural exchange (Rahman, 2022; Arslan et al., 2022). The principal aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Türkiye's economic and strategic relations with Bangladesh within the broader framework of the Asia Anew Initiative. Specifically, it explores the historical and cultural background that underpins Türkiye- Bangladesh relations, examines the objectives and operationalization of the Asia Anew Initiative, analyzes the trajectory of economic, trade, and defense cooperation between the two countries and evaluates how recent political developments in Bangladesh may influence the future of trajectory of their bilateral relations. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: What historical and cultural ties have shaped the Türkiye-Bangladesh relationship? What are the principal objectives of the Asia Anew Initiative, and how is it applied to Bangladesh? How have economic relations between Türkiye and Bangladesh developed over time? What role does defense and security cooperation play in bilateral relations? How can recent political dynamics in Bangladesh affect future collaboration between the two countries?

Despite the considerable scholarly attention devoted to Türkiye's foreign policy, particularly its relations with Europe, The USA, and the Middle East, engagement with South Asia has remained peripheral in academic discussions. Seminal works, notably those by Ahmet Davutoğlu emphasizing the concept of "Strategic Depth" have advocated for Türkiye's active engagement with neighboring regions based on shared historical and cultural affinities (Davutoğlu, 2001). Nevertheless, while Türkiye's foreign policy has increasingly encompassed Africa, Central Asia, and East Asia, its South Asian outreach particularly toward Bangladesh has not received proportionate academic focus (Aslan, 2022). By integrating historical, political, economic, and defense dimensions into a cohesive analysis, this study aims to fill a critical gap in literature. It endeavors to contribute to a deeper understanding of Türkiye's strategic reorientation toward Asia and to enrich the academic discourse on emerging models of South-South cooperation within the shifting architecture of the global system.

2. Literature review

Türkiye's foreign policy has undergone significant transformation over past two decades, shifting from a traditionally western-centric approach to a more diversified and

multidimensional strategy. Central to this evolution is the concept of “Strategic Depth” (Stratejik Derinlik), introduced by Ahmet Davutoğlu, which advocates for Türkiye’s active engagement with regions historically and culturally connected to the Ottoman legacy (Davutoğlu, 2001). Within this framework, Türkiye’s foreign policy has expanded towards Africa, Central Asia, and increasingly toward East and South Asia. By the launch of the Asia Anew Initiative in 2019 represents a strategic recalibration aimed at strengthening ties with Asian countries across various sectors, including trade, education, culture and defense (Riwansyah, 2021) This policy shift reflect Türkiye’s recognition of the changing global power dynamics and its intention to position itself as a key player in the emerging Asian Century. However, much of the scholarly focus on the Asia Anew Initiative has concentrated on Türkiye’s relations with East and Southeast Asia, particularly within the ASEAN context, rather than with South Asian nations (Aslan,2022).

South-South cooperation, a concept grounded in mutual development partnerships among countries in the Global South, has become an increasingly important framework for understanding emerging bilateral relations. Scholars such as Shaw, Cooper, and Chin (2009) argue that South-South relations are characterized by solidarity, shared development goals, and a resistance to traditional North-South hierarchies. In this context, the relationship between Türkiye and Bangladesh offers a compelling case study of how two non-Western, Muslim majority countries can leverage historical ties and contemporary strategic interests to shape meaningful partnerships.

Bangladesh’s foreign policy trajectory, particularly since its independence in 1971, has been shaped by pragmatic engagement with both regional neighbors and global powers. While its relations with India, China, and The United States have been extensively studied (Riaz, 2016; Islam, 2022), there is a notable paucity of scholarly works focusing on its bilateral relations with Türkiye. Existing studies predominantly examine Bangladesh’s participation in multilateral organizations, its economic development, and its foreign direct investment strategies (Bazaluk et al., 2024) yet little attention has been paid to dynamics of Bangladesh-Türkiye relations.

A limited but growing body of literature has begun to address this gap. Rahman (2022) provides a detailed analysis of diplomatic, economic, and cultural dimensions of Türkiye-Bangladesh relations, highlighting the historical solidarity between the two nations,

particularly during the Turkish War of independence. Furthermore, Sarker et al. (2022) explore the contributions of Bengali intellectuals such as Kazi Nazrul Islam to the Turkish cause, underlining the deep historical roots of mutual supports. Despite these contributions, comprehensive analysis that integrate political, economic, and defense dimension of Türkiye-Bangladesh relations scarce. Moreover, contemporary developments, including defense cooperation agreements, growing trade volumes and shared stances on international platforms, have not been systematically studied. As Arslan et al. (2022) note, the potential for enhanced cooperation between Türkiye and Bangladesh is considerable, particularly in the context of South-South cooperation frameworks.

In view of these observations, this study aims to fill the existing gap in the literature by providing an integrated analysis of Türkiye's economic and strategic relations with Bangladesh within the framework of the Asia Anew Initiative. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Türkiye's evolving Asia policy and the broader dynamics of South-South cooperation in the contemporary global system.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach to investigate the dynamics of Türkiye-Bangladesh relations within the larger context of the Asia Anew Initiative (*Yeniden Asya Girişimi*). Given the relatively limited scope of existing academic literature on this bilateral relationship, a qualitative approach allows for a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of historical, political, economic, and strategic dimensions. The research is structured as a case study, focusing specifically on Bangladesh as a representative case of Türkiye's evolving engagement with South Asia. Data collection for this study relies primarily on the analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data include official government statistics and statements, bilateral agreements, press releases, speeches by political leaders, and documents from international organizations. Speeches by Turkish and Bangladesh leaders are analyzed to capture the political discourse and policy narratives shaping bilateral relations. Secondary data comprise peer reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, news reports and think tank analysis that provide contextual background and expert perspectives on Turkey's foreign policy and Bangladesh's regional and international engagements. Policy documents reviews and media analysis are employed to understand the contemporary developments in diplomatic, economic and defense cooperation. The triangulation of different data sources ensures the validity and reliability of the findings by allowing cross verification of information from multiple perspectives (Creswell,2013).

The study acknowledges several limitations, first, the availability of publicly accessible data on defense cooperation is limited due to confidentiality and national security considerations. Second, political development in both Türkiye and Bangladesh are dynamic and can rapidly alter the trajectory of bilateral relations. Consequently, while the study endeavors to provide a comprehensive and up to date analysis, it is constrained by the temporal limitations of the available data. Additionally, the relative scarcity of academic literature specifically focused on Türkiye-Bangladesh relations necessitates a greater reliance on primary sources and media reports, which may introduce certain biases.

Despite these limitations, the methodological approach in this study is well suited to achieving a holistic understanding of the subject matter. By integrating historical, policy, and discourse analysis, the study aims to contribute to the academic literature on Türkiye's Asia policy and to provide insights into the evolving dynamics of South-South cooperation through the lens of Türkiye's Bangladesh relations.

