

Bridges and Barriers: Ishaq Dar's Visit to Bangladesh

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Summary

The visit of Ishaq Dar, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, to Dhaka on 23 and 24 August 2025 marked a significant moment in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations. However, longstanding historical grievances held by Bangladesh continue to pose a substantial challenge to the full normalisation of bilateral ties.

Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Bangladesh from 23 to 24 August 2025 was the first by a Pakistani foreign minister in 13 years. Hina Rabbani Khar was last Pakistani foreign minister to visit in Dhaka in November 2012 to invite then-Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the Developing-8 countries' summit in Islamabad.

Dar's visit was part of the process to reset ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan after the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in August 2024. Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Amna Baloch, had earlier visited Dhaka for foreign office consultations in April 2025 after a gap of 15 years. In an exclusive discussion with *Dhaka Tribune* during her visit, [Baloch said](#), "It is true that this round of consultations comes after a significant gap, but what is important is that both sides have shown a clear intent to re-engage." On 23 July 2025, Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited Dhaka. And on 21 August 2025, Pakistan's Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan made a trip to Dhaka. There has also been engagement between the military officials from the two countries. On 22 August 2025, [Pakistani and Bangladeshi senior army officials met in Rawalpindi](#), where they discussed enhancing defence and security cooperation between the two countries.

During his visit, Dar met a delegation from the National Citizen Party, led by General Secretary Akhtar Hossain; Bangladesh's Jamaat-i-Islami members, led by Naib Amir (Deputy Head) and Syed Abdullah Mohammed Taher; and leaders from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Secretary General [Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir](#). Dar also called on Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and interacted with the Chairperson of the BNP, Begum Khalida Zia, and Amir of Bangladesh [Jamaat-e-Islami, Shafiqur Rehman](#).

Bangladesh and Pakistan signed [several agreements and memoranda of understanding](#) (MoU) in Dar's presence. These included an agreement on visa abolition for diplomatic and official passport holders and four MoUs on establishing a joint working group on trade, cooperation between the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad and the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies in Dhaka, between the Foreign Service Academy of Pakistan and the Foreign Service Academy of Bangladesh, and between the Associated Press of Pakistan and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha; as well as a cultural exchange programme.

Dar also announced the launch of the [“Pakistan-Bangladesh Knowledge Corridor”](#), which envisages the grant of 500 scholarships to Bangladeshi students to pursue higher studies in Pakistan over the next five years. This project will also cover training courses for 100 Bangladeshi civil servants. Then, the [number of scholarships](#) allocated to Bangladeshi students under the Pakistan Technical Assistance Program would be increased from five to 25.

While both countries are working to reset their relationship, several serious historical issues remain unresolved. First, Bangladesh is [demanding US\\$4.52 billion](#) (S\$5.79 billion) in financial claims from Pakistan to cover its share of pre-1971 assets, including foreign aid, unpaid provident funds and savings instruments. The demand includes US\$200 million (S\$256 million) in foreign aid sent to then-East Pakistan following the [1970 Bhola cyclone](#). Second, it is seeking a formal apology from the Pakistani state for the 1971 atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army in the then-East Pakistan. Finally, Dhaka claims that [around 324,000 stranded Pakistanis](#) are still living in camps in Bangladesh. It urges their quick repatriation to Pakistan.

Interacting with media following the talk with Baloch in April 2025, [Bangladesh’s Foreign Secretary, Md Jashim Uddin](#), who led the Bangladesh delegation, said, “These issues need to be resolved for having a solid foundation of our relations”. On this matter, while talking to journalists in Dhaka, [Dar stated](#) that these issues have been “resolved twice”. He referred to a 1974 tripartite agreement signed between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh under which the repatriation of [prisoners of war and civilian internees](#) was agreed. Dar also referred to then-President [Pervez Musharraf’s expression of regret](#) during his visit to Dhaka in 2002. Bangladesh’s Interim Government’s Foreign Affairs Advisor, [Touhid Hossain](#), disagreed with Dar’s claim but maintained, “...surely no one expects that we would sit down for an hour and resolve everything. We have presented each other’s positions.”

As political ties between Dhaka and Islamabad show signs of growing warmth, the geopolitical implications for South Asia are noteworthy. India is likely observing these developments closely, given their potential impact on regional dynamics. The fact that both Pakistan and Bangladesh maintain strong relationships with China further adds to New Delhi’s strategic concerns. On 19 June 2025, a [China-Pakistan-Bangladesh Trilateral Vice Foreign Minister/Foreign Secretary meeting](#) was held in Kunming in China, where they agreed to advance their cooperation “based on the principles of good-neighbourliness, equality and mutual trust, openness and inclusiveness, common development and win-win cooperation”.

Reflecting on the evolving ties among the three countries, India’s Chief of Defence Staff, [General Anil Chauhan](#), noted during his address at the launch of the Observer Research Foundation’s Foreign Policy Survey on 8 July 2025 that “there is a possible convergence of interest...between China, Pakistan and Bangladesh, [which] may have security implications for regional stability and security dynamics.”

Dar’s visit marks a noteworthy moment in the ongoing effort to revitalise Islamabad-Dhaka relations. While it signals a willingness to engage at the highest levels, the path to a fully normalised relationship remains complex, with deep-rooted political and historical

challenges yet to be addressed. Sustained dialogue and mutual political will be essential to overcoming these longstanding hurdles.

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