Q5(a)

China's growing footprint and a tangible shift in power dynamics in Bangladesh has weakened India's leverage in Dhaka. Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · Recent developments in Indian Foreign policy

Recent developments in Indian Foreign policy: India's position on the recent crisis in Afghanistan, Iraq and West Asia, growing relations with US and Israel; vision of a new world order.

Core demand of the question

- State the post-2024 shift in Bangladesh (Hasina's exit, interim politics, China courtship)
- **Show China's footprint:** infrastructure, defence, debt, diplomatic visits
- Show why India's leverage in Dhaka is under strain (water, trade surplus, politics of 2009-24)
- **Comment:** weakened, not erased; geography and connectivity still bind

Revision summary

India's Bangladesh leverage after 2009 was tied to Sheikh Hasina; her 2024 exit opened space for China.

Beijing's BRI projects, credit and defence courtship give Dhaka an omni-enmeshment option.

Indian delays on Teesta, a trade surplus and political optics of patronage stored grievances.

The shift weakens Delhi's privileged access but does not erase geography, power trade or transit.

A less personality-based Neighbourhood First is the repair, not a hyper-realist sulk.

Introduction

- **India's Bangladesh policy after 2009 rested on a close bet on** Sheikh Hasina**:** security cooperation against northeast insurgents, transit, power trade, and a managed border. That bet was jolted when Hasina left office in **August 2024** and an interim order under **Muhammad Yunus** began to reopen the external field. **China's growing footprint** is both cause and beneficiary of that shift. India's leverage in Dhaka has weakened. It has not vanished.

Body

The tangible shift

- **Beijing already sat in Bangladesh's infrastructure:** bridges, power plants, and **Belt and Road** credit. After 2024, political permission for a more visible China - defence conversation, extra projects, and a less embarrassed equidistance - increased. For a smaller state, **omni-enmeshment is rational: play India and China, as Nepal and Sri Lanka have. Reports of Chinese interest in dual-use facilities and of Dhaka's wish to diversify arms away from a single neighbour are the security reading. The Teesta** water file, long stalled, became a symbol of Indian delay that China offered, rhetorically, to fill with projects.

Why Indian leverage thinned

Leverage was personalised around Awami League networks and around India's role as the 1971 midwife. It under-priced **domestic anger**: jobless youth, alleged electoral closure, and the optics of Delhi as a patron. A large bilateral **trade surplus** in India's favour, occasional border killings, and CAA-NRC sensitivities among Bangladeshi Muslims were stored grievances. When the regime broke, those grievances became foreign policy. China does not carry 1971's emotional debt; it carries cash and a UN veto.

Comment

The statement is **largely right as a trend**, overstated as a verdict. India remains the market, the electricity grid partner, the transit geography to the northeast, and the cultural neighbour. Delhi still holds visas, river data, and the capacity to spoil. A hyper-realist over-reaction would push Dhaka further east. A smarter line is Neighbourhood First with less regime-personality: water-sharing, trade access, and quiet security coordination that does not look like tutelage. China's rise in the Bay is real. India's loss is **political capital**, not the map.

Flow diagram

Hasina-era bet -> Shock 2024

Shock 2024 -> China footprint

Shock 2024 -> Thinner Indian leverage

Geography grids rivers -> Residual Indian cards

Conclusion

China's opening in a post-Hasina Bangladesh has cut India's privileged access. Geography, grids and markets still give Delhi cards. Leverage is weaker because it was too personal and too slow on water and trade dignity. It is not yet a lost neighbourhood.

Facts & figures

August 2024

Sheikh Hasina left office amid mass unrest; an interim administration headed by Muhammad Yunus followed.

Teesta

Long-pending water-sharing file; a symbol of Indian delay that rivals use diplomatically.

BRI in Bangladesh

Chinese-built infrastructure and credit predated 2024; the political welcome became less constrained after the regime change.