4. Historical Background of Türkiye- Bangladesh Relations

4.1. Early Relations and Ottoman Connections

The Bengal region (Bangladesh) in South Asia has long been center of political, economic, and cultural engagement. Its importance grew specially during the medieval period, when it emerged as an influential power in the Islamic world. Early ties between Bengal and the broader Islamic world, notably with the Ottoman Empire, can be traced back to the late 7th century when Muslim Traders and Muslim Missionaries initially established connections with Bengal. These early encounters took place predominantly along coastal trade routes, Chittagong serving as an important port for these transactions. Through these early commercial and religious interactions, Islam began to take root in the region, building the foundation for a more significant political and cultural transition (Eaton, 1993).

The Turkish and Bengali historical and cultural relations date back to the independent Bangladesh and the Ottoman Empire. In the 13th century (1204 AD), the first Turkish commander Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji conquered western and northern Bengal. The first Muslim kingdom in Bengal was founded by Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji military expeditions, which later became a significant actor in the regional political landscape. Following this victory, Sufi missionaries, mystics, and saints began to spread Islam throughout the rural areas of Bengal, bringing about long lasting cultural and theological

transformations The Sufism was crucial to the Islamization of Bengal, as the missionaries used peaceful strategies such as social outreach and spiritual engagement (Rahaman, 1995).

The Bengal Sultanate was founded in the 14th century by the Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah who was a Turk, marked the beginning of the region's golden period. Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah's rule united Bengal together on an ethnolinguistic basis, promoting political stability and cultural growth. Bengal region also had strong ties with the Ottoman Empire and the larger Islamic world. Although the Ottomans didn't directly intervene in Bengal's internal affairs, but the two empires common Islamic history and cultural interactions helped to shape Bengal's Islamic institutions and administration (Tarafdar, 1956: 69-70).

By the sixteenth century, the Mughal Empire had spread across Bengal and established its authority. However, from the 18th century, the Nawabs of Bengal began to assert greater autonomy, which reflected a larger trend of regional independence that impacted later Türkiye-Bangladesh relations (Heitzman & Worden, 1989).

Muslim rule in Bengal lasted approximately 553 years, ending with British conquest following the Battle of Palashi in 1757. Scholars consider this long era to be the most formative period in Bengal's history, during which Turkish-origin rulers significantly played important role to influence the political, cultural and religious landscape of the area (Al Mahmud, 2022).

However, despite British colonial control and the fall of the Bengal Sultanate in 1757, Bengali Muslims constantly provided practical and moral support to the Ottoman Empire. During the Ottoman-Russian War (1877-1878), Bengal Muslim Communities gathered in Kolkata to collect financial support for the Turkish army and prayed for Ottoman victory in the mosques of Kolkata (Fuad & Polat, 2025). The relationship remained during following battles, such as the Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912), the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), World War I (1914-1918) and (1919-1923) the Turkish War of Independence (Hardy, 1972). Even Bengali Muslims' admiration lasted throughout the early Republican period of Turkey, as seen by the 368-line poem "Kemal Pasha" written in 1921 by Bangladesh's national poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam. The poem, which honors Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was initially published in Calcutta magazine and then included in Bangladesh's educational curriculum (Islam, 2020).

4.2. Relation During the Pakistan Period (1947-1971)

The downfall of the caliphate in Istanbul and the establishment of the modern republic of turkey had an immense effect on political development in Bengal. These events contributed to the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, based on the two-nation principle according to religious, maintain historical ties between the peoples of Bengal and Turkey. However, the end of British colonial in August 1947 resulted in Bengal's partition: West Bengal became part of India while East Bengal (later Bangladesh) was established as Pakistan's eastern region. Bangladesh's history has developed within the framework of Pakistan for about a quarter century. Following political tensions and violence between East and West Pakistan, East Pakistan declared independence on 16 December 1971 and became known as Bangladesh (Van Schendel, 2009). Türkiye approached the new state of Bangladesh with caution because of its close relationship with Pakistan. Nevertheless, Türkiye formally recognized Bangladesh at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation conference summit held in Lahore on 22 February 1974 (Samiha, 2024).

4.3. Recognitions of Bangladesh and Diplomatic Ties

Despite geographically distinct, Türkiye Bangladesh relation has developed partnership influenced by shared cultural valued, historical ties and expanding geopolitical interests. Considering significant events in history, high-level visits, bilateral agreements, ideological changes and multilateral cooperation as focal points, this article explores the evolution of diplomatic and political ties between Bangladesh and Turkey (Sarısır, 2019).

Diplomatic missions were rapidly formed after the recognition of Bangladesh. Türkiye established an embassy in Dhaka in 1976, and Bangladesh followed by establishing its embassy in Ankara in 1981. While these procedures established official diplomatic connections, the Cold War era provided limited opportunities for deep bilateral cooperation. Türkiye's foreign policy remained primarily Euro-Atlantic in orientation, with a focus on ties with NATO, the European Economic Community, and the US (Oran, 2001-2012). Meanwhile, Bangladesh was navigating its post-independence recovery, first aligning more closely with the soviet bloc under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and then moving toward to the Islamic World under Ziaur Rahman (Bhardwaj, 2003).

One of the early milestones in the bilateral relationship was Bangladeshi president Ziaur Rahman's visit to Türkiye in 1978 (Ullah, 2017). His discussion with Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit resulted in Bangladesh's support for Türkiye on several international issues, including the Cyprus crisis and Aegean Sea conflicts. These diplomatic affirmations implied ideological

alignment on a number of global issues, particularly those concerning Islamic unity. Turkish President Kenan Evren's visited to Bangladesh in 1982 and 1986, as well as President Süleyman Demiral's visit in 1997, highlighted Ankara's intermittent interest in South Asia, which was frequently driven by participation in larger multilateral summits rather than strategic bilateral objectives (Rashid, 2015).

A paradigm shift began in Turkish foreign policy in the early 2000s with rise if the Justic and Development Party (AKP). The AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, implemented a multifaceted foreign policy that focuses on strengthening connections with the Muslim world, Africa, and Asia. This strategy changes prioritized soft power diplomacy including humanitarian relief, cultural diplomacy, and Islamic unity, while also growing economic and educational participation. Bangladesh emerged as a crucial South Asian partner for the Türkiye as part of this larger policy adjustment (Walker, 2009).

The year 2010 was an important turning point in Türkiye and Bangladesh relation. In February 2010, Turkish president Abdullah Gul visited Dhaka, followed by Prime Minister Erdogan's historic visit in November, the first by a Turkish Prime Minister in 21 Years. These Trips led to several high-level agreements in sectors including health, agriculture, education, and tourism. The formation of the Türkiye-Bangladesh Business Council, as well as the launch of direct Turkish Airlines flights between Dhaka and Istanbul in December 2010, was a significant step toward strengthening economic and people to people relation. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visited Türkiye in April 2012 strengthened the budding cooperation. The visit included the signing of cooperation treaties in customs, investment, agriculture and cultural exchange (Ullah, 2017). Notably, Konya and Sylhet have formed sister city pact, demonstrating subnational diplomatic interaction and cultural connectedness. The reciprocating character of these high-level interactions highlighted a strategic convergence, especially in terms of growing South-South cooperation (Konya Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2012).

