

POLITICAL TURMOIL IN BANGLADESH: STRATEGIC CONCERNS FOR INDIA

Dr. Iqbal Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Kanya Maha Vidyalaya (Autonomous), Jalandhar, Punjab. Pin Code 144004

Dr. Ashima Sahni, Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Political Science, Kanya Maha Vidyalaya (Autonomous), Jalandhar, Punjab. Pin Code 144004

Dr. Prabhjot Kaur, Assistant Professor, Department of Laws, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab. Pin Code 143002

Abstract

The political instability in Bangladesh, highlighted by the collapse of Sheikh Hasina's administration in August 2024 amid widespread protests, carries significant consequences for India. This research paper examines the complex crisis, which encompasses political turmoil, economic distress marked by growing inflation and dwindling foreign reserves, social unrest driven by governance challenges and a shift towards religious nationalism. The crisis presents considerable challenges for India's security, particularly in relation to border management, the possible resurgence of anti-India militant factions, and the increasing influence of China in the region. From an economic perspective, instability affected bilateral trade and investments, potentially disrupting supply chains and connectivity initiatives. Socially, India is confronted with the risk of a heightened influx of refugees and concerns regarding the rights of minority communities in Bangladesh. The paper further investigates the historical and contemporary dynamics of India-Bangladesh relations, underscoring both collaborative efforts and areas of disagreement. This political transition could adversely impact India's strategic interests and geopolitical position in relation to Bangladesh. Post ouster of Hasina government signaled many ups and downs in politically instable Bangladesh. The study is relevant on the grounds that India as a leading partner in South Asia has strong bonding with its neighbouring states in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity and language etc. Any turbulence in this region will have serious ramifications for India.

Keywords: Bangladesh Crisis, Economic Impact, Political Turmoil, Regional Geopolitics, Regional Security, Student Protest.

1. Introduction and Historical Background

The year 2024 represented a time of considerable political turmoil for Bangladesh, characterized by pronounced political division, economic challenges, and notable changes in governance. Beginning with the re-election of Sheikh Hasina at the start of the year and culminating in the dramatic collapse of her administration, Bangladesh faced a pivotal moment.ⁱ Referring to relations between India and Bangladesh, the phase from 26 March 1971 to 3 December 1971 was very crucial in the East Bengali move to obtain full autonomy, which meant ultimately complete independence. It was during this period that President of Pakistan Yahya Khan announced the imposition of martial law in Pakistan to East Pakistan and a civil war broke out in this part of Pakistan. Owing to its geographical contiguity with East Bengal, the events there threatened India's very socio-economic and political fabric. Millions of refugees were forced to enter India. The refugee problem caused serious financial stringencies to India.ⁱⁱ The Bangladesh liberation movement that developed in response to Pakistani repression and atrocities was led by the Awami League (AL), the largest political party in Bangladesh.ⁱⁱⁱ As a result, Bangladesh was declared as independent nation on March 26, 1971.

Bangladesh and north-east India share a long history, culture and a long border. North-east India was integrally linked to the mainland India through what is now Bangladesh. Its passage to the sea was through Chittagong port in Bangladesh and via Bangladesh's rivers to Calcutta port. The region shipped tea and other exportable by inland water transports through the rivers of Bangladesh for overseas shipment from Calcutta.^{iv} India shares the longest land boundary of 4,096-kilometer with Bangladesh and more than 50 trans-boundary rivers. Bangladesh is almost entirely surrounded by India on three sides and India's northeastern states are connected to the rest of India by a narrow corridor called the "Siliguri Corridor" or "Chicken's Neck." The easiest and most efficient access for trade, travel, and strategic movement to and from the Northeast often passes through or near Bangladesh, making the region somewhat dependent on Bangladeshi cooperation. According to the preliminary data from the "Population and Housing Census 2022" conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), it has a total population of over 16.51 crore.^v

India's role in the independence of Bangladesh led to the development of strong bilateral relations. These positive currents were temporarily stopped by growing political tensions leading to civil war and finally to the independence of Bangladesh in December 1971. After a painful start with much instability and bloody coups d'état, the advent to power of General Zia Ur Rahman in November 1975 led to a return to order, a basic prerequisite for development.^{vi} This turmoil holds deep strategic significance for India, given their shared history, geographic proximity, and

interlinked security and economic interests. This will raise concerns in New Delhi about the strategic stability of India's North-eastern region, which shares a border with Bangladesh, and Dhaka's new geopolitical calculus.^{vii}

Research Questions

- What are the dominant factors of the political turmoil in Bangladesh?
- What should be India's policy towards Bangladesh in the wake of Hasina's ouster?
- Will the situation in Bangladesh, currently unsafe for the Awami League, improve for its return as a party?
- Why the minority communities are feeling insecure in Bangladesh and how their democratic rights can be protected?
- How the democratic governance can be ensured in Bangladesh and what role should be played by different stakeholders for the restoration of democracy?

