

# NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY OF BANGLADESH

Safeguarding Sovereignty in an Era of  
Complex Threats



Professor M A Rashid, PhD



**SIPG**

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For many years, Bangladesh had relied on scattered plans and ad hoc actions to protect its sovereignty and address internal threats. Security was often viewed solely in military terms, focusing on readiness and border control. Other important areas, like the economy, technology, and climate risks, were often ignored.

This changed in the turbulent summer of 2024. After the July Revolution, questions of legitimacy, stability, and survival became urgent. Dhaka then took a major step: It began to prepare its first National Security Strategy (NSS).

This was not just any routine paperwork. It was a turning point in the country's statecraft. The government recognized that security could not remain a loose collection of ministries and short-term fixes. It had to be built as a clear long-term vision. The new National Security Policy (NSP) now works as Bangladesh's guiding framework. It sets the course for protecting sovereignty, maintaining stability, and supporting economic growth in an increasingly hostile and uncertain world.

## **1 Core Objectives of the National Security Policy**

The main goal of Bangladesh's National Security Policy is to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. For Bangladesh, which won

independence through struggle, sovereignty is not just an idea. It is a lived reality. It reminds the nation that the right to make decisions without foreign control must never be compromised.

Protecting sovereignty means keeping the judiciary, the law, and the administration independent. It also means that the state must have full control over its own affairs. Any attempt, direct or indirect, to weaken Bangladesh's ability to decide its national or international agenda must be resisted.

Another core objective is to protect territorial integrity. Bangladesh's borders, land, sea, and air, are not only lines on a map. They represent the nation's survival. Guarding them requires constant vigilance against disputes, smuggling, and infiltration. It also requires securing maritime boundaries and the sea lanes that connect Bangladesh to global trade and energy supplies.

To achieve these goals, the state must combine strength with strategy. The armed forces, together with the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Coast Guard, provide the hard shield of defense. But security also depends on diplomacy, which can reduce tensions and build international support before conflicts escalate.

Intelligence systems and modern technologies serve as the eyes and ears of the state. Development of roads, ports, and services in border regions

strengthens control and brings stability. Local communities also play a role since their engagement ties security to daily life.

Above all, the stability of the state, political, social, and economic, is the foundation of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Without stability, defense and diplomacy cannot prevail.

## **2 Combating Terrorism in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)**

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) include three districts: Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban. This is one of Bangladesh's most complex and important frontier regions. Despite being rich in natural beauty and resources, the area has faced decades of tension and violence. Historical divisions, armed conflicts, and separatist groups have left deep scars in the region.

The CHT lies close to sensitive borders with India and Myanmar. This makes it not only a domestic security issue but also a regional one. What happens in the hills can affect the relations with the neighboring countries.

For many years, the CHT has been fraught with the struggles of marginalized communities. Grievances over land, governance, and rights have often fueled unrest. These problems remain unresolved, and they continue to create instability.



Because of this, the government now treats countering terrorism and restoring peace in the CHT as a top priority in its national security policy.

## **2.1 Major Challenges**

### **2.1.1 Separatist Armed Groups**

One of the biggest challenges in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is the presence of separatist armed groups. These groups have roots in the region's long history of conflict and exclusion. For generations, the communities in remote hill areas have faced unresolved disputes over land and limited political representation.

Underdevelopment and economic neglect have made the situation worse. Many residents feel being ignored or disconnected from the central government. On top of this, there are repeated allegations that some separatist groups receive covert support from across the border. This has encouraged militant factions and turned local discontent into armed resistance.

The impact has been severe. Clashes between insurgents and security forces continue. Civilians are often caught in the middle, facing extortion, threats, and violence. This creates fear and insecurity in daily life. Development projects, which could improve the region's economy, are often blocked or delayed. As a result, investors lose confidence in investing, and economic growth

slows down. Law and order have weakened, while accusations of foreign involvement have created friction between Bangladesh and its neighbors.

To deal with this cycle, the state has used both hard and soft measures. For security, intelligence networks and border surveillance have been strengthened to stop external support. Security forces have carried out targeted operations to dismantle insurgent bases. At the same time, development programs have been launched to improve education, jobs, and infrastructure, addressing the root causes of frustration.

The government has also tried continuing political dialogue and negotiation to bring all groups into the mainstream discussion at the national level. Confidence-building steps such as fairer governance, inclusion, and reconciliation platforms have been introduced. These measures aim to build trust and create a foundation for long-term peace.

### **2.1.2 Arms and Ammunition Smuggling**

Another serious threat to stability in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) comes from the constant flow of arms and ammunition across the open borders with India and Myanmar. The region's hilly and forested terrain makes surveillance very difficult. This gives cover to cross-border criminal networks that are already well organized. These groups traffic

weapons and narcotics with little fear of being caught.

Weak coordination between law enforcement agencies in the region makes the problem worse. A lack of modern surveillance tools also allows smugglers to move freely. The demand for weapons remains high. Separatist groups, terrorist organizations, and even local gangs buy arms from these networks. Corruption and sometimes direct involvement of local actors at the border points further enable trade of ammunitions.

The effects of this unchecked arms trafficking are dangerous. Extremist groups get a steady supply of weapons and money, which strengthens their ability to carry out attacks. Violence continues, and civilians, especially those living in border areas, face greater risks of death, injury, and displacement. The state's authority is weakened when law enforcement loses credibility due to corruption and inefficiency.

The narcotics that move alongside weapons also create wider problems. Addiction spreads in local communities, fueling social breakdowns. At the same time, disputes over border control and accusations of inaction or collusion strain Bangladesh's relations with its neighbors.

To fight these threats, the government has taken a multi-layered approach. Stronger physical infrastructure, including fencing, watchtowers,

drones, and modern monitoring systems, has been built along the borders. Joint patrols and intelligence-sharing with India and Myanmar have been expanded. Special operations target smuggling groups and their networks.

Because corruption plays a major role in the problem, anti-graft campaigns have been launched to reduce collusion at the local level. Rehabilitation programs also aim to cut domestic demand for narcotics and illegal arms, giving vulnerable communities other options for survival.

On a wider level, Bangladesh continues to take part in regional security talks. The goal of such participation is to treat arms trafficking as a shared South Asian problem that requires joint action. By building trust and cooperation with neighbors, Bangladesh hopes to stop these networks and bring greater stability to the CHT.

### **2.1.3 Extortion and Terror Financing**

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the fight against militancy is not only about armed clashes. It also takes place in the hidden world of terror financing. Militants and separatist groups rely heavily on extortion as a steady source of money. They take advantage of the weak presence of the state in remote areas.

Local businesses and development projects are often forced to pay. Many comply out of fear, since reporting can bring retaliation. Weaknesses in

Bangladesh's financial monitoring systems allow these illegal money flows to continue without being noticed. Corruption and, at times, collusion at the local level make the problem even worse, giving militants more control over the regional economy.

The results of this underground economy go far beyond CHT. Extortion creates fear, which discourages entrepreneurs and drives away investors. Growth slows down, and development funds meant for welfare or infrastructure projects are often stolen or misused. Each payment to insurgents weakens the authority of law enforcement, deepens mistrust between the people and the state, and strengthens a shadow economy that harms both local governance and national security.

The government has recognized how serious this threat is. It has taken steps that combine financial control with protection for communities. Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) now monitor suspicious transactions. Legal tools such as asset freezing and prosecution are being used to target groups involved in terror financing.

Special security units and hotline reporting systems are being developed to protect businesses and contractors under threat. At the community level, policing initiatives and awareness campaigns aim

to reduce fear. These efforts encourage citizens to resist extortion and work with law enforcement.

Finally, stronger coordination between security forces, banks, and regulators is the key. By working together, they can shut down illegal financial networks and cut off the funds that sustain militancy.

#### **2.1.4 Demographic Imbalance and Trust Deficit**

Beyond insurgency and financing, one of the most serious and long-lasting problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is the deep divide between communities. For decades, migration and settlement patterns have changed the region's population balance. This increased competition for land, natural resources, and jobs.

These changes made old grievances worse. Armed conflicts, displacement, and broken promises left many residents with little political representation. Some felt ignored in decision-making. Differences in language and culture added to this sense of exclusion, strengthening the belief that the state does not understand or respect the region's diversity.

The results of this demographic change are clear in the fragile social fabric of the CHT. Mistrust between groups has not gone away. It often leads to clashes that break down peace. Past peace accords and reconciliation efforts have weakened

because the root grievances had never been fully addressed. This division has slowed development and made governance harder in the region.