Despite the momentum, ties declined between 2012 and 2016 as a result of Türkiye's condemnation of Bangladesh's executions of top members of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Türkiye, Under Erdogan leadership, considered the executions as politically motivated and against Islamic and international law. Ankara's expression of concern, including parliamentary resolutions and strong statements, were perceived by Dhaka as an interference in its domestic judicial process. The subsequent diplomatic conflict highlighted the ideological divide

between Türkiye's increasingly pro-Islamist foreign policy and Bangladesh's secular political orientation under Awami League administration (Karim, 2022).

However, bilateral relations restored when Bangladesh immediately condemned Türkiye's failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. In 2017, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım visited Bangladesh and met with prominent political leaders, including opposition leader Khaleda Zia. His visit to the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar demonstrated Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy, as the Türkiye pledged to continue supporting the persecuted Muslim minority. This visit created the framework for a more comprehensive humanitarian and political engagement, notably via coordination with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Baba, 2017).

Multilaterally, Türkiye and Bangladesh have consistently backed each other in forums such as in the OIC, the D-8, and the UN. Türkiye has supported Bangladesh's to take actions on climate change and the refugee crisis, while Bangladesh has endorsed Türkiye's views on Palestine and Islamophobia. These mutual affirmations have strengthened diplomatic ties. Additionally, Türkiye's new Asia strategy implemented in 2019 to future prioritized engagement with Asian countries, particularly Bangladesh, through improved political consultation mechanisms, cultural exchanges, and educational collaboration. Economically, bilateral trade and investment have steadily increased. Trade climbed from \$14 million in 2002 to more than \$1 billion in 2016 (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Economy, n.d.). Although the target of \$3 billion by 2015 was not met, Turkish companies have showed interest in Bangladesh's infrastructure, textiles and energy sectors. Meanwhile, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has expanded its development corporation and project execution in Bangladesh in areas such as healthcare, disaster relief, and education. The Yunus Emre Institute and Türkiye Scholarships have also contributed to improved cultural and educational relations (Çolakoğlu, 2019).

In short, the diplomatic and political ties between Türkiye and Bangladesh have undergone significant transformation from symbolic recognition to strategic engagement. Despite both state governments having shown tenacity in pursuing shared goals through political and diplomatic discussion even in the face of ideological disagreements and diplomatic strain. As the international order moves toward multipolarity and regionalism, Türkiye and Bangladesh

in good position to strengthen their collaboration based on common goals, historical solidarity and pragmatism.

5. Major Aspects of Türkiye and Bangladesh Relations

5.1. Economic and Trade Relations

The Bilateral trade relationship between Bangladesh and Türkiye has undergone a significant transformation since the beginning, with different agreements, institutional initiatives, and shifting trade quantities. The partnership founded on a cultural collaboration has seen both growth and setbacks throughout the decades. This article presents a thorough examination of the evolution of trade ties between Bangladesh and Türkiye from the mid-1970s to the present day, covering historical landmarks, economic agreements, institutional systems, and contemporary trading dynamics. The formal commercial contacts between Bangladesh and Türkiye began on July 27, 1976, when a Bangladeshi economic and trade team visited Ankara. This visit was the first major commercial connection between the two countries. As a consequence of the negotiations made during this visit, a trade agreement was struck with the goal of increasing bilateral commerce while adhering to each country's current rules and regulations. Furthermore, the countries showed mutual desire to reach a cultural accord and collaborating in commercial and technological fields (Rahman, 2022).

A notable step was making an agreement and proposal was to establish a joint economic commission tasked with exploring avenues for strengthening cooperation in 1976. The Bangladeshi delegation held productive discussions with important Turkish institutions, including the Ministries of transport and trade, the State Planning Organization, and the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Industry. This initiative laid the foundation for long-term economic engagement. Following the 1976 agreement, a Turkish delegation headed by minister of state economic enterprises Kenan Bulutğlu visited Dhaka from March 3 to 10, 1979. The primary objective of this visit was to enhance economic ties and explore future trade opportunities. During the meetings with Bangladeshi officials, both countries agreed to establish a Joint Trade Council (Milliyet, 1979). Additionally, The Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, signed on March 9, 1979, in Dhaka, was subsequently ratified by the Turkish Council of Ministers on June 3, 1979. These developments reinforced the bilateral trade cooperation. By 1980, the role of the private sector in fostering trade relation becomes more pronounced. For instance, Northern Trades Ltd, a Bangladeshi company, submitted an application to the Turkish Embassy in Dhaka to import Durable consumer goods from

Türkiye. Such private sector initiative indicated the growing commercial interest between the two nations beyond governmental agreements (Cumhuriyet, 1980). The late 1970s witnessed a gradual growth in Türkiye's imports from Bangladesh. In 1975, the import volume stood at \$4.638 million and steadily rose to \$9.833 million by 1978, before slightly declining in 1979 and 1980. The primary commodities exported by Bangladesh during this period included jute, embroidery items, and sacks. On the other hand, Türkiye began its export activities to Bangladesh in 1977, with a notable transaction involving the sale of 49 passenger wagons and some cotton, yielding foreign exchange earnings of \$7.650 million. The trade agreement signed in 1976 played a crucial role in stimulating this trade activity, although Türkiye predominantly imported from Bangladesh during this era (Milliyet, 1978).

To deepen economic cooperation, the two countries signed an agreement on the "Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investment" on November 12, 1987 (UNCTAD, n.d.). This accord was aimed at creating a favorable environment for investors from both countries by ensuring protection against expropriation and facilitating smooth operations. The agreement is also intended to foster economic growth through cross-border investments (T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı, n.d.). Despite these agreements, the trade relationship did not develop at the expected pace. Recognizing this, both governments took additional steps to boost bilateral economic engagement. In 1979, the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) was officially established to serve as a platform for periodic discussions on economic matters (Economic Relations Division, n.d.). Decades later, in 2011, the foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) established the Türkiye-Bangladesh Business Council to further strengthen business to business interactions (Foreign Economic Relations Board of Türkiye [DEİK], n.d.). Another notable institutional initiative was the establishment of the Türkiye-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TBCCI) in June 2007. TBCCI played an important role in promoting trade, economic development, and social cooperation (The Daily Star, 2007). Under its leadership, Bangladeshi entrepreneurs began participating in the Türkiye World Trade Bridge from 2008 onwards. However, TBCCI was eventually closed in 2016 due to alleged affiliations with the Green Movement, which is considered a terrorist organization in Türkiye (Colakoğlu, 2019).