Research Methodology

In the realm of social science research, numerous methodologies are accessible. This research predominantly depends on academic perspectives and writings, as its objective are to elucidate the historical assessment of India-Bangladesh relations, the various viewpoints regarding this relationship (including economic factors), the importance of Bangladesh to India, and the challenges that may create tensions between India and Bangladesh. Both nations are expected to address the contentious issues with care and to strengthen their relationship, with policymakers from both sides managing these matters diligently. This study employs a qualitative approach to gather secondary data. The secondary data is obtained through an examination of pertinent journals, newspapers, and online articles.

2. Statement of the Problem

2.1. Electoral Crisis

After the January 2024 general election, perceived as flawed by the West, critics accused Hasina's government of becoming increasingly arrogant, resulted in the nationwide protest against the government. The protesters, viewing Hasina as responsible for the deaths of some 600 people killed in the clashes with the police, began seeking her overthrow.^{viii} The turning point came in June 2024, when Bangladesh's High Court re-instated a quota reserving 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans from Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. With government jobs in high demand due to elevated graduate unemployment, students protested the quota, which they also viewed as favouring supporters of Hasina's Awami League party. The Supreme Court eventually reduced the quota in late July to 5 per cent.^{ix} Following the nationwide protest, Hasina

resigned from office on August 5, 2024, as large crowds of demonstrators surrounded the Prime Minister's residence. Her resignation was announced by General Waker-uz-Zaman, the Chief of the Army Staff. Later that day, Hasina fled to India in a chaotic departure. Thereafter, Muhammad Yunus assumed office as the Chief Advisor of the caretaker government of Bangladesh. The political transition in Bangladesh had taken a worrisome extremist turn.

2.2. Attack on Minorities

After the ouster of Sheikh Hasina, more than 200 people had been killed. Subsequently, the attacks largely targeted leaders and supporters of Hasina's Awami League party. India is quite concerned about the protection of Hindus and other minorities residing in Bangladesh, because they feel insecure due to the attack by the protestors.^x After August 2024, the protests turned violent, when the youth wing of the ruling party started attacking the protestors.^{xi} The mayhem that marked the violence and revenge killings was similar to those witnessed during the regime change in Afghanistan in 2021.^{xii} The Head of interim government, Muhammad Yunus will have to face the daunting challenges in terms of law and order. The interim council backing Yunus inspires confidence, with its mix of technocrats, women, representatives of the students' movement, and members of ethnic and religious minorities.^{xiii} The interim government comprises academics, civil society activists, student leaders and former government officials.^{xiv}

3. Regional Stability and Cross-border Spillover

The ouster of Sheikh Hasina in a mass upsurge of "people's power" and it is a moment that holds both peril and promise, calling for a measured and sagacious response from all those who have a stake in regional stability. In accordance with the well-established principle on non-interference, it has been India's long-standing policy to refrain from passing judgement on what are essentially internal political matters of other countries.^{xv} Muhammad Yunus faced a formidable task in bringing stability to a nation in turmoil. The immediate goals before him are crystal clear restoration of normalcy, ensuring law and order and protection of the vulnerable groups, including the minorities.^{xvi} Beyond the Islamic World and China, Yunus was finding ways to advocate sub-regionalism through platforms like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).^{xvii} As Human Rights Watch noted, political actors took advantage of the power vacuum to attack their opponents, and extremists took advantage to attack religious and ethnic minorities.^{xviii} In response, Bangladeshis organically began defending Hindu temples, Christian churches, and other minority community institutions.^{xix}