For insurgent and extremist groups, these divisions create opportunities to create nuisance in the area. They use mistrust to recruit, radicalize, and spread conflict. This cycle of instability harms everyone and benefits no one.

To rebuild trust, the state has tried to combine security measures with justice and inclusion. Fair systems for solving land disputes are essential since land is one of the most sensitive issues in the region. Providing stronger political representation allows all voices to be heard in policy decisions.

Social and economic programs, such as better access to education, healthcare, and jobs, help reduce inequality. Recognizing local traditions and promoting inclusive governance also show respect for identity and participation.

Confidence-building measures are equally important to establish peace in the area. Dialogue platforms, joint community projects, and reconciliation efforts can bring divided groups together. These steps are needed to repair relationships and build a foundation for lasting peace in the CHT region.

### **3.1 Economic Security Means**

#### **3.1.1 Stability of Economic Institutions and Sectors**

Bangladesh's economy has made great progress in recent decades, but it also faces vulnerabilities on many sides. Terrorist groups, insurgents, and organized crime networks can target financial and industrial systems aiming not just to cause damage but to undermine confidence. Cyberattacks on banks, stock exchanges, and trade systems are becoming more common threatening both domestic stability and international reputation. Weak regulation and political uncertainty can discourage foreign investment while corruption erodes public trust. Because the economy is interconnected, disruption in one area can ripple outward. A shock in energy supply, for example, can slow factories, which in turn affects exports, employment, and growth.

The main goal is to keep these institutions secure and functioning under all conditions. Banks, industries, energy systems, and trade networks must be safeguarded not only from bomb attacks or sabotage but also from hackers, fraud, and systemic failures. The expectation is not achieving perfection but resilience as no system is invulnerable. Essential services must keep running during crises whether those crises come from violence, natural disaster, or global market



turbulence. Public trust and investor confidence are the pillars that allow an economy to grow, and both depend on visible measures of protection. Economic security, therefore, should not be seen as separate from national security. It is part of the same whole.

If these measures succeed, the impact will be felt widely. Banks and trade systems will be more resistant to shocks, industries will continue producing in times of stress, and citizens will have greater faith that their savings and livelihoods are protected. Growth can continue even in uncertain times, supported by stronger confidence in the state's ability to manage crises. Security agencies and regulators will be able to work more closely, making responses to threats faster and more effectively.

To get there, Bangladesh must adopt a set of clear measures. Cybersecurity and physical safeguards must be applied across every major sector, from banking to energy. Regular risk assessments should be conducted, and contingency plans need to be prepared for worst-case scenarios. Regulatory agencies must be empowered with stronger oversight and better coordination, since fragmented responses only deepen risk. Partnerships with the private sector are critical as businesses themselves play a frontline role in resilience. Strategies must be updated regularly to

reflect changing risks. Beyond institutional reforms, the country must also protect its trade routes, foreign investments, and reserves. Securing energy and food supplies is vital, as shortages can trigger unrest. Finally, addressing unemployment, poverty, and inequality is more than social policy, it is also a matter of national security, since economic frustration often fuels instability.

### **3.1.2 Infrastructure Protection**

Just as economic institutions form the financial backbone of Bangladesh, critical infrastructure forms the physical one. The country's airports, seaports, railways, and highways connect people and goods across the nation and to the world. Power plants, dams, and telecommunication networks keep the society running, while bridges and pipelines link industries to markets. Yet these systems face multiple threats. Terrorists may seek to bomb a power station or airport. Insurgents may sabotage rail lines or disrupt supply chains. Cyberattacks can disable ICT networks or shut down electricity grids. On top of human threats, natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, earthquakes pose a constant danger in a country as geographically exposed as Bangladesh. Even industrial accidents can spark chain reactions when the infrastructure is fragile.

Because these networks are deeply interconnected, failure in one area can quickly spread to other

areas. A disruption in electricity may halt factories, disable hospitals, and black out communications. An attack on a major port could block trade, slow exports, and reduce revenue. Infrastructure security is, therefore, not a luxury but a precondition for both economic and national security.

The goal is to make these systems secure and resilient. Airports, seaports, railways, and highways must be safeguarded against attack and disruption. Energy plants, dams, and bridges must be maintained to withstand both sabotage and natural hazards. ICT and telecom networks require both physical and cyber protection. The state cannot prevent every incident, but it must ensure that essential services continue, even in times of crisis. A strong infrastructure base reassures citizens that their safety is protected and assures investors and partners that the country is a stable place to do business.

If protection improves, vulnerabilities will shrink. Preparedness for disasters will be stronger, and recovery will be faster. Even under stress, critical services will continue to function. Citizens will feel more secure knowing that the state is not only protecting borders but also safeguarding the very systems that support daily life.

Achieving this requires several steps. Regular risk assessments and audits are necessary to spot

weaknesses before they are exploited. Cybersecurity and physical security must be strengthened across all infrastructure sectors. Contingency plans for accidents, disasters, or attacks should be ready and rehearsed. Cooperation between government agencies and private companies is vital, since much of the infrastructure is run by private operators. Investment in technology such as early warning systems, surveillance, and rapid-response units will make the country more resilient. Training for personnel, from engineers to emergency responders, ensures that when a threat emerges, a quick and coordinated response is sure to occur.

#### **4 Food Security**

In Bangladesh, food security is not just about feeding people. It is about protecting stability, sovereignty, and the essential fabric of the nation. When citizens go hungry, or when food prices rise beyond their reach, the consequences ripple far beyond kitchens and markets. Hunger sparks protests, stirs resentment, and destabilizes governments. Rising inequality in access to food deepens divisions between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, the center and the periphery. These pressures cannot be contained by soldiers on the streets or the police in the alleys. They are pressures that erode trust in the state

itself. For this reason, food security is woven directly into Bangladesh's national security strategy. It is treated not as a peripheral issue of welfare but as a core pillar of resilience and sovereignty.

Food insecurity has a direct impact on political stability. Bangladesh's history shows that shortages or sudden price spikes often trigger protests, strikes, or even violent unrest. Crowds gather in markets and streets, demanding relief or accountability, and these dissatisfactions quickly weaken confidence in the government. A breakdown in food supply does more than just cause hunger, it undermines the legitimacy of the state, creating opportunities for extremist or criminal groups to exploit grievances. In such times, public anger can be manipulated, making the society more vulnerable to radicalization and unrest. Protecting access to food, therefore, is not only a humanitarian duty but a security imperative that keeps peace on the streets and order in the institutions of governance.

Food security is also inseparable from economic security. Agriculture remains the backbone of Bangladesh's economy, employing nearly half of the labor force and sustaining millions of rural families. The fields of rice and jute, the fisheries and livestock farms, are not just sources of food but engines of growth. When floods wash away crops,

when droughts parch the soil, or when global markets turn unstable, the shock is felt across the nation. Rural households lose income, unemployment rises, and growth slows down. To fill the gaps, the state often turns to imports, but this dependence carries its own risks such as higher costs, exposure to global price swings, and vulnerability to trade restrictions. A weak food system, in short, makes the entire economy fragile, while a resilient one underpins economic stability and growth.

Beyond economic benefits, food security touches the question of social cohesion. When one region suffers hunger while another has plenty, resentment grows. When urban populations can afford rice and vegetables, but rural families cannot, the sense of inequality sharpens. Unequal access to food fuels divisions between regions and classes, eroding unity and solidarity in the society. Conversely, a fair and reliable food system strengthens bonds across society, reinforcing the sense that the state cares for all its citizens. In this way, food security is not only about survival, but also about justice and cohesion, values that hold a nation together.

Bangladesh's vulnerability to disasters adds another layer of complexity. The country lies in the path of cyclones, monsoons, and river erosion, each capable of disrupting food production and supply chains. Flooded fields, broken roads, and

displaced communities leave markets empty and households desperate. Without preparation, these aftermaths of natural disasters quickly become humanitarian crises. But with climate-resilient farming, sustainable agricultural practices, and strong reserves of grain, the state can cushion the blow. Building resilience means that even when nature strikes, people do not starve and the economy does not collapse. Disaster management and food security are, therefore, two sides of the same coin.

Food security also has profound implications for health and productivity. Malnutrition robs individuals of physical strength and weakens mental capacity. It leaves children stunted, workers less productive, and students unable to learn at their full potential. A hungry population cannot power an economy or defend a nation. By contrast, access to nutritious food produces stronger citizens, healthier families, and a more resilient workforce. Nutrition, in this sense, is not only about individual well-being, it is a form of collective strength that underpins national capacity.