The 21st century marked a period of considerable progress in bilateral trade between Türkiye and Bangladesh. The trade volume between Türkiye and Bangladesh was reached to \$47 million in 2002. However, over the next eight years, this figure increased approximately 21 times, hitting \$1 billion in 2010. This remarkable growth signaled a turning point in economic relations and demonstrated the untapped potential of the bilateral relationship. From 2009 onward, Türkiye's exports to Bangladesh consistently remained above the \$100 million threshold. In 2012, Türkiye's exports surpassed \$200 million for the first time, showing increasing market penetration. However, the momentum was briefly disrupted between 2013 and 2014. During 2014, Türkiye exported goods worth \$149 million to Bangladesh, while imports from Bangladesh amounted to \$1.029 billion. This large trade imbalance underscored Bangladesh's strong export base, particularly in garments and textiles, which are in high demand in the Turkish market. Türkiye's exports to Bangladesh surged by 34.7%, reaching \$200 million, while imports from Bangladesh totaled \$996 million in 2015. However, imports from Bangladesh decreased by 13.1%, amounting to \$881 million. The overall trade volume in 2016 stood at approximately \$1.2 billion, maintaining parity with the previous year. Between 2010 and 2017, trade volume consistently hovered around the \$1 billion mark (Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu [DEİK], 2018). However, from 2018 to 2020, bilateral trade experienced a slight downturn, dipping below \$1 billion. Despite this decline, 2020 witnessed a 13.5% increase in trade volume compared to the previous year, reaching approximately \$918 million. Türkiye's imports from Bangladesh saw a significant rise of 21.1%, totaling \$569 million, while exports rise to \$349 million, indicating an upward trajectory (T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2024).

In 2021, the total trade volume hit the \$1 billion mark once again. Türkiye imported goods worth \$482.1 million from Bangladesh and exported \$572.9 million, resulting in a trade surplus of \$90.8 million in favor of Türkiye. The following year, in 2022, witnessed future growth in trade relations. Türkiye's imports reached \$663.7 million, while exports slightly declined to \$551.6 million, culminating in a total trade volume of 1.2 billion.

However, 2023 brought a decline in total trade volume, which dropped to \$1.08 billion. Türkiye imported \$665.5 million worth of goods from Bangladesh, while its exports decreased to \$416.5 million. Despite the drop, the sustained level of trade above \$1 billion reflects the resilience and importance of economic ties between the two countries (T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2024).

5.2. Defense and Security Cooperation

In an era marked by multipolarity and rapidly changing geopolitical alignments, the strategic defense and security relations between Türkiye and Bangladesh has emerged as a compelling case of Global South cooperation. This partnership, although not historically deep-rooted like some of Bangladesh's other bilateral relations, has gained remarkable momentum over the last decade. The evolution of Türkiye- Bangladesh defense relations is situated within broader strategic shifts, including Türkiye's Asia Anew Initiative and Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030, both of which prioritize national security modernization and geopolitical autonomy. The deep analysis explores the multi-dimensional nature of their defense relationship, focusing on the historical trajectory, strategic rationale, defense industrial cooperation, military diplomacy, geopolitical implications in South Asia, and prospects for future collaboration (Bhattacharya, 2025).

The initial relations of both countries were largely diplomatic, with limited engagement in defense or economic cooperation. However, the military visit by Bangladesh's Chief Martial Law Administrator Ziaur Rahman to Türkiye in 1976 marked the first step toward strategic interaction (Ullah, 2017). Despite early expressions of goodwill, the relationship reminded underdevelopment throughout the Cold War, largely due to Bangladesh's policy of non-alignment and Türkiye's did alignment with NATO and Western defense structures. This divergence in strategic orientations limited deeper military engagements (Kamruzzaman, 2021). Yet, symbolic indicate such as the 1983 proposal by Bangladesh to establish a Turkish airbase on its soil, though never realized, indicate a persistent strategic undercurrent in the relationship (Khan, 2020).

A decisive shift in the Türkiye-Bangladesh defense relationship occurred after 2016. The failed coup attempts in Türkiye in July of that year catalyzed a significant diplomatic overture from Bangladesh, as it expressed solidarity with the civilian government led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. This act of political support served to reset bilateral relations after a period of tension following Türkiye's condemnation of the execution of a Jamat-e-Islami leader in Bangladesh. The diplomatic reset opened avenues for renewed engagement, especially in defense cooperation (Mahmud, 2017). Within three years, the bilateral relationship experienced a transformative turn, catalyzed by Türkiye's *Asia Anew Initiative*, launched in 2019, which prioritized multidimensional engagement with Asian countries, including South Asian states like Bangladesh. The Initiative is Türkiye's strategic response to

its frictions with the West, aiming to create new geopolitical and economic spaces for influence. Bangladesh, with its growing economic clout, geostrategic location, and increasing defense needs, emerged as a key partner in this framework (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

Bangladesh's *Forces Goal 2030*, a long-term modernization blueprint for its armed forces, envisions a comprehensive enhancement of the country's military capabilities through diversified procurement, training, and technological advancement. Türkiye, with its rapidly growing indigenous defense industry, competitive pricing, and willingness to engage in technology transfer, presented itself as a viable alternative to traditional arms suppliers such as China and Russia. Since 2017, Bangladesh has significantly increased its defense procurement from Türkiye. This includes armored vehicles, surveillance equipment, missile systems, and radar technologies. Turkish defense companies like Roketsan, Aselsan, and Delta Defense have emerged as key suppliers to the Bangladeshi military (Rahman, 2024). Notably, in 2017, a \$1 billion deal was signed for the procurement of 680 Light Armored Vehicles. In 2021, Bangladesh received TRG-300 Kaplan guided missile systems, enhancing its artillery capabilities. Other notable acquisitions include the Cobra II armored vehicles, Hisar-O medium-range surface-to-air missiles, ground surveillance radars, electronic warfare tools, and EOD robots. In parallel, the Bangladesh Air Force modernized its F-7 fleet by integrating Turkish laser-guided munitions. Türkiye has also offered co-development opportunities, particularly in the domain of drone technology and the TF-X next-generation fighter jet program (Bhattacharya, 2025).

Moreover, Türkiye has expressed its readiness to include Bangladesh in future co-production ventures and technology-sharing programs. These overtures reflect Ankara's long-term view of Dhaka not merely as a market, but as a strategic partner in Asia. The Turkish defense sector's emphasis on NATO standards and post-sale support aligns well with Bangladesh's need for reliable, scalable, and politically non-conditional procurement. As part of the broader defense-industrial partnership, Turkish firms have explored establishing assembly lines in Bangladesh to facilitate technology transfer and bolster domestic defense manufacturing under the *Made in Bangladesh* policy. This serves mutual interests: Türkiye gains market access and geopolitical leverage; Bangladesh boosts its defense self-sufficiency and industrial capacity (Nath, 2023).