4. Geopolitics Challenges for India

4.1.China

Another significant concern that has created some apprehension among Indian policymakers is the increasing interest of China in Bangladesh. The relationship between China and Bangladesh becomes even more extensive, when examining security collaboration. As the primary provider of military equipment and training to the armed forces of Bangladesh, Beijing plays a crucial role in shaping Dhaka's security framework.^{xx} China has been working for years to spread its tentacles in the Indian subcontinent. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, China's arms deals and loans have deeply rooted its influence, aligning their interests with Beijing.^{xxi} Islamist extremism poses a challenge not only for Bangladesh, but also represents a serious issue for India. Hasina had managed to keep extremism in check and has not permitted anti-India factions to operate freely.^{xxii} In spite of these realities, maintaining strong relations with India is equally vital for Bangladesh, due to its economic reliance, interpersonal connections, and cultural ties. It is estimated that several million Bangladeshis have sought refuge, primarily illegally, in various regions of India.^{xxiii} India has significantly developed sub-regional connectivity with its Seven Sisters through land transit, rail connectivity and transshipment within Bangladesh, which was allowed by the Hasina regime.^{xxiv} The political turmoil in Bangladesh has posed the serious challenges for India as it shares its border with five Indian states. The Indian intelligentsia as well as policy makers have repeatedly called for the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act/National Register of Citizens and described Bangladeshis as 'insects' and 'infiltrators'.

4.2.Rise in Radicalism and Violence

During the clashes on August 4, 2025 at least 91 people, including 14 policemen, were killed and hundreds injured between protestors demanding Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation.^{xxv} The clashes broke out when protestors attending the non-cooperation programme under the banner of the Students against Discrimination with the one-point demand of the government's resignation over a job quota system faced opposition from the supporters of the Awami League, *Chhatra League*, and *Jubo League* activists.^{xxvi} The protests against reservations, while spearheaded by students, were later infiltrated by *Jamaat-e-Islami*, whose student wing, *Chhatra Shibir*, was responsible for much of the violence.^{xxvii} Another incident, that added fuel to the fire, was the murder of Abu Saeed (a student of Begum Rokeya University). He joined the protests in favour of quota reforms. Later on, his murder became a powerful public symbol of the fight against chronic corruption, repression, and the arrogance of power.^{xxviii}

In addition to this, the China Media Group, along with Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence had encouraged the banned outfits like *Jamaat-e-Islami* and its student wing, *Islami Chhatra Shibir*, to fuel anti-India sentiments.^{xxix} The unrest along the India-Myanmar border, along with the ongoing tensions in Manipur, poses serious threat to India's Act East and Neighbourhood First strategies, particularly if an antagonistic government regains power in Dhaka. Additionally, the threat from China to the Siliguri corridor is likely to resurface. The BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) will also face destabilization as a regional entity. As a result, the Army's role will be crucial in safeguarding India's strategic interests and fostering stable and amicable relations with Bangladesh, considering the effort and dedication invested in these relationships. India must convey appropriate signals to the decision-makers in Dhaka. A considerable amount is at stake for New Delhi, which has diverted its attention from the surrounding region.^{xxx} Pointing to the political trends of Bangladesh, Commodore Uday Bhaskar (retd.) opines, "India may have to contend with greater Chinese activity and presence in the maritime space. China will seek to consolidate its footprint in Bangladesh."^{xxxi} In this changing scenario, if a radical anti-India Government, backed by a belligerent China, gets installed in Dhaka, it could mean greater presence of Beijing and its navy in the Bay of Bengal, which will have serious repercussions for India.^{xxxii} During the Hasina-led Awami League's 15-year rule, China supplied submarines, warships, military equipment and even built a major submarine base near Cox Bazaar, ironically naming it BNS Sheikh Hasina.^{xxxiii}

India must clearly identify its interests as opposed to getting caught in a self-defeating friend's vs. enemy's formulation. India's interests vis-à-vis Bangladesh pertains to illegal immigration, safety of minorities in Bangladesh, security in states bordering the country. Indian businesses there, and the China factor.^{xxxiv} As a matter of fact, Bangladesh needs India more than India needs Bangladesh. Giving asylum to Hasina is a humanitarian gesture, but allowing the ousted PM to use India as a platform for political activity may hurt India's interests' vis-à-vis Bangladesh, for States take precedence over individuals in international relations.^{xxxv} The remarkable progress made by Bangladesh in many indices of socio-economic development, such as literacy, infant mortality, women's empowerment and financial inclusion is acknowledged and respected by many in India.^{xxxvi} For the last decade and a half, Bangladesh and India have, by and large, lived peacefully as neighbours.