Finally, food security protects strategic autonomy. Heavy reliance on imports leaves Bangladesh exposed to external pressures. Export bans, shipping delays, or sudden price surges in global markets can destabilize domestic food supplies and restrict Dhaka's freedom to act. A country that

cannot feed its people risks losing sovereignty being forced to adjust its policies to the interests of suppliers. By investing in greater self-sufficiency, Bangladesh strengthens its independence. It ensures that even in times of global crisis, the nation retains control over its most basic resource, which is food.

In the end, food security synonymizes national security. A country that keeps its people fed keeps its society stable, its economy steady, and its sovereignty intact. Reliable access to affordable and nutritious food is a shield just as vital as borders, alliances, or weapons. It protects Bangladesh from unrest within, from pressure abroad, and from the long shadows of hunger and inequality. Ensuring food security is not only an economic or social policy, it is a defense strategy that sustains the nation itself.

## **5 Health Security as an Integral Part of National Security**

Health is not only a social concern but a core element of national security. The well-being of a population directly shapes economic growth, social stability, and the country's ability to withstand crises. A nation with widespread illness, weak healthcare systems, or recurring epidemics is one that risks economic slowdown, political unrest, and vulnerability to external pressure. For Bangladesh,



with its high population density, frequent disease outbreaks, and recurring public health challenges, the link between health and security is especially clear. Ensuring health security is not just about employing hospitals and doctors, it is about protecting sovereignty, strengthening resilience, and safeguarding the very stability of the state.

Health security means protecting people from epidemics, pandemics, malnutrition, and other health threats that can destabilize the society. Poor public health reduces workforce productivity, drives up costs, and can trigger unrest when hospitals fail, or essential medicines run short. By contrast, a healthy and well-nourished population fuels growth, sustains development, and responds more effectively to emergencies. Citizens who trust that the state can protect their health also trust the state. This makes public health a foundation of political legitimacy. For these reasons, health security is treated as a vital component of Bangladesh's National Security Policy.

One key dimension of health security is disease prevention and control. Bangladesh is vulnerable to infectious diseases such as dengue, cholera, tuberculosis, and influenza, which can spread quickly in crowded urban areas. Outbreaks that go unchecked overwhelm hospitals, reduce productivity, and spark fear or panic. The COVID-19 pandemic provides a stark reminder of how

health crises can disrupt every part of life, from schools and workplaces to trade and governance. Strong disease surveillance systems, regular vaccination programs, and rapid-response teams are, therefore, critical. The ability to detect and contain outbreaks early not only saves lives but also prevents broader economic and social instability.

A second dimension is healthcare infrastructure. Hospitals, clinics, and medical supply chains must be robust, well-equipped, and accessible to both urban and rural populations. Weak systems lead to delayed treatment, higher mortality, and frustration that can turn into public anger during crises. Overcrowded hospitals and shortages of basic medicines undermine trust in the state, leaving room for unrest. By strengthening healthcare infrastructure, through investment in equipment, training of medical staff, and reliable supply chains, Bangladesh not only improves everyday medical services but also builds capacity to handle emergencies such as epidemics, natural disasters, or industrial accidents. Reliable healthcare infrastructure is, thus, both a social service and a security shield.

The third dimension involves nutrition and public health. Malnutrition continues to affect millions in Bangladesh, particularly children and vulnerable groups. Poor nutrition weakens immune systems,

reduces learning capacity, and limits workforce productivity. A poorly nourished population cannot drive economic growth or contribute fully to national development. By contrast, a well-nourished population is healthier, more productive, and more resilient in times of crisis. Public health campaigns on hygiene, disease prevention, and maternal and child health as well as national nutrition programs reduce long-term vulnerabilities. Addressing malnutrition and preventive care is, therefore, not only a health policy but also a national security measure since it strengthens the human capital on which the country's future depends.

Another critical aspect is emergency preparedness. Pandemics, natural disasters, industrial accidents, and even bioterrorism, have the potential to severely disrupt the society. Without preparation, such crises can quickly spiral into chaos. Rapid-response teams trained in early warning systems and tested contingency plans are essential. Preparedness ensures that hospitals are ready, medicines and protective equipment are available, and communication systems can guide the public calmly and effectively. Effective preparedness not only saves lives but also maintains social order, protects confidence in government institutions, and ensures that essential services continue to function during emergencies.

Together, these elements demonstrate that health security is inseparable from national security. A healthy nation is a stronger nation, economically, socially, and politically. By preventing disease, strengthening healthcare systems, improving nutrition, and preparing for emergencies, Bangladesh can protect its people, sustain development, and remain stable in the face of both internal and external challenges. The lesson is clear: Security does not come only from military strength. It comes also from the health of the population, which forms the foundation of resilience and the heart of national power.

## **6 Bangladesh's Energy Security**

Energy is the fuel that drives Bangladesh's development, powering homes, industries, transport, and the digital networks on which modern life depends. Demand has been rising steadily for decades, pushed upward by population growth, rapid urbanization, and expanding industrial production. Every new factory, town, and digital service adds to the load on an already stressed system. At the same time, Bangladesh relies heavily on imported fuels, particularly oil, gas, and coal. This dependence leaves the country vulnerable to global price shocks, geopolitical disputes, and disruptions in international supply chains. When prices spike in world markets, or

when exporters impose restrictions, Bangladesh feels the effects immediately. Energy insecurity, in short, is not just an economic problem, but a direct threat to stability, sovereignty, and security.

The risks extend beyond market dependence. Energy infrastructure itself, including power plants, pipelines, refineries, and transmission networks, faces threats ranging from terrorism and sabotage to cyberattacks and accidents. A single disruption can halt electricity for millions, shut down factories, or block critical services like hospitals and transport systems. Limited diversification of energy sources makes the problem worse. If one system fails, there are few alternatives to pick up the slack. For a country that aspires to middle-income status and industrial competitiveness, such vulnerabilities are unacceptable. Energy insecurity left unchecked would slow growth, undermine investor confidence, and create fertile ground for social unrest.

The objective is, therefore, to build an energy system that is reliable, sustainable, and affordable. Energy supply must be not only steady enough to support industry and economic growth, but also resilient enough to withstand shocks. Diversification is the key. By expanding renewable sources such as solar, wind, and hydro resources, and by boosting domestic production of natural gas

and other resources, Bangladesh can reduce dependence on imports. At the same time, protecting critical infrastructure, both physically and digitally, is essential. Power stations must be shielded against sabotage, pipelines against theft and damage, and grids against cyber intrusion. Import security and strategic reserves form another pillar, ensuring that the country can ride out sudden shortages or spikes in international prices. Together, these measures create not only a more stable system but also a more sovereign one, less exposed to external manipulation or crises.

If these goals are achieved, Bangladesh will enjoy a stable and continuous energy supply that supports its long-term growth. Dependence on a single source will diminish, spreading risk across a diversified energy portfolio. Infrastructure will be better protected, reducing the danger of disruption from accidents, attacks, or disasters. And with strategic reserves in place, the nation will be able to cushion itself against external shocks, whether they come from global markets or regional politics. Perhaps most importantly, an improved national planning will give Bangladesh a sustainable energy strategy that balances growth with resilience, supporting the country's vision of becoming a modern, knowledge-based economy.

Several measures can help reach this point. First, investment in renewable resources must be scaled

up, with solar and wind energy developed as mainstream fuel sources of the national grid. Domestic production of natural gas and other resources should be expanded, supported by technology and exploration partnerships. Second, strategic reserves of fuel need to be built, with storage facilities capable of holding supplies that can stabilize the market during crises. Long-term fuel supply agreements with reliable international partners can provide an additional safety measure. Third, infrastructure must be protected. Physical security around power plants, refineries, and pipelines should be tightened, while digital defenses against cyberattacks must be constantly updated. Fourth, energy efficiency programs can reduce waste and lower demand stretching limited resources further. Households, industries, and transport systems all need incentives and technologies to use energy more efficiently. Finally, Bangladesh must strengthen regional and international cooperation, working with neighbors and partners to share technology, knowledge, and investment. Energy security, after all, is not just a domestic challenge but a global one.

In sum, energy security is equivalent to national security. Without reliable power, factories cannot run, hospitals cannot operate, and digital systems cannot function. By diversifying its sources, protecting its infrastructure, and preparing for external shocks, Bangladesh can secure the energy

it needs to fuel growth, sustain stability, and safeguard sovereignty in the decades ahead.