Parallel to procurement, military training and joint exercises have also gained prominence. Since the 2004 agreement, Türkiye has emerged as an important destination for Bangladeshi military officers to receive advanced instruction in NATO-standard military tactics, logistics, cyber defense, and peacekeeping. Training engagements serve a dual purpose: they enhance the operational capacity of Bangladesh's forces and promote long-term institutional interoperability between the two militaries. Furthermore, defense *attachés* from both sides have intensified cooperation through regular visits, seminars, and joint assessments, reinforcing the diplomatic dimension of military-to-military ties.

The two countries also signed a security cooperation agreement in 2022, covering counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and transnational organized crime. This agreement marks a qualitative shift from defense procurement to broader security alignment, acknowledging that contemporary security threats transcend traditional military domains. Joint counterterrorism efforts are particularly significant given the regional prevalence of violent extremism and radicalization. In this light, Türkiye's experience in asymmetric warfare, border security, and intelligence operations becomes a valuable resource for Bangladesh's internal security architecture (Islam, 2022).

The implications of Türkiye-Bangladesh defense ties in the broader South Asian context are particularly noteworthy. India, the region's dominant power, has historically viewed South Asia as its sphere of influence and has been wary of extra-regional actors gaining a foothold. Türkiye's strategic partnership with Pakistan and its vocal stance on the Kashmir issue have already strained its relations with New Delhi. The growing defense partnership between Türkiye and Bangladesh especially arms transfers, and strategic coordination has been interpreted by some analysts as a potential alignment that could challenge India's primacy. Though Bangladesh maintains a warm relationship with India, the perception of a quadrilateral axis involving Bangladesh, Pakistan, China, and Türkiye has surfaced in some Indian strategic discourses. However, these perceptions often overestimate the depth of alignment and underestimate the pragmatic and non-aligned nature of Bangladesh's foreign policy. Dhaka's strategic approach remains rooted in non-alignment, pragmatism, and multilateral engagement. Its defense relations with Türkiye must be viewed through this lens: as part of a broader effort to diversify military capabilities while preserving strategic autonomy. Indeed, Bangladesh's simultaneous military relationships with China (its largest arms supplier), Russia, the United States, and India underscore its multipolar engagement

strategy. Türkiye is thus a new but increasingly important node in Bangladesh's security network, not a replacement for other strategic relationships. Nonetheless, the partnership is not without challenges. Türkiye's economic volatility and fluctuating exchange rates could affect the continuity of arms deals and technology transfer. Furthermore, any future alignment between Bangladesh and Türkiye that is perceived rightly or wrongly as ideological rather than strategic could provoke regional backlash or disrupt existing partnerships. Therefore, both sides need to navigate their cooperation with careful calibration, ensuring that their defense engagement remains transparent, interest-based, and de-securitized in broader regional narratives (Haque, 2024).

The growing defense engagement between Bangladesh and Türkiye also serves as an example of South-South cooperation that challenges the conventional structure of international arms trade, which has long been dominated by Western powers. Türkiye's emergence as a defense exporter not only strengthens its economy but allows it to carve out geopolitical influence in regions like South Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. For Bangladesh, engaging with an emerging defense power like Türkiye allows it to move beyond dependencies on larger powers, enabling it to assert greater agency in its strategic choices (Aziz, 2025).

Looking forward, the Türkiye-Bangladesh defense partnership is poised to expand. Potential areas include cyber defense, space-based intelligence, drone co-production, naval cooperation, and enhanced intelligence sharing. Türkiye's strategic calculus involves leveraging its defense industry to deepen ties with emerging Asian powers, while Bangladesh's defense vision calls for diversified, interoperable, and future-ready forces. In this convergence lies the long-term strength of their partnership. Joint exercises, naval port calls, and intelligence-sharing frameworks could soon complement existing arms deals and training exchanges. The integration of private defense firms and think tanks in both countries could also facilitate knowledge transfer and strategic dialogue. While geopolitical sensitivities remain, the ability of both Ankara and Dhaka to navigate these strategically through transparency, multipolar diplomacy, and economic pragmatism will determine the future trajectory of their defense cooperation. With overlapping visions for regional stability, national resilience, and economic growth, Türkiye and Bangladesh are poised to expand their defense partnership into new domains, contributing to a more decentralized and dynamic global security architecture.

5.3. Cultural and Educational Exchange

The bilateral relations between the two countries are dependent not only on contemporary diplomatic and economic relations but also rooted in historical, cultural and educational linkages. These socio-cultural roots form a solid foundation for strategic collaboration and mutual understanding between the two countries. The cultural affinities between Türkiye and Bangladesh continue to manifest in contemporary times, transcending formal diplomatic channels and reaching into the everyday cultural consciousness of both societies. The shared legacy of Islam, particularly in its mystical Sufi tradition, has been instrumental in nurturing this bond. The influence of Sufism in Bangladesh, for instance, can be partially attributed to the spiritual linking Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi of Konya and Hazrat Shah Jalal of Sylhet. Hazrat Shah Jala was one of the Rumi's spiritual disciples, was a prominent Sufi saint who played a vital role in the spread of Islam in Eastern Bangla During the 13th and 14th centuries. According to Turkish Ambassador Devrim Öztürk, Sufism has acted as a spiritual and cultural bridge between Anatolia and Bengal, providing a profound basis for mutual cultural identification ("Exclusive Interview of the Turkish Ambassador Devrim Öztürk," 2018).

This cultural dialogue continues in the modern era through festivals, cultural and educational exchanges. For instance, Türkiye's participation in the second "International Sufi Festival" held at Dhaka Shilpakala Academy in 2018, with a performance by a troupe of whirling dervishes, showcased its commitment to promoting shared heritage and deepening public relation. Ambassador Öztürk emphasized that such events offer excellent opportunities to celebrate Turkish spiritual traditions and to understand the unique local variations of Sufi culture in Bangladesh ("Exclusive Interview of the Turkish Ambassador Devrim Öztürk," 2018).

Future strengthening this socio-cultural engagement are symbolic gestures of mutual recognition and respect. The name of key infrastructure in honor of prominent national figures exemplifies this. Bangladesh renamed its second-busiest airport as "Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport" in 2010, in tribute to the Sufi saint. Conversely, in Bangladesh's capital, a major thoroughfare was name "Mustafa Kemal Ataturk Avenue" in 1982, signifying deep respect for Turkey's founding father. In Ankara, two roads bear the names of former Bangladeshi presidents Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman, future reflecting reciprocal appreciation. Additionally, the establishment of the "Mustafa Kemal Turkish

Learning Center” within the Dhaka Military Barracks demonstrates the importance attached to language and cultural dissemination (Ullah, 2017).