4.3. Refugee Crisis

It has been the healthy blossoming of ties in a multitude of areas, ranging from security to multi-modal connectivity to trade and commerce to infrastructure development and people-to-people

contact.^{xxxvii} Especially worrying are reports of more than 200 attacks on Bangladesh's largest religious minority, the Hindus- at least five members of the community have lost their lives and the properties of several others have been vandalized since August 5, 2024.^{xxxviii} Till 10 September, there have been as many as 205 cases of attacks on members of the minority communities in Bangladesh after August 5, with five confirmed cases of deaths.^{xxxix} The spate of attacks on minorities in Bangladesh constitutes solid legal ground for the grant of asylum even though India is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Not being a signatory does not absolve India of its commitment under customary international law to extend the much-needed succor to hapless asylum seekers.^{xl}

Bangladesh's interim head of government has reiterated his call for peace. Yunus will have to arrest the collapse of law and order and ensure that the country's minorities are protected. The Hindus, traditionally Awami League supporters, have become soft targets during the retaliation against the excesses of the Hasina regime.^{xli} There is a streak of anti-Indianism in Bangladesh, cultivated by those, who have infiltrated the protests.^{xlii} The Indian leadership has pointed to the importance of safeguarding the rights of minorities amidst widespread violence, especially against Hindu community in Bangladesh.^{xliii} India's explicit support to the new leadership in Dhaka is critical to prevent the situation from getting worse. It needs to reach out to the leaders of the student movement, get a sense of what they hope to achieve.^{xliv}

5. India's Strategy to Deal with Bangladesh Crisis

It is important to analyze the political trends of Bangladesh as it is traditionally linked to India in South Asian subcontinent in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity and language etc.^{xlvi} The turmoil reflects underlying fissures in Bangladesh's politics, economy and security situation. To address these issues, the military-led interim government will need to focus on building political consensus, stabilizing the economy and rebuilding the legislative, judicial and executive state institutions to ensure accountability.^{xlvi} Hence, the political developments in Bangladesh have the most direct implications for India, with the Hasina government being a longtime supporter of improving relations between Delhi and Dhaka. Besides, there are serious implications in the countries of South Asia with large and young populations facing growing inequality and lack of employment opportunities.^{xlvi} The minorities want fundamental reforms to the Bangladeshi government, including a Minority Affairs Ministry and 10 per cent reservation for minorities in the Parliament.^{xlvi}

Expressing the concerns over the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah highlighted, "In the wake of the ongoing situation in Bangladesh, the Union government has

constituted a committee (instead) to monitor the situation in the strife-torn country and along the India-Bangladesh border. The committee will maintain communication channels with their counterpart authorities in Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of Indian nationals, Hindus, and other minority communities living there. The committee will be headed by the Additional Director General, Border Security Force, Eastern Command.^{xxlix} This committee has entrusted the task of safety of Indian nationals, Hindus and other minority communities.^l In November 2025, Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal (Bangladesh's domestic war crimes court) after being found guilty of crimes against humanity for the violent suppression of student protests in 2024 that led to the collapse of her government.^{li}

6. Concluding Observations

The political turmoil in Bangladesh poses the security threats, diplomatic obstacles, and strategic rivalries for India. Given the profound geographical, economic, and cultural connections, any instability in Bangladesh will inevitably affect India's internal and external strategic landscape. In simple terms, India faces interlinked risks from Bangladesh's turmoil in terms of refugee influx, cross border crime, radicalization, and external (especially Chinese and Pakistani) strategic inroads that together threaten border stability, internal security, and connectivity to the northeast. These risks make it imperative for New Delhi to pair tighter border management and counter terror cooperation with diversified political outreach in Dhaka, sustained economic and connectivity projects, and careful balancing of great power competition. The political trends in post ouster of Hasina regime highlight that the Interim government must prioritize the security for its citizens and protect the economic development, but both require a period of stability within its splintered politics. In order to adapt the robust and inclusive democracy, Bangladesh has to introduce the reforms in the political machinery. To protect its interests, India needs to implement a multi-faceted strategy by striking a balance between diplomacy and readiness, enhancing border and maritime security, and refraining from overt involvement in Bangladesh's internal political affairs. A well-calibrated, sensitive, and proactive approach will be crucial to maintain regional stability and safeguard India's long-term strategic interests in South Asia. A regulated mix of hard security measures and inclusive, long-term diplomatic engagement thus offers India the best chance to contain immediate spillovers while helping shape a stable, friendly, and strategically autonomous Bangladesh in its neighborhood.