## **7 Industrial Security**

For Bangladesh, industry is not just an economic driver, it is a pillar of national security. Millions of citizens depend directly on industrial jobs, and millions more benefit indirectly from the wages, exports, and supply chains that the sector sustains. The garment and textile industries, in particular, provide the bulk of foreign exchange, forming the backbone of Bangladesh's integration into the global economy. But this heavy dependence also creates risk. If industries are disrupted, whether through labor unrest, cyberattacks, accidents, or deliberate sabotage, the impact spreads quickly and widely. Factories may halt production, export earnings may shrink, and supply chains may collapse. In turn, the economy weakens, social tensions rise, and the country's standing in international trade is put at risk. Protecting industrial infrastructure, supply chains, and intellectual property is therefore not only an economic necessity but a matter of political stability and national survival.

Industrial security in Bangladesh has several dimensions, each tied closely to wider national interests. The first and most visible is economic stability. Garments and textiles remain the flagship



of Bangladesh's export economy, employing millions of workers and earning billions in foreign exchange. Any disruption in these sectors, whether caused by prolonged strikes, global market shocks, or the breakdown of supply chains, has immediate consequences for the national balance of payments. Export earnings fund food imports, energy supplies, and critical infrastructure projects. Without them, the economy loses resilience and becomes more vulnerable to external pressure. Stability in industry, therefore, directly translates into stability in the economy.

Another core dimension is labor security. The workforce is the heart of industrial production, and its protection is vital for both ethical and practical reasons. When labor rights are ignored as wages are withheld, safety standards are neglected, or workers are treated unjustly, unrest follows. Strikes, protests, and demonstrations disrupt production, while tragic accidents weaken both national morale and international reputation. The Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, which killed more than a thousand workers, remains a stark reminder of how unsafe conditions can devastate lives and undermine the entire sector. Ensuring safe working environments, fair wages, and social protection is, therefore, not only a moral responsibility but a strategic necessity for ensuring secure industrial growth. Protecting workers ensures steady production, strengthens social stability, and

preserves Bangladesh's global reputation as a reliable industrial hub.

A third pillar is critical infrastructure, which underpins the entire industrial ecosystem. Power plants, ports, highways, bridges, and special economic zones are the lifelines of industrial growth. If these are damaged by sabotage, natural disaster, or cyberattack, production halts and supply chains collapse. A breakdown in the port of Chattogram, for example, would cripple exports and paralyze imports creating economic shockwaves across the country. Similarly, a cyberattack on an industrial zone could shut down factories for days or weeks leading to massive losses. Protecting infrastructure, therefore, requires constant vigilance, from upgrading cybersecurity defenses to investing in disaster-proof construction and maintaining physical security at key sites. Without secure infrastructure, industries cannot operate, and without industries, the economy falters.

Finally, foreign investment depends heavily on perceptions of industrial security. Investors look for stability, predictability, and protection for their assets. A country with frequent labor unrest, fragile infrastructure, or high exposure to sabotage and cybercrime will struggle to attract long-term foreign direct investment (FDI). On the other hand, a stable and well-protected industrial environment

builds trust and encourages inflows of capital. Such investment brings not only money but also technology, training, and jobs. Strong protections against industrial disruptions, therefore, serve two purposes: They reduce dependence on external actors by strengthening the domestic economy, and they also bring in the resources needed to modernize and expand. In this way, industrial security supports both immediate resilience and long-term growth.

In short, industrial security is national security. A country that safeguards its industries, protects its workers, secures its infrastructure, and fosters investor confidence does more than defend factories as it defends its sovereignty. By ensuring that production continues smoothly, exports remain strong, and workers are safe, Bangladesh strengthens social stability, sustains political legitimacy, and secures its strategic independence. Factories, warehouses, and economic zones are, thus, not only sites of commerce, they are part of the frontline defense mechanisms in national security.

## **8 Maritime Security and Protection of the Blue Economy**

Bangladesh is not only a land of rivers but also a nation of seas. Following the rulings of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and

the International Court of Justice, Dhaka now exercises sovereign rights over a maritime zone of about 118,813 square kilometers. This vast space, larger than many countries in its own right, is known as the Blue Economy. It represents a frontier of opportunity offering enormous potential in fisheries, offshore energy, trade, and even tourism. The seas are Bangladesh's new horizon, a domain that could fuel development for decades to come. But this maritime wealth also attracts threats as illegal fishing fleets plunder resources, smugglers and traffickers exploit porous waters, pirates and armed groups challenge safety at sea, and unregulated extraction risks damaging fragile marine ecosystems. Even more concerning, Bangladesh's limited capacity for surveillance and enforcement makes it difficult to monitor such a vast domain effectively.

The challenge, therefore, is twofold: securing the seas and using them responsibly. Fisheries, offshore energy, and shipping lanes are strategic assets that must be defended from illegal exploitation, sabotage, or environmental harm. At the same time, Bangladesh must ensure that its use of these resources is sustainable so that any short-term gain does not destroy long-term prosperity. Maritime domain awareness, or knowing what is happening at sea in real time, is critical. Without reliable monitoring, illegal activities accelerate, resources are lost, and sovereignty is weakened.

For this reason, the National Security Policy ties the development of the Blue Economy directly to maritime security making it clear that growth and protection must advance together.

If these priorities are met, the benefits will be widely varied. Illegal fishing and smuggling will decline, giving fishermen and local communities more secure livelihoods. Offshore energy and mineral resources will be developed safely, supporting industry and national growth. Shipping routes, vital for trade and foreign exchange, will be better protected against piracy and criminal networks. Environmental safeguards will ensure that the marine environment is not destroyed by reckless exploitation allowing future generations to benefit. Most importantly, Bangladesh will gain confidence in its maritime governance, demonstrating sovereignty not only on land but also across its seas.

To reach this goal, several key steps are needed. Naval and coast guard patrols must be expanded ensuring that presence is visible across the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This requires both manpower and technology. Modern surveillance systems such as coastal radars, drones, and satellite monitoring can provide the “eyes” to cover areas where ships cannot always reach. Better coordination is also vital. Agencies responsible for defense, law enforcement,

fisheries, and maritime affairs must work together rather than in isolation. Clear rules and transparent regulations are needed to govern how resources are used, ensuring that development is managed responsibly. Regional cooperation adds another layer: Maritime threats often cross borders, and only collective action can address piracy, trafficking, and illegal fishing that move from one country's waters to another. Finally, investment in research, training, and technology will allow Bangladesh to build long-term capacity, equipping future generations to manage and defend their seas effectively.

### **8.1 Key Measures for Maritime Security and the Blue Economy**

Protecting maritime sovereignty is the first and most fundamental measure for protecting the Blue Economy. The sea is an extension of the homeland, and it must be guarded with the same seriousness as land borders. Regular patrols, backed by advanced surveillance, are needed to defend the EEZ and territorial waters in Bangladesh. Bangladesh must also continue to assert its legal rights under international law, ensuring that its maritime claims are respected and enforced.

The second measure is ensuring security and responsible management of the Blue Economy. Fisheries, offshore energy, shipping lanes, and marine biodiversity are not only economic

resources but also national security assets for Bangladesh. Protecting them from illegal exploitation while managing them sustainably is essential. Overfishing, unregulated drilling, or unchecked pollution would undermine long-term growth for the country. Bangladesh must strike a balance allowing development while preserving ecological stability.

The third measure is combating smuggling, trafficking, and piracy at sea. These threats drain resources, destabilize trade routes, and empower criminal networks that can link to terrorism or insurgency on land. Expanding naval and coast guard operations is necessary, but technology is equally important to ensure maritime security. Intelligence-sharing, satellite tracking, and coastal monitoring can allow the Bangladeshi authorities to act before small threats grow into large crises.

Finally, enhancing regional and international cooperation is indispensable. The Bay of Bengal is not solely a Bangladeshi marine territory, —it is shared with India, Myanmar, and routes connecting to the wider Indo-Pacific. Maritime crime is transnational, and so it requires a coordinated response. Bangladesh should continue to work with neighbors through forums such as BIMSTEC and IORA, and deepen cooperation with global partners through joint patrols, training exercises, and intelligence exchanges. By doing so, it can

strengthen collective defense, making regional waters safer for commerce, development, and shared security.

In short, maritime security is no longer a narrow naval concern, but it is a matter of national security. The seas are Bangladesh's next frontier, providing a source of prosperity as well as a domain of risk. By protecting sovereignty, managing resources sustainably, fighting crime, and building international partnerships, Bangladesh can transform its Blue Economy into a shield of resilience and a pillar of growth.