Institutional and educational partnerships have also served as key pillars in sustaining and expanding the socio-cultural relations of both countries. The Turkish government, particularly through the presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), has facilitated the mobility of Bangladeshi students and scholars through its “Türkiye Scholarships” program. Between 1992 and 2018, Türkiye granted 379 state scholarships to Bangladeshi students ("Exclusive Interview of the Turkish Ambassador Devrim Öztürk," 2018).

In the 2017-2018 academic year alone, 68 Bangladeshi students received these prestigious scholarships. Additionally, the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2017 between the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and the Bangladesh University Grants Commission (UGC) provided for 12 doctoral fellowships and promoted academic exchange across disciplines (Rahman, 2022). These academic opportunities have yielded commendable results. Many Bangladeshi students studying in Türkiye have achieved high academic performance and received recognition for their excellence. According to Bangladeshi Ambassador M. Allama Siddiki, several students have ranked among the top 20 international students in Türkiye and were recipients of presidential awards. Moreover, a small but growing number of Bangladeshi alumni have transitioned into academic positions in Turkish universities, further institutionalizing educational cooperation (Zorlu & Alam, 2020).

In terms of soft power, the influence of Turkish popular media Bangladesh has been profound. Turkish television series especially historical dramas such as those portraying the Ottoman Empire have gained remarkable popularity among Bangladeshi audiences. Turkish dramas now rank second globally in terms of television series exports, following the US and are broadcast in more than 140 countries. Their impact on Bangladeshi media consumption is visible, with several dramas airing weekly across major Bangladeshi television channels, dubbed in Bangla to appeal to a wider audience (Anadolu Agency, 2022). This cultural export has extended beyond media to influence popular fashion and branding trends in Bangladesh. Shops and retail outlets in major urban centers have adopted names inspired by Turkish Historical figures and Islamic aesthetics examples include “Hurrem Sultan Fashion,” “Turkee Avaya,” and “Turkee Hizab”. These naming strategies reflect an aspiration to capture the exoticism and perceived prestige of Turkish culture, particularly among younger

consumers. Such developments illustrate how Türkiye's cultural and soft diplomacy contributes to shaping perceptions and preferences in Bangladesh (Samiha, 2024).

Interpersonal relations have also played an important role in contemporary Türkiye-Bangladesh relations. Intercultural marriages between Turkish and Bangladeshi citizens have become more common, symbolizing the transformation of bilateral relations from institutional frameworks to deeply personal exchanges. These developments reflect an evolving dynamic in which the bilateral relationship is supported not only by the state policies and economic interests but also by social interactions and cultural affinities at the grassroots level. Another noteworthy avenue of engagement has been the involvement of youth and children in cultural diplomacy initiatives. For example, Türkiye has invited Bangladeshi children to participate in its April 23 Children's Festival, hosted annually by the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT). This festival is celebrated as National Sovereignty and global solidarity. The participation of the Bangladesh Children's Academy in this event highlights Türkiye's commitment to nurturing future generations of cultural ambassadors (Daily Sabah with AA, 2016). Membership in multilateral platforms has further facilitated cultural and social connectivity. Bangladesh's accession to the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation in 1997, where Türkiye is a founding member, opened additional avenues for cultural exchange and collaborative development initiatives. The D-8 framework emphasizes not only economic cooperation but also social development, education, and science and technology, offering opportunities to institutionalize the shared socio-cultural aspects of member countries (Ozkan, 2007).

Türkiye Bangladesh relations are rooted in shared religious values, enriched through centuries of intellectual and spiritual exchange, and sustained by modern educational, cultural, and media channels; these ties form a critical dimension of Turkey's broader strategic engagement with Asia.

6. Türkiye's Asia Anew Initiative: Strategic Shift and Its Implications for South Asia

Since the foundation of the Republic in 1923, Türkiye's foreign policy had largely remained anchored in a Western-oriented, defensive-security approach, primarily shaped by its NATO membership and alignment with the United States. For decades, the Cold War's bipolarity and Türkiye's role as a frontline state against Soviet expansion defined its geopolitical behavior. However, with the end of the Cold War and particularly following the rise of the Justice and

Development Party (AKP) in 2002, Türkiye began reorienting its foreign policy. The concepts of “strategic depth” and “zero problems with neighbors,” introduced by Ahmet Davutoğlu, marked an important shift towards a more proactive, multi-dimensional engagement, expanding Türkiye’s diplomatic footprint not only in the Middle East and Africa but increasingly in Asia (Islam, 2020).

This transformation culminated in the launch of the “Asia Anew initiative” (*Asya Yeniden*) in August 2019 by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The policy was officially elaborated during a workshop held on December 26, 2019, in Ankara, where Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu emphasized the importance of developing a fresh, comprehensive foreign policy approach toward Asia (Daily Sabah, 2019). The policy aimed to enhance cooperation in areas such as trade, technology, defense, education, and cultural exchange. Underpinning this shift was a broader geopolitical calculus: Ankara sought to balance its strained ties with the West, particularly the EU and the US, by diversifying its alliances and strengthening partnerships in the rapidly growing Asian region, which Çavuşoğlu described as the center of gravity of the 21st century (Üngör, 2025).

Türkiye’s Asia Anew Initiative is not merely symbolic. It reflects a calculated strategic rebalancing in response to both global and domestic pressures. Facing mounting tensions with traditional Western allies over issues such as democratic backsliding, human rights, and regional conflicts (like Syria), Türkiye has actively pursued an autonomous foreign policy, seeking new strategic and economic opportunities. Asia, particularly East and South Asia, offers immense potential as both a market for Turkish exports and a source of investment and technological collaboration. While Türkiye had previously viewed Asia predominantly as a source of imports or development models (e.g., Japan in the early 20th century), Asia Anew encourages Turkish enterprises and institutions to see the region as a destination for exports, partnership, and influence (Alperen & Ersoy, 2019).

In this context, South Asia occupies a particularly intriguing space within Türkiye’s broader Asian vision. Despite establishing diplomatic ties with India as early as 1947, Ankara’s historical engagement with the region remained limited, largely due to its Western orientation and its close ties with Pakistan, especially on the Kashmir issue. Türkiye’s unwavering support for Pakistan over Kashmir created a diplomatic distance with India for decades. However, starting from the late 2000s, Turkish diplomacy has shown greater interest in balancing its South Asian ties. Visits by President Abdullah Gül and then-Prime Minister

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to India signaled a desire to improve bilateral relations, despite continued friction over Kashmir (Islam, 2020).

Bangladesh, however, has emerged as one of the key focus areas of the Asia Anew initiative, representing both strategic potential and geopolitical sensitivity. Bilateral relations between Türkiye and Bangladesh have historically been cordial. Türkiye recognized Bangladesh's independence in 1974, and economic cooperation has developed steadily, especially under the framework of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, founded by former Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. But it was after Bangladesh's strong expression of support for the civilian government in Türkiye during the failed coup attempt of July 2016 that bilateral ties began to deepen significantly. This support laid the foundation for broader cooperation in trade, defense, education, and humanitarian issues (Baba, 2017).