References

- ⁱ <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2025/january/06/Bangladesh-in-2024-A-Year-of-Political-Turmoil-and-Transformation> as accessed on 21 November 2025.
- ⁱⁱ M. G. Chitkara, *Bangladesh: Mujib to Hasina*, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1997, p. 19.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Talukder Maniruzzaman, “Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh”, in Paul R. Brass and Marcus F. Franda (eds.), *Radical Politics in South Asia*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1973, p. 4.
- ^{iv} M. Shahidul Islam, “Bangladesh-China-North-East India: Opportunities and Anxieties”, Hernaikh Singh and Tridivesh Singh Maini (eds.), *South Asia in 2008: A Review*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2009, p. 420.
- ^v <https://www.nextias.com/beyond-classroom/bangladesh-crisis> as accessed on 18 November 2025.
- ^{vi} Gilbert Etienne, *Rural Change in South Asia - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995, p. 181.
- ^{vii} <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/09/14/why-india-is-so-concerned-about-bangladeshs-political-problems/> as accessed on 14 July 2025.
- ^{viii} <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/08/bangladesh-domestic-turmoil-and-regional-insecurity/> as accessed on 14 November 2024.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*
- ^x *Hindustan Times*, 10 August 2024, p. 16.
- ^{xi} Gurjit Singh, “Why Bangladesh didn't go the Sri Lanka way”, *Hindustan Times*, 13 August 2024, p. 16.
- ^{xii} Major General Ashok K. Mehta (Retd.), “Regime change can impact Bangladesh defense ties with India”, *The Tribune*, 20 August 2024, p. 7.
- ^{xiii} *Hindustan Times*, 10 August 2024, p. 16.
- ^{xiv} *Indian Express*, 14 August 2024, p. 12.
- ^{xv} Ramanathan Kumar, “Relook at Dhaka”, *Indian Express*, August 13, 2024, p. 9.
- ^{xvi} Editorial, *The Tribune*, 9 August 2024, p. 8.
- ^{xvii} <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/bangladeshs-shifting-geopolitics-why-india-cannot-afford-wait> as accessed on 18 November 2025.
- ^{xviii} Ria Chakrabarty, “Solidarity over fear”, *Indian Express*, 31 August 2024, p. 12.
- ^{xix} *Ibid.*

^{xx} Islam, n. 4, pp. 426-427.

^{xxi} <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/china-debt-diplomacy-bangladesh-pakistan-convergence-concern-for-india-turkey-south-asian-geopolitics-explained-2753871-2025-07-12> as accessed on 14 July 2025.

^{xxii} Editorial, *Times of India*, 2 September 2024, p. 10.

^{xxiii} M. Shahidul Islam, “Bangladesh-China-North-East India: Opportunities and Anxieties”, Hernaikh Singh and Tridivesh Singh Maini (eds.), *South Asia in 2008: A Review*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2009, p. 429.

^{xxiv} <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/09/14/why-india-is-so-concerned-about-bangladeshs-political-problems/> as accessed on 14 July 2025.

^{xxv} *Times of India*, 5 August 2024, p. 1.

^{xxvi} *Ibid.*

^{xxvii} Harsh Vardhan Shringla, “While We Wait For New Bangla Dress”, *Times of India*, 7 August 2024, p. 10.

^{xxviii} Shahab Enam Khan, “In Dhaka, They Rose, So She Fell”, *Times of India*, 6 August 2024, p. 10.

^{xxix} Mehta, n. 16, p. 7.

^{xxx} *Ibid.*

^{xxxi} *The Tribune*, 11 August 2024, p. 18.

^{xxxii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxiii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxiv} Happymon Jacob, “Interests, not friendship, determine foreign policy”, *Hindustan Times*, 12 August 2024, p. 12.

^{xxxv} *Ibid.*

^{xxxvi} Ramanathan Kumar, “Relook at Dhaka”, *Indian Express*, August 13, 2024, p. 9.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*

^{xxxviii} *Indian Express*, 14 August 2024, p. 12.

^{xxxix} Deepak K. Singh, “By withholding refuge”, *Indian Express*, 10 September 2024, p. 13.

^{xl} *Ibid.*

^{xli} *Indian Express*, 14 August 2024, p. 12.

^{xlii} Singh, n. 15, p. 16.

^{xliii} *Indian Express*, 10 August 2024, p. 16.

^{xliv} *Ibid.*

^{xlv} Jyoti Malhotra, “Dacca-Dhaka/1975-2024”, *The Tribune*, 10 August 2024, p. 8.

^{xlvi} <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/08/sheikh-hasinas-departure-exposes-fractures-bangladeshs-politics> as accessed on 17 August 2024.

^{xlvi} *Ibid.*

^{xlvi} Chakrabarty, n. 22, p. 12.

^{xlx} Deepak K. Singh, “By withholding refuge”, *Indian Express*, 10 September 2024, p. 13.

¹ *The Tribune*, 10 August 2024, p. 1.

^{li} <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/11/17/asia/bangladesh-sheikh-hasina-verdict-intl-hnk> as accessed on 21 November 2025.