## **9 Strengthening Capacity for Climate Change and Disaster Management**

Few countries in the world live with climate risk as constantly and as heavily as Bangladesh. Its flat deltaic geography, dense population, and long coastline along the Bay of Bengal make it one of the most vulnerable nations on the planet. Cyclones from the sea devastate the lands, floods inundate riverbanks, droughts parch farmlands, and river erosions steadily devour villages and croplands. Rising sea levels add to these natural disasters as another slow but relentless threat, endangering millions who live in coastal regions. Climate change has made these hazards more frequent, more severe, and less predictable. Where once storms used to occur seasonally, now they appear



with little warning, sometimes striking with unprecedented force. For many Bangladeshis, disaster is not an occasional crisis but a recurring reality.

The effects of these disasters are not limited to human suffering. They create deep security challenges. Cyclones and floods destroy roads, bridges, power lines, and housing, crippling infrastructure that takes years to build. Crop failures triggered by drought or salinity intrusion undermine food security, creating hardship for farmers and threatening economic stability. Disasters push families into poverty, force migration, and heighten competition for scarce land and resources. When livelihoods collapse, social instability rises, leaving communities vulnerable to unrest or exploitation by criminal and extremist groups. Climate stress, therefore, acts as a multiplier, feeding into wider national security risks.

For this reason, the National Security Policy identifies climate change and disaster management as central to long-term resilience. The goal is clear: Bangladesh must build state capacity not only to respond after disasters strike but to anticipate them, reduce their impact, and prepare the society to adapt to the changing environmental realities. This means protecting lives, properties, and critical infrastructures while also safeguarding the

economy and strengthening communities. Adaptation and disaster risk reduction should no longer be treated as separate fields of development; they must be woven directly into national security planning.

If this approach is taken seriously, Bangladesh can become more resilient to natural disasters. Cyclones and floods will still come, but their humanitarian toll will be reduced. Critical infrastructure such as roads, energy grids, water systems will be built to withstand shocks. Agricultural practices will shift toward climate-adaptive technologies, securing food supplies even in uncertain conditions. Vulnerable communities will have access to resources, training, and support that will allow them to recover faster and rebuild stronger. National readiness will improve, with rapid response capabilities available at all levels: national, regional, and local. Over time, public trust in government institutions will grow as citizens will see that the state not only reacts to disasters but actively prepares for them.

Several actions are needed to reach this level of preparedness. Early warning systems must be expanded and modernized so that alerts reach villages, farms, and urban centers quickly and reliably. Resilient infrastructure should become the standard including roads built higher to withstand floods, bridges designed to endure cyclones,

housing resistant to storms, and water systems that remain functional during droughts. Agricultural research should focus on salt-resistant crops, drought-tolerant rice, and farming methods that conserve scarce resources. Disaster drills and simulations should be carried out regularly by government agencies, first responders, and community leaders so that procedures are tested and refined before real crises occur.

At the same time, climate and disaster risk must be integrated into all levels of planning. Development projects should not be approved without assessing how they will perform under climate stress. Urban planning must take account of flooding and heatwaves. Energy systems should be designed for reliability under extreme weather conditions. Disaster management cannot be separated from the broader agenda of sustainable growth.

Local communities are essential to this effort. National strategies succeed only if they are understood and supported at the grassroots level. Awareness campaigns should help villagers recognize warning signs, prepare emergency kits, and know evacuation routes. Community leaders should be trained to coordinate relief and recovery, making them partners in resilience rather than passive recipients of aid. Women and youth, who are often the first responders in households and

communities, should be given a stronger role in planning and decision-making.

Bangladesh must also deepen regional and international cooperation to fight disasters. Natural disasters due to climate change often cross borders: a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal can strike multiple countries, floods can flow from upstream rivers, and food shocks can ripple through regional markets. Working with neighbors such as India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar on early warning systems, water management, and joint response exercises will be critical. Global partnerships can provide access to funding, technology, and expertise. Diplomatic engagement is needed to ensure that Bangladesh has a strong voice in international climate negotiations where decisions on finance and adaptation support are made.

Key strategies support this effort at a national level. Building climate-resilient infrastructure reduces physical vulnerabilities. Strengthening early warning systems improves prevention and preparedness. Integrating adaptation into agriculture, urban planning, and energy ensures that development remains sustainable even under stress. Policies must also address displacement caused by climate hazards, whether temporary or permanent, ensuring stability for populations that are forced to move. Finally, international cooperation is vital not only to share knowledge

but to secure the resources that a country like Bangladesh needs to implement large-scale adaptation measures.

Bangladesh's fight against climate change and disasters is, in many ways, a fight for its future. The threats cannot be eliminated, but they can be managed and reduced. With foresight, investment, and strong institutions, the country can transform vulnerability into resilience. And in doing so, it can demonstrate that even one of the world's most climate-exposed nations is capable of turning crisis into strength.

## **10 Ensuring Cybersecurity**

Daily life in Bangladesh now runs on digital systems. Government offices, banks, businesses, schools, and even family communication depend on a technology that connects millions of people each day. This dependence has brought convenience and speed, but it has also created a new kind of vulnerability. A single cyberattack can paralyze ministries, disrupt services, drain financial accounts, or throw all the sectors of the economy into confusion. For this reason, cyberspace is no longer a secondary concern; it has become a central issue of national security. Recognizing this, the National Security Policy places cybersecurity at the core of its agenda.

## **10.1 Major Threats**

The threats in cyberspace are multiplying, and Bangladesh faces them on many fronts. Hackers routinely break into government websites and databases, putting sensitive records at risk and undermining public trust. Financial institutions live under constant pressure, targeted by attacks that can steal funds, shut down services, and erode confidence in the banking system. Social media spread false or misleading information at lightning speed, creating confusion that sometimes spills into political unrest. Critical infrastructures such as power grids, transport networks, and telecom systems have become a tempting target for digital sabotage. A single breach could disrupt daily life for millions of citizens. Military and diplomatic communications are equally at risk, and a successful intrusion could weaken the country's defenses or damage its international standing. Taken together, these risks demonstrate why cybersecurity is no longer just a technical issue. It is a matter of sovereignty, stability, and survival.

## **10.2 Cybersecurity Objectives**

### **10.2.1 Critical Infrastructure Protection**

Bangladesh's essential services including electricity, water, banking, transport, and communications are now bound tightly to digital networks. That reliance has made life easier but far

more fragile. Many of the systems that keep these services running are old, patched together over time, and not designed to withstand modern cyberattacks. A blackout in the grid, a breakdown in mobile networks, or a failure of online banking would do more than inconvenience to the public; it would shake confidence in the state's ability to govern. The greater the dependence on these networks, the higher the risks.

Protecting this infrastructure lies at the heart of the National Security Policy. Firewalls and guards alone are not enough. What is needed is resilience, or the ability of systems to bend without breaking, to recover quickly when attacked. A resilient grid is one where power comes back on swiftly after an outage, and a resilient bank is one where transactions continue even in the face of disruption. Resilience requires coordination across ministries, regulators, companies, and local governments. It also means constant monitoring, regular stress tests, and a workforce trained to respond immediately when trouble arises. The private sector, which owns much of this infrastructure, must be a full partner, sharing reports of threats and vulnerabilities.

If these efforts succeed, the benefits will be clear. Sudden breakdowns will become less common, the economy will be less exposed to shocks, and citizens will see that essential services hold firm

even in crisis. At its core, infrastructure protection is about building trust, a trust that the state can keep society's lifelines working in good times and bad.

### **10.2.2 Protection of Government and Military Information**

Among the most valuable targets for hostile actors is government and military information. Espionage and data theft are no longer rare events but regular features of the digital world, with methods that grow more sophisticated each year. Bangladesh's reliance on digital platforms for administration and defense adds to the risk. Leaks may come from outside through hacking, or from inside through careless handling or even deliberate betrayal.

The task is to keep this information safe, reliable, and accessible only to those who are authorized. Protecting confidentiality, integrity, and availability requires secure communication systems, trusted data storage, and strong encryption. It also demands strict discipline which ensures that cybersecurity protocols are enforced consistently, leaving little room for error. When decision-makers can trust their systems, they are able to act with confidence, and this strengthens both governance and defense.