Türkiye's support for Bangladesh on the Rohingya refugee crisis, both in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and at the United Nations, further enhanced its image in Dhaka as a reliable and empathetic partner. Ankara's humanitarian diplomacy, combined with its growing capacity in defense manufacturing, infrastructure development, and health services, positioned it as an attractive alternative partner for Bangladesh. Turkish exports of military equipment and technology to Bangladesh have especially caught regional attention, marking a potential shift in the balance of defense relations in South Asia (Rahman, 2022).

India, as the dominant regional power in South Asia, has viewed Türkiye's growing presence with increasing concern. The Indian strategic community has long expressed unease about external powers expanding their influence in the region, particularly those with historical or ideological ties to Pakistan. Türkiye's vocal support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, especially President Erdoğan's reference to Kashmir during his 2020 speech at the UN General Assembly, was perceived in New Delhi as an unwelcome intrusion into its internal affairs. India's Ministry of External Affairs criticized Türkiye for lacking respect for the sovereignty of other nations, underscoring how Ankara's stance on Kashmir has become a sticking point in Türkiye-India relations (Raj, 2020).

This geopolitical tension becomes more pronounced when considering Türkiye's deepening engagement with both Bangladesh and Pakistan. While Bangladesh and Pakistan have a complicated historical relationship stemming from the 1971 Liberation War, Ankara's strong ties with Islamabad and its expanding defense and economic relations with Dhaka suggest the

possibility of a new geopolitical triangle. Some analysts even speculate about a potential quadrilateral axis involving Türkiye, Pakistan, China, and Bangladesh, particularly given Bangladesh's increasing economic reliance on China through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and military procurement (Haque, 2024).

Such a configuration especially if it extends into military cooperation, would be alarming for India. New Delhi has already expressed concern over China's strategic encroachment in South Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka and Nepal. The addition of Türkiye into this equation further complicates India's calculations. For instance, Bangladesh's purchase of Chinese submarines and its growing defense ties with Türkiye suggest a move towards multi-vector diplomacy that dilutes India's traditional dominance over the smaller South Asian states. While Bangladesh remains officially committed to a balanced foreign policy, its embrace of Türkiye's Asia Anew vision allows Dhaka to diversify its alliances and reduce its overdependence on any single power (Indian Narrative 2021).

India's own "Act East" policy, launched in 2014 to upgrade its earlier "Look East" initiative, focuses on expanding India's economic and strategic engagement with Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific. However, the emergence of Türkiye as a new actor in South Asia introduces a form of "competitive outreach" in the region. Türkiye's Asia Anew policy, although broader in scope, overlaps in some areas with India's Act East strategy, especially when it comes to securing influence in countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar (Mazumdar, 2021). Furthermore, the spiritual and historical appeal of Türkiye in parts of the Muslim-majority South Asian population linked to the legacy of the Ottoman Caliphate adds a soft power dimension that India's secular and pluralist model may struggle to counter effectively in certain contexts (Mohan, 2021).

In broader terms, the Asia Anew initiative reflects Türkiye's ambition to play a greater role in shaping regional geopolitics beyond its traditional spheres. Ankara's increasing participation in regional platforms like ASEAN's Sectoral Dialogue Partnership and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) Dialogue Partnership status, further indicate its willingness to institutionalize its Asian engagement. These moves are consistent with President Erdoğan's vision of a "multi-polar world," where Türkiye asserts its identity as a Eurasian power bridging East and West (Temiz & Aydoğdu, 2019). However, challenges remain. Türkiye's ability to sustain its Asia Anew strategy depends on both domestic stability and external receptivity. Economic volatility, inflation, and currency fluctuations in Türkiye

could limit its capacity to invest heavily in Asia. Moreover, balancing relations with rival states such as India and Pakistan, or China and Japan, requires careful diplomacy. For Bangladesh, while Türkiye offers a valuable partnership, overreliance on any external actor could compromise its strategic autonomy (Colakoğlu, 2019).

At the end, Türkiye's Asia Anew initiative is a reflection of its broader foreign policy recalibration, aiming to assert greater autonomy, diversify alliances, and tap into the economic dynamism of the Asian continent. Its growing engagement with South Asia, especially with Bangladesh, illustrates the shifting patterns of global geopolitics where traditional alliances are giving way to more fluid and interest-based partnerships. For South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Türkiye's renewed focus offers new opportunities for economic and strategic collaboration. However, this shift also introduces new geopolitical complexities, particularly in relation to India's regional leadership and strategic interests. As Türkiye continues to expand its presence in Asia, South Asia is likely to become a key battleground for influence among emerging and established powers.

7. Recent Development and Future Prospects

Following the recent political upheaval in Bangladesh, marked by the fall of Hasina's regime through a popular uprising, Bangladesh-Türkiye relations have entered a transformative phase, with significant implications for recent developments and future strategic prospects. At the 11th D-8 Summit held in Cairo on 19 December 2024, Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus called on D-8 member states to take action-oriented initiatives, leverage technological advancements, and reinvent educational models to meet the challenges of the changing global labor landscape. Emphasizing the urgency of preparing youth for a rapidly evolving "world of work," Prof. Yunus urged the member states to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), foster innovation, and invest in entrepreneurship-driven ecosystems. "Young people should emerge as agile entrepreneurs by reshaping their skills and learning," he stated, aligning with the summit's broader focus on youth empowerment and economic resilience. During the summit, Prof. Yunus officially handed over the D-8 chairmanship to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, concluding a tenure marked by notable achievements such as the ratification of the D-8 Preferential Trade Agreement and the establishment of the D-8 Youth Council in Dhaka. Prof. Yunus also held high-level bilateral meetings with the presidents of Egypt and Iran, as well as the prime minister of Pakistan, underscoring the importance of strengthened collaboration and reaffirming Bangladesh's commitment to

multilateral diplomacy. In a special session dedicated to the humanitarian crises in Gaza and Lebanon, Prof. Yunus advocated for comprehensive reconstruction efforts led by international coalitions. He proposed a D-8-led initiative to assess the financial requirements for rebuilding Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, urging members to move beyond humanitarian aid toward sustainable development. The session concluded with a joint communiqué attended by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati, and several international representatives (The Business Standard, 2024).

