

China-Pakistan-Bangladesh Trilateral

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China-Pakistan-Bangladesh Trilateral: Implications for India's Neighbourhood Strategy

Context

Recently, **China hosted the first-ever trilateral meeting with Pakistan and Bangladesh in Kunming, China.**

This development highlights China's growing efforts to reshape South Asian geopolitics by **forging alliances with India's neighbours** and isolating New Delhi from regional affairs.

What is the China-led Trilateral Nexus?

- This trilateral initiative is part of China's larger **geo-strategic plan to encircle India** by forming close partnerships with its neighbouring countries like **Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.**
 - **Objective:** To **weaken India's geopolitical and economic influence** in the region and increase China's control and presence.
 - **Strategy:** Using diplomatic and economic tools to create **alternative regional groupings** that **exclude India.**
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Historical Attempts to Isolate India

- **1965 Strategy:** Pakistan proposed using **East Pakistan, Nepal, and China** to cut off India from the strategic **Siliguri Corridor.**
- **1962 War Legacy:**

- The **India-China war** altered regional alignments.
 - Post-war, China viewed **Pakistan as a strategic partner** to divert India's attention from Beijing's interests.
 - Pakistan, in return, saw China as a source of **unconditional military and economic support**.
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Current China-Pakistan Military and Economic Nexus

- **Debt Dependency:** As of **end-2024**, Pakistan owes China **over \$29 billion** in loans.
 - **Military Imports:** **More than 80%** of Pakistan's arms imports come from China.
 - **Chinese Military Support:** Pakistan deploys **Chinese-made drones, radars, guidance systems, missiles, and fighter jets**.
 - **Terrorism Shield:** China has **consistently blocked efforts** at the UN Security Council to sanction **Pakistan-backed terrorists**.
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Recent Trilateral Engagements by China

- **Bangladesh Trilateral:** Discussions focused on enhancing **economic and strategic cooperation**.
 - **Afghanistan Trilateral (May 2025):** Aimed at **extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** and increasing regional connectivity.
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Regional Political Climate

- **India's Ties with Afghanistan** are strengthening, while **Pakistan's relevance is diminishing**.
- **India-Bangladesh relations** have recently been strained, creating **space for Chinese influence**.

- These trilaterals are attempts to:
 - **Reinstate Pakistan's role** in regional diplomacy.
 - Keep **India engaged with local security concerns**.
 - Promote **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** interests.
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Why is China Reinitiating the Trilateral Nexus Now?

- **India's Assertive Posture:**

- India has responded firmly to **terror attacks** in **Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), and Pahalgam**.
- After Pahalgam, India:
 - **Suspended Indus Waters Treaty**
 - **Restricted trade and port access**
 - **Targeted Pakistan's military infrastructure**

- **Diplomatic Prowess:**

- India used its global influence to **diplomatically isolate Pakistan**.
- Strong responses in **Doklam and Galwan** surprised China.

- **Growing Global Standing:** India is now seen as a **rising power**, prompting China to create **strategic distractions**.

- **China's Declining Influence:** Due to India's regional engagement, China's **momentum in South Asia** has slowed down.

Improving Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations

- Following **regime change in Bangladesh**, ties with Pakistan have warmed.
- **Key Developments:**
 - **Bangladeshi Navy** participated in **Aman 2025** naval exercise in **Karachi** after **12 years**.
 - For the **first time since 1971**, the two countries **resumed direct trade** in **March 2025**.

Current Geopolitical Trends in South Asia

- **Maldives:** Despite anti-India rhetoric by President **Muizzu**, China is cautious due to the country's **economic instability**.
- **Nepal:** Although part of BRI, there are **funding disagreements** and **slow project progress**.
- **Sri Lanka:** President **Anura Kumara Dissanayake** is maintaining **close ties with India**.
- **Bangladesh-Nepal-India Energy Cooperation** continues despite political differences, showing India's **mature regional approach**.

Implications of the Trilateral Nexus

- **Security Threats:** The China-Pakistan-Bangladesh axis may **escalate terrorism and cross-border tensions**.
- **Undermining India's Influence:**
 - China's moves may **reduce India's strategic leverage** with its neighbours.

- Pakistan could regain **regional significance** with Chinese backing.
 - **Opportunity for China:** A **preoccupied India** allows China to push **BRI projects, economic control, and infrastructure development**.
 - **Challenges India's Anti-Terror Strategy:** These groupings may **counter India's efforts to build a unified front against terrorism**.
 - **Shift in South Asian Balance:** Countries may be forced to **balance between China and India**, leading to **strategic confusion**.
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What Lies Ahead for India?

- China's increasing role, not Pakistan, is India's **primary strategic challenge** in South Asia.
 - **India's Options:**
 - Strengthen **bilateral diplomacy** with neighbours like **Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka**.
 - Enhance regional cooperation via platforms like **SAARC** and **BIMSTEC**.
 - **Clearly communicate redlines** to neighbours regarding security and territorial concerns.
 - Promote **economic integration and connectivity projects** led by India.
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Conclusion

China's trilateral diplomacy is aimed at **reshaping South Asia's political order** and **marginalising India's influence**.

India must respond through **assertive diplomacy, economic partnerships, and strategic clarity** to safeguard its interests and maintain **regional stability**.