If these measures are sustained, the chances of espionage and leaks will fall. Institutions will communicate more securely, and personnel will gain confidence that their plans and records are



protected. That sense of trust builds morale within organizations and strengthens the state's ability to act strategically. To achieve this, Bangladesh needs advanced encryption as a standard, regular security audits to uncover weak points, and continuous training for staff in cyber hygiene and incident response. Rapid detection systems must be ready to contain breaches, and intelligence must be shared quickly between agencies. Protecting government and military information is not just about technology; it is about discipline, coordination, and the safeguarding of sovereignty.

### **10.2.3 Preventing Cybercrime and Cyberterrorism**

The rise of cybercrime and cyberterrorism is among the most pressing challenges Bangladesh faces. Attacks have grown in frequency and complexity, targeting ministries, banks, and companies, while also reaching deep into the daily lives of citizens. Phishing scams, online extortion, and identity theft are widespread. Infrastructure systems are probed constantly for weaknesses, while false narratives spread rapidly on social media, sometimes destabilizing politics or sparking fear. Yet institutions built to handle crime often struggle to respond. Police and courts are still adapting to crimes without borders, where evidence can be erased in seconds, and suspects

may never set foot in the country evading punishment.

The state's goal is to prevent these crimes before they cause harm. That means investing in monitoring systems that can detect threats early and building law enforcement and judicial capacity to investigate cybercrimes, gather digital evidence, and prosecute cases quickly. Protecting critical systems is vital, but maintaining public trust is just as important. Citizens must believe that their communications, money, and data are safe. Deterrence is also key making it clear that cybercriminals and terrorists will face consequences.

If these efforts succeed, hacking, phishing, and disinformation campaigns will be easier to stop, and institutions will be seen as capable of handling twenty-first century threats. Citizens will feel less exposed, knowing that protection exists. Achieving this requires deploying advanced monitoring tools across all sectors, continuous training for police and judges, regular updates to cyber laws, and awareness campaigns to teach safe digital behavior. Because cybercrime crosses borders, Bangladesh must also work with neighbors and international partners, sharing intelligence and mounting joint responses. In cyberspace, defense is the strongest when it is shared.

## **10.2.4 Cyber Policy and Legislation**

The rapid expansion of Bangladesh’s digital sphere has brought both progress and peril. Government services are increasingly online, businesses rely heavily on digital platforms, and citizens live more of their daily lives on screens. This growth offers speed and convenience, but it also creates openings for crime and abuse. Cyber laws, drafted years ago, struggle to keep up. Gaps in regulation leave institutions vulnerable, while citizens are left uncertain about whether their personal data is truly safe. Without trust in digital security, the entire project of digital governance is weakened.

The objective is to create a legal framework that evolves with the risks. Existing instruments—the ICT Act, the Digital Security Act, and the National Cybersecurity Strategy—must be enforced consistently, while a new Data Protection Act is urgently needed to guarantee privacy. Laws must serve as shields against cyber threats while also holding those who manage data accountable.

If done well, such reforms will produce a stronger and more adaptable legal system. Citizens will enjoy greater protection of their data, businesses will have clearer rules, and government agencies will be bound to higher standards. To get there, laws must be updated regularly, judges and regulators trained to apply them effectively, and citizens educated about their digital rights.

Partnerships with the private sector and international allies can strengthen both drafting and enforcing laws. The strategy itself must be treated as a living document, reviewed and revised as quickly as threats evolve. In the digital world, laws cannot stand still.

### **10.2.5 Building Cyber Defense Forces and Capabilities**

Reliance on digital systems makes Bangladesh more vulnerable to attacks, and the pace of those attacks is accelerating. Intrusions against government institutions, the military, and vital infrastructure are growing more sophisticated, often faster than traditional agencies can adapt to such threats. When a major cyber incident occurs, the state has only a narrow window to contain it, yet many institutions lack the speed and expertise required to battle the challenge.

The goal is to build specialized cyber defense forces within the military, intelligence services, and civilian security agencies. The Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) must be strengthened with new resources, broader authority, and deeper expertise. Together, these units would form a national defense system combining intelligence gathering, technical skill, and crisis response.

If these steps are taken, Bangladesh will be far better prepared. Cyber defense units will be able to

prevent, detect, and disrupt attacks more effectively, while coordination across agencies will create a unified front. Citizens will see the results in safer systems and fewer disruptions. Achieving this vision requires continuous training, realistic simulations, advanced monitoring tools, and habits of intelligence-sharing. It also requires international partnerships, as no country can defend itself in isolation. In cyberspace, strength comes from cooperation as much as from capacity.

### **10.2.6 Public Awareness and Education**

Cybersecurity is not only the responsibility of governments or corporations; it also depends on ordinary people. Citizens face real risks including phishing emails, identity theft, online scams, and waves of misinformation, yet many lack the skills to protect themselves. As dependence on digital tools deepens in education, work, and commerce, awareness and skills are becoming more urgent. At the same time, Bangladesh needs a trained workforce to support national defense and the wider digital economy.

The aim is, therefore, twofold: raising awareness and building skills. Citizens must learn safe digital habits through campaigns, education, and community programs. At the same time, the state must invest in trainings, workshops, and career paths that produce a new generation of cybersecurity professionals. This dual effort

creates a culture of vigilance while also building technical expertise.

The results would be felt across society. Citizens would know how to avoid common traps, communities would be more resistant to misinformation, and a professional cybersecurity workforce would emerge. To achieve this, schools and universities should integrate digital safety into their curricula, while national campaigns spread knowledge more broadly. Incentives can encourage students and professionals to pursue careers in cybersecurity. Workshops and practical exercises can sharpen skills. Because threats evolve constantly, awareness programs must also adapt over time.

Cybersecurity is no longer a narrow technical concern. It has become part of sovereignty itself. Protecting infrastructure, government systems, and personal data is what allows a state to function and a society to trust its institutions. Without this protection, stability falters. With it, Bangladesh can withstand shocks and move confidently into the digital age.

## **11 Balancing Foreign Policy and Regional Relations**

Bangladesh sits at the heart of South Asia, one of the most strategically sensitive regions in the world. Its geography places it at a crossroads

bordering India and Myanmar, connected to the Bay of Bengal, and within the reach of both South and Southeast Asia. This position gives Bangladesh opportunities to serve as a hub for trade, connectivity, and diplomacy, but it also exposes the country to the rivalries of larger powers. India and China compete for influence across the region, while the United States pursues its own strategic and economic interests. Europe, Russia, Japan, and the Gulf states also play important roles. For Dhaka, the challenge is clear: protecting sovereignty and national interests while managing external pressures in an environment where the balance of power is always shifting.

The risks of miscalculation are real. Rivalries between India and China, or between the United States and China, can easily spill into South Asia. As tensions rise, Bangladesh faces pressure to lean toward one side or the other. Too close a tilt risks alienating another partner, while neutrality can be difficult to maintain in a polarized climate. Border tensions, such as disputes over enclaves or rivers with India, carry the potential to stir unrest at home. The Rohingya crisis with Myanmar, unresolved for years, continues to create humanitarian and security challenges that test Bangladesh's diplomacy. Heavy reliance on external trade routes, foreign financing, and overseas investment adds another layer of vulnerability. A sudden cutoff in loans or shifts in trade policy abroad could disrupt

growth and weaken economic stability. The danger is not only dependence but also exclusion: being left out of regional cooperation frameworks at a time when collective solutions are needed the most.

To address these challenges, Bangladesh pursues a careful, balanced approach in its foreign policy. It seeks to maintain strong ties with all major powers such as India, China, the United States, Europe, and Russia while avoiding overdependence on any single partner. This strategy is often described as “friendship to all, malice toward none,” a principle rooted in the nation’s founding diplomacy. In practice, this means engaging actively in bilateral relations while also strengthening multilateral platforms such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA, D-8, and BBIN. By doing so, Bangladesh ensures that it remains not just a participant but also a shaper of regional agenda. Promoting regional cohesion is a consistent goal, whether through dialogue on shared rivers, joint efforts on counterterrorism, or peaceful settlement of boundary disputes.

Safeguarding sovereignty requires vigilance against undue foreign influence. As Bangladesh’s economy grows and its infrastructure expands, the country has attracted increasing attention from global investors and lenders. While such engagement is vital for development, it can also create risks. Control over seaports, energy systems, or telecom networks by foreign actors could



compromise independence if left unchecked. For this reason, Dhaka has introduced stricter screening of foreign investments, paying closer attention to ownership structures and long-term obligations. Trade and shipping routes, lifelines of the economy, must also be protected through cooperation with international partners to ensure uninterrupted access. At the same time, national interests must come first in negotiating foreign loans and agreements, so that short-term financial support does not undermine long-term sovereignty.