Following this diplomatic engagement, Bangladesh and Türkiye have entered a promising phase of strategic cooperation. On 7 January 2025, Turkish Trade Minister Prof. Dr. Ömer Bolat visited Dhaka with a large delegation of business leaders representing key organizations such as the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM) and the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK). The visit aimed to deepen economic ties and explore new areas of cooperation in infrastructure, energy, defense, health tourism, e-commerce, and clean energy. In meetings with Chief Adviser Prof. Yunus and Commerce Ministry Adviser Sheikh Bashir Uddin, Minister Bolat expressed Türkiye's strong interest in relocating Turkish factories to Bangladesh, investing in its economic zones, and bringing advanced Turkish technologies into the country. Prof. Yunus reciprocated this enthusiasm, urging Türkiye to harness Bangladesh's young, vibrant workforce to support regional production and supply chains. "We have to give our young people an opportunity, so we want your help. Use our young people to run your factories here so that you can supply your products in the region," he emphasized. Prof. Yunus further proposed that Türkiye build its defense industry in Bangladesh, citing Bangladesh's strategic location and labor force as key assets. "You are the leader in technology; let's make a beginning. We are available for anything that you need," he said (Dhaka Tribune, 2025).

This burgeoning relationship continued to unfold on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Türkiye on 12 April 2025, where two key meetings further elevated bilateral cooperation. First, Bangladesh's Information and Broadcasting Adviser Md. Mahfuj Alam met again with Minister Ömer Bolat. Discussions focused on expanding Turkish investments in Bangladesh's economic zones and organizing a Türkiye-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting in Dhaka later this year (Sakib, 2025). More significantly, Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain held a high-level bilateral meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. This meeting focused on enhancing political dialogue, regional cooperation, and security partnerships between the two nations. Both sides

reiterated their support for each other on global platforms and expressed interest in developing a strategic partnership that would cover diplomacy, defense, education, and humanitarian cooperation. They also exchanged views on regional developments, including the Gaza crisis and the Rohingya refugee situation, highlighting the need for joint diplomatic efforts in multilateral forums such as the OIC and the UN (Çelik, 2025).

According to official data, trade between Türkiye and Bangladesh surpassed \$1.3 billion in 2024. Türkiye imported \$581 million worth of goods from Bangladesh, while Bangladesh imported \$424 million from Türkiye. However, both countries view this as just the beginning. Turkish officials suggested that economic cooperation could move beyond the textile sector historically the mainstay of bilateral trade into defense, pharmaceuticals, farm machinery, and healthcare. Minister Bolat stated, “We can replace India and other markets in Bangladesh’s imports. There can be cooperation in economic and social fields at multiple levels.” These developments represent more than economic ambition; they reflect a strategic South-South partnership rooted in shared values, historical connections, and mutual geopolitical aspirations. Türkiye’s *Asia Anew Initiative* (ANI), launched in 2019 to strengthen ties with Asian nations, has identified Bangladesh as a key partner. As both countries deal with major humanitarian challenges Türkiye with Syrian refugees and Bangladesh with the Rohingya crisis they are well-positioned to co-develop new global frameworks for migration, humanitarian aid, and crisis response, guided by culturally attuned and regionally grounded approaches (TRT World, 2025). Looking forward, the upcoming JEC meeting could mark a turning point, paving the way for joint industrial ventures, technological transfer, and even co-produced defense systems. Both Bangladesh and Türkiye now face the critical question of whether they possess the strategic foresight and political will to transform a historically cordial relationship into a full-fledged alliance capable of shaping the future of regional development, security, and youth-driven progress.

8. Conclusion

This study has explored the evolving economic and strategic relations between Türkiye and Bangladesh within the broader framework of Türkiye’s *Asia Anew Initiative*. Through a detailed examination of historical ties, cultural connections, trade and investment dynamics, defense cooperation, and recent political developments, it becomes clear that the Türkiye-Bangladesh relationship is entering a new and promising era. Historically, the foundations of this relationship were shaped by shared Islamic heritage, spiritual exchanges during the

Ottoman and Mughal periods, and mutual support during times of crisis. These early connections laid the groundwork for modern diplomatic and cultural relations, which have steadily grown since Türkiye's formal recognition of Bangladesh in 1974. The diplomatic ties though initially limited by Türkiye's Euro-Atlantic orientation and Bangladesh's internal focus have matured into a multi-sector partnership in the 21st century. The Asia Anew Initiative, launched by Türkiye in 2019, marked a strategic turning point. It encouraged a systematic and deeper engagement with Asian countries by diversifying economic partnerships, expanding diplomatic dialogue, and strengthening people-to-people connections. Bangladesh quickly emerged as one of Türkiye's key partners in South Asia under this policy shift. Shared priorities such as economic growth, youth development, regional stability, and soft power diplomacy have aligned the two nations' interests. Economically, Türkiye and Bangladesh have made significant progress in bilateral trade, investment, and industrial cooperation. Despite some fluctuations, the trade volume has consistently exceeded \$1 billion in recent years. Sectors such as textiles, infrastructure, pharmaceuticals, and defense have seen growing interest. Türkiye's investments and technological exports especially in military hardware have supported Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030, while Bangladesh's strategic location and young labor force offer Türkiye new economic opportunities in Asia. Strategically, defense cooperation has become one of the most dynamic areas in the partnership. Türkiye has become a notable defense supplier to Bangladesh, providing not only equipment but also training and technology. This has allowed Bangladesh to diversify its military procurement beyond traditional suppliers like China and Russia, while Türkiye strengthens its presence in South Asia and asserts itself as a global defense actor. Joint exercises, security dialogues, and agreements on counterterrorism and intelligence sharing show the deepening trust between the two countries. Cultural diplomacy and education have also played a central role in cementing relations. The influence of Sufism, the popularity of Turkish media in Bangladesh, student exchanges through Türkiye Scholarships, and symbolic gestures like naming roads and institutions after each other's national figures show the depth of mutual appreciation. These socio-cultural ties provide a solid foundation for long-term cooperation beyond political cycles or short-term interests. Recent political changes in Bangladesh, particularly the shift in leadership in 2024, have opened new doors for bilateral engagement. The visits of high-level Turkish delegations, participation in summits like D-8, and growing dialogue on youth, innovation, and humanitarian cooperation reflect a shared vision for the future. As Bangladesh repositions itself on the global stage, Türkiye appears ready to support and engage with the country as a reliable partner. However, challenges

remain. Regional sensitivities, particularly concerning India's response to growing Türkiye-Bangladesh defense ties, and Türkiye's own economic instability, could impact the pace of cooperation. Both countries must navigate these complexities with caution, ensuring that their partnership remains inclusive, transparent, and interest based.

The Türkiye-Bangladesh relationship represents a valuable example of 21st-century South-South cooperation. It shows how emerging middle powers can build meaningful alliances based on mutual respect, shared values, and strategic vision. For Türkiye, Bangladesh is more than a trade partner it is a gateway to deeper engagement in South Asia. For Bangladesh, Türkiye represents a model of diversified diplomacy and a source of technological and political support. Looking ahead, continued commitment, open dialogue, and institutional collaboration will be essential to transform this partnership into a long-term alliance. If managed carefully, the Türkiye-Bangladesh relationship has the potential to serve as a model for broader regional cooperation uniting Asia's diverse actors around peace, development, and shared prosperity.

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Makale tek yazarlıdır.

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