Expanding and diversifying security partnerships is another part of the strategy. While relations with India remain central due to geography and shared history, Dhaka has also deepened ties with China, Russia, Pakistan, and Turkey. China, in particular, plays a crucial role through infrastructure investment, defense cooperation, and trade. These ties provide Dhaka with strategic options and act as a counterbalance to potential pressure from India. Yet, Bangladesh seeks balance rather than dependence. It looks to maintain positive relations with multiple partners, preventing any one country from dominating its choices. Most importantly, Bangladesh insists that no external power, whether neighbor or distant ally, should interfere in its internal affairs.

On global issues, Bangladesh uses international platforms to advance its security and humanitarian

interests. The Rohingya crisis is a prime example. Hosting over a million refugees from Myanmar has placed immense strain on Bangladesh's economy, society, and security. Dhaka has taken the issue to the United Nations, calling for stronger action and pressing for international support. This approach reflects a wider strategy: when bilateral or regional solutions stall, Bangladesh seeks strength in multilateral diplomacy, leveraging global institutions to safeguard its national interests.

Balancing these complex relationships is never easy. South Asia and the Indo-Pacific are arenas of contest where rivalries grow sharper and alliances shift quickly. For Bangladesh, survival and success depend on careful navigation. The country cannot afford to be drawn too deeply into the orbit of any single power, nor can it afford isolation. Instead, it must walk a fine line maintaining sovereignty, avoiding entanglement in great power rivalries, and securing its place in regional and global networks. In the decades ahead, this balancing act will remain one of the most important challenges of Bangladesh's national security policy, a task that demands caution, flexibility, and a clear sense of national interest.

## **12 Key Features of the National Security Policy**

The National Security Policy of Bangladesh is built on a set of guiding principles that recognize the

complex nature of modern security. It moves beyond a narrow focus on borders or the battlefield and, instead, treats security as a nationwide responsibility, touching every part of governance, society, and the economy. These features mark a shift from ad hoc responses toward a structured, long-term vision for protecting sovereignty and building resilience.

**Integrated Approach.** Security in Bangladesh is no longer seen as the job of the military alone. Instead, it requires the coordinated use of all national resources, institutions, and strategies. The armed forces and police remain at the front line, but their effectiveness depends on the support of diplomacy, economic stability, social cohesion, and technological strength. A stable economy reduces vulnerabilities to shocks; strong diplomacy builds alliances and reduces external pressures; social unity strengthens resilience against unrest; and advanced technology gives the state the tools to detect, prevent, and respond to threats more effectively. By linking these elements together, the policy creates a stronger and more balanced framework, one where every part of society contributes to the nation's defense and survival.

**Comprehensive Security.** The policy also embraces the idea that security goes beyond territory or borders. Protecting people's lives, livelihoods, and dignity is just as important as

guarding land or seas. This approach, often described as “human security”, has been promoted by the United Nations and is now central to Bangladesh’s own strategy. In practice, this means treating food security, health, education, climate resilience, and disaster preparedness as security issues, not only as challenges to development. A country cannot be stable if its citizens are hungry, sick, or unprotected from floods and cyclones. By recognizing this, the policy brings social well-being into the core of national defense.

**Civil–Military Coordination.** Another key feature of the policy is its emphasis on close cooperation between the armed forces and the civilian authorities. In today’s environment, effective security cannot be delivered by any single institution. The Army, Navy, and Air Force must work closely with ministries, police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), disaster management agencies, health services, intelligence units, and diplomats. This cooperation allows for unified planning, faster crisis response, and more efficient use of limited resources. It ensures that defense operations, humanitarian missions, and disaster response efforts are integrated rather than fragmented. Such collaboration strengthens institutional resilience, improves effectiveness, and builds public trust. When citizens see that the military and civilian agencies are working together in a coordinated

manner, confidence in the state's ability to handle both internal and external threats grows.

## **12.1 Developing a World-Class Armed Forces for National Security**

Bangladesh's armed forces now operate in a world where security threats are more complex than ever before. Geopolitical tensions across South Asia, great power rivalries in the Indo-Pacific, and new forms of conflict such as terrorism, cyber warfare, and hybrid tactics create pressures that demand adaptation. The armed forces are also expected to go beyond their traditional role of defending borders. They are regularly called on to support disaster response, contribute to peacekeeping missions, and assist in humanitarian crises at home and abroad. At the same time, advances in defense technology are transforming warfare, making modernization and research not optional but essential for survival and readiness.

The objectives for the armed forces are clear. Bangladesh must modernize its equipment and adopt advanced technologies to keep pace with regional and global standards. Professional training and education need to be expanded, raising operational capacity to a higher level. Command, control, and planning systems must be strengthened so that responses to crises are rapid, coordinated, and effective. Above all, the goal is to ensure that Bangladesh can deter threats and

respond effectively to both conventional and unconventional challenges, while also maintaining the flexibility to support civilian needs during disasters or emergencies.

If these measures are pursued, the results will be significant. Bangladesh will field a highly capable and professional military that can protect sovereignty while contributing to stability in the wider region. The country will be better equipped to resist both traditional threats, such as border incursions, and modern dangers, such as cyberattacks or terrorism. The armed forces will also be prepared to contribute more effectively to international peacekeeping missions, reinforcing Bangladesh's reputation as a responsible global actor. Domestically, the military's ability to assist in disaster management and humanitarian operations will further strengthen public trust in the state. Together, these outcomes will reinforce sovereignty, improve the country's regional security posture, and build confidence in the military as a central pillar of national resilience.

To achieve this vision, several concrete steps are required. The state must invest steadily in modern equipment, defense technologies, and research and development. Training programs should be broadened, with greater opportunities for joint exercises and international cooperation to expose personnel to global standards. Cyber and

intelligence capabilities must be integrated directly into operational planning, ensuring that the military is ready for the new battlefields of the digital era. Regular reviews and readiness assessments are essential to identify weaknesses and close gaps quickly. Finally, a culture of professionalism, innovation, and adaptability must be nurtured at every level of the armed forces. Only by combining modernization, training, and institutional culture can Bangladesh build an armed force that remains strong and effective in a rapidly changing world.

### **13 Why Bangladesh Must Consider a People's Army**

When we speak of a “People’s Army,” we are talking about something very simple but deeply powerful: ordinary citizens coming together, organized and trained to defend their nation. Such forces may stand alongside the state’s official army or, in times of crisis, step in where it cannot. The idea is not unique to Bangladesh. China calls its model the People’s Liberation Army, Cuba and Vietnam have long traditions of citizen defense, and Venezuela has built its own “Bolivarian Militia.”

For Bangladesh, the concept is more than an abstract thought experiment. It is becoming a matter of survival.

## **The Case for Citizen Defense**

Bangladesh's security challenges stretch well beyond what professional soldiers alone can manage. In the country's borderlands, hills, and remote regions, the army or police cannot always remain present. Here, trained local communities often step into watching over villages, reporting threats, and organizing protection. Institutionalizing this reality in the form of a constitutionally recognized community defense structure would strengthen, not weaken, the state's security framework.

More worrying still is the possibility of external attack. If Bangladesh were to face sudden aggression from India or Myanmar, depending only on a conventional army would leave the nation dangerously exposed to a formidable threat. In such a moment, survival would depend on something broader: a defense system in which ordinary citizens are trained and ready to form the first shield of resistance. After all, the greatest resource of any nation is its people. History shows that independence is not preserved by armies alone but by the collective will of a mobilized society.

## **Defense as a Collective Responsibility**

National defense has often been seen as the duty of governments and generals. But in truth, it is equally the right and responsibility of the people themselves. When national survival is at stake,



weapons matter less than morale. A population instilled with patriotism, basic training, and readiness can serve as a formidable deterrent.

True security emerges when government, administration, military, and citizens act together. To exclude the people from defense is to leave the nation exposed.

### **A Fragile Geopolitical Position**

Bangladesh lives in a fragile neighborhood. To the west and north lies India, one of the world's largest military powers. To the east sits Myanmar, which despite its own turmoil, has modernized its forces and repeatedly tested Dhaka's patience with shelling, border incursions, and the mass expulsion of more than a million Rohingya. That episode was not only a humanitarian disaster but also a calculated act of pressure.

At the same time, Bangladesh feels the weight of constant disputes: border killings, water-sharing tensions, transit demands, and political interference. Added to this is the attention of global powers like China and the United States, who view Bangladesh as strategically central, and the picture is clear. Dhaka risks becoming not just a neighbor to great powers, but a pawn in their contest. Without a prepared citizenry, the nation's capacity to resist sudden aggression could collapse.

## **What a People's Army Could Look Like**

In today's world, wars are not fought only with guns and tanks. They play out online, in cyberspace, where disinformation spreads faster than bullets. They arrive in the form of blockades that strangle economies, or psychological operations that weaken a nation's confidence before a shot is ever fired. Professional armies cannot manage every domain on their own. A People's Army in Bangladesh could take a multi-layered form:

- National Reserve Force: Retired army, police, and paramilitary personnel reactivated in times of crisis.
- Civil Defense Units: Citizens trained to respond to disasters, provide protection, and organize relief.
- Cyber and Information Defense Corps: Tech-savvy young Bangladeshis fighting cyberattacks, stopping false news, and pushing back against digital propaganda.
- Rural Defense Squads: Border and remote villagers trained to guard supply lines, conduct surveillance, and provide local resistance.

This is not about arming the population recklessly. It is about building awareness, readiness, and organization. The goal is not chaos but resilience.

## **Lessons From Abroad**

The idea is hardly untested. Switzerland, despite its neutrality, trains all men in military service and requires them to keep weapons at home for rapid mobilization. Vietnam built its “People’s Militia” into every corner of society, making foreign invasion extraordinarily difficult. China maintains millions of militia members under its People’s Armed Forces Department. Turkey enforces six months of general service for men, while Israel requires both men and women to serve at 18, forging national unity through shared obligation.

The lesson is simple: nations that train, organize, and prepare in peacetime are never easy targets in war.

## **Beyond Defense: Social and Economic Benefits**

A People’s Army would not only enhance military readiness. It could strengthen Bangladesh’s society and economy. Training would give young people discipline, self-reliance, and responsibility—qualities that shape stronger citizens and workers. It would also create valuable human resources for disaster management, environmental protection, and technology.

In a country so often struck by floods, fires, or pandemics, these citizen units could be the fastest responders, saving lives and easing the strain on the army. There is another social benefit, too. By engaging young people in constructive national

service, Bangladesh could help shield them from the pull of drugs, crime, or extremism, giving them instead a sense of pride and responsibility.

Shared training across class, religion, and region could also foster unity at a time when social divisions remain deep.

### **Guardrails and Safeguards**

Of course, the risks are real. But with careful oversight, strong laws, and clear safeguards, they are risks that can be contained. Strict controls must remain in the hands of the administration and security forces. Weapons should never be freely distributed. Training should emphasize tolerance, ethnic balance, and peace values as much as defense.

Legal safeguards are essential: parliamentary and presidential sanction, political neutrality, transparent laws, and audited funding. A clear code rooted in human rights would ensure that such a force strengthens, not undermines, Bangladesh's democracy.

### **Nation-Building, Not Militarization**

A people-based defense system would extend benefits well beyond security. It would bind society closer, empower youth, and create a disciplined citizenry ready to serve in peace as well as in crisis. For Bangladesh, this is not merely a matter of

military preparedness. It is a matter of nation-building.

In an age when the country faces pressure from every direction, relying on soldiers alone is no longer enough. To endure, Bangladesh must once again call upon its greatest strength: its people.

### **Policy Formulation for National Security: Addressing India's Water Aggression**

Bangladesh faces strategic challenges from upstream water management and diversion activities by India, which can impact national water security, agriculture, fisheries, and overall socio-economic stability. Formulating effective national security policies is essential to address these concerns. Policy measures focus on negotiating water-sharing agreements, strengthening legal and diplomatic frameworks, enhancing water resource management, and developing mitigation strategies to protect communities, critical infrastructure, and the environment. A proactive and coordinated approach ensures Bangladesh can safeguard its water sovereignty while maintaining regional cooperation and stability.

### **Determining the right industrialization policy keeping in mind national security**

Formulating industrialization policies requires careful consideration of national security implications. Strategic industrial development must balance economic growth with the protection

of critical infrastructure, supply chains, energy resources, and technological assets. Policies should prioritize industries vital to defense, energy, telecommunications, and cybersecurity while mitigating risks from foreign dependence, industrial espionage, and environmental vulnerabilities. By aligning industrialization strategies with security priorities, Bangladesh can achieve sustainable economic development without compromising national resilience and sovereignty.

### **Political Vulnerabilities and National Security**

In Bangladesh, some political actors prioritize the interests of external powers over national priorities, potentially compromising sovereignty and strategic decision-making. Such alignment with foreign agenda can influence policy, weaken state institutions, and create vulnerabilities in defense, economic, and diplomatic sectors. Effective monitoring, legal frameworks, and awareness of these political risks are essential to safeguard national interests and ensure that governance serves the country's security and development objectives.

### **Media and Religious Misinformation Threats to National Security**

In Bangladesh, certain media outlets have spread false or misleading reports concerning religious issues, which can inflame communal tensions,

provoke unrest, and undermine social cohesion. Such misinformation poses a direct threat to national security by destabilizing communities, eroding public trust, and providing opportunities for extremist or disruptive actors to exploit societal divisions. Addressing this challenge requires responsible journalism, robust fact-checking mechanisms, regulatory oversight, and public education to promote interfaith harmony and protect national stability.

### **Addressing the Rohingya Crisis for National Security**

The ongoing Rohingya refugee situation poses significant national security challenges for Bangladesh, including pressure on border management, local resources, and social cohesion. Rapid and coordinated resolution of the crisis is essential to mitigate these threats. Strategic measures include diplomatic engagement with Myanmar, international cooperation, effective refugee management, and development support for host communities. Resolving the Rohingya issue helps reduce security risks, stabilize affected regions, and strengthen Bangladesh's social, economic, and national resilience.

### **National Security Council (NSC)**

The National Security Council (NSC) is designed to be the central body for coordinating and managing Bangladesh's National Security Policy.

To be effective, it must be fully institutionalized and made operational without delay.

The NSC has several core functions. It should carry out rapid reviews of security situations and assess threats as they emerge. It will be responsible for developing and approving contingency plans, as well as authorizing joint military and civilian operations. Intelligence must be shared, analyzed, and used for decision-making. The council will also guide Bangladesh's diplomatic and international security cooperation. Protecting critical infrastructure and cyberspace is another priority. In addition, the NSC must set clear rules to bring political actors and even the media within the scope of responsible security discourse.

Certain special measures will help the NSC function effectively. A permanent Secretariat under the Prime Minister's Office should act as its coordination hub, with the ability to shift into emergency mode when needed. Meetings should be held weekly, or on short notice through video conferencing during crises. Task forces may be formed to deal with specific threats such as cyberattacks, terrorism, or climate risks.

Bangladesh's security challenges are wide-ranging. It is a densely populated and climate-sensitive country, facing threats from natural disasters, the Rohingya crisis, water scarcity, and economic inequality. Because of this, the NSC



must oversee a framework that integrates more than just the military. Administration, health, agriculture, environment, and social development must all be part of the security system. The policy also stresses the role of citizens in defense. A People's Army, supervised by the armed forces, is seen as essential. To support this, mandatory military training for all citizens should be introduced, ensuring that the population is prepared to assist in times of crisis.

## **14 Conclusion**

Bangladesh today faces a wide spectrum of security challenges, traditional and non-traditional, internal and external. From separatist militancy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, from climate disasters to great power rivalries, no single institution can carry the burden alone. Security must be understood as a national effort, one that combines the strength of the armed forces with the capacity of civilian institutions, the resilience of the economy, and the unity of the people.

The National Security Policy outlined here provides a framework for that effort. It calls for stronger defenses at the borders and in cyberspace, but also for inclusion, dialogue, and development to address the root causes of insecurity. It links national defense with economic stability,

infrastructure protection, energy security, and climate resilience. It recognizes that diplomacy, regional cooperation, and balanced foreign relations are as vital as weapons and soldiers.

At its heart, this policy insists that sovereignty is not only about protecting territory. It is about ensuring that the people of Bangladesh can live with dignity, stability, and confidence in their future. The path ahead will not be easy. Geopolitical pressures, resource constraints, and internal divisions will test the country's resolve. But by aligning strategy with national interests, by strengthening institutions, and by empowering citizens as active partners in security, Bangladesh can build a resilient state capable of withstanding crises.

National security is not an end in itself. It is the foundation for peace, development, and justice. For Bangladesh, a country born through struggle and sacrifice, the responsibility is clear: to defend the independence that was won, to secure the future for generations ahead, and to remain vigilant in a world where challenges evolve but sovereignty must never be compromised.



## About the Author

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