| 1 | NEW DELHI, Aug 5 (Reuters) - Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's [resignation](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladesh-protesters-call-march-dhaka-defiance-curfew-2024-08-05/) after weeks of violent protests, announced on Monday in a televised address by the army chief, has brought focus once more to the country's history of political upheaval and coups.\*\*1975\*\* The country's first Prime minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hasina's father, was assassinated along with most of his family members in a military coup that brought in a long period of military rule. Two more coups in the same year ended with General Ziaur Rahman seizing power in November.\*\*1981\*\*Ziaur Rahman was assassinated by rebels who stormed into a government guest house in Chittagong city where he was residing. The violence was believed to be the act of a small group of army officers, but the army itself remained loyal and suppressed the rebellion.\*\*1982\*\*Rahman's successor, Abdus Sattar, was ousted in a bloodless military coup led by Hussein Muhammad Ershad, who took over as chief martial-law administrator and later assumed the office of president Advertisement · Scroll to continue\*\*2007\*\*The army chief staged a military coup and backed a caretaker government that ruled the country for the next two years until Hasina took power in 2009.\*\*200\*\*Unhappy with their wages and living conditions, revolting paramilitary forces killed more than 70 people in the capital Dhaka, most of whom were army officers. The mutiny, as it was called, which had spread to nearly a dozen towns, ended after six days as the angry guards surrendered following a series of discussions.\*\*2012\*\*The Bangladesh army said it had foiled a coup attempt by retired and serving officers that was driven by a campaign to introduce Sharia, or Islamic law, throughout the country.\*\*2024\*\*angladesh's [Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/who-is-bangladesh-army-chief-who-announced-hasinas-resignation-2024-08-05/) said Hasina had resigned following violent anti-quota protests and an interim government would be formed to lead the country. |

| 2 | \*\*Top news of the day: Sheikh Hasina lands at Hindon Air Force station near Delhi, seeks asylum in U.K.; Lakshya Sen loses Olympics bronze medal match, and more Sheikh Hasina lands at Hindon Air Force station near Delhi, seeks asylum in U.K.\*\*In a sudden turn of events, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina succumbed to [protests](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/from-protests-to-sheikh-hasina-resignation-timeline-of-bangladesh-student-protest/article68488361.ece) and [tendered her resignation on August 5](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sheik-hasina-resigns-as-bangladesh-pm-leaves-country-with-sister/article68487831.ece). She has reportedly reached India, where Ms. Hasina and her family were sheltered when the country faced a military coup earlier. However, this time it was not a coup, and the protesters stormed the Prime Minister’s official residence in Dhaka after the news of her leaving the country emerged. The Bangladesh Air Force C-130 transport with Ms. [Hasina landed at Hindon Air Force station](https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/bangladesh-protests-live-updates-students-protest-august-5-sheikh-hasina/article68486955.ece), according to sources. Meanwhile, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval leaves for Hindon airbase for talks with Ms. Hasina. Western Air Command Chief PM Sinha is also present there. \*\*BSF intensifies security along India-Bangladesh border in wake of Sheikh Hasina resignation i\*\*n the wake of political developments in Bangladesh, an [alert was sounded along the 4096 km border with India](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bsf-intensifies-security-along-india-bangladesh-border-in-wake-of-sheikh-hasina-resignation/article68487980.ece), said a Border Security Force official. Director General-BSF Daljit Singh Chawdhary rushed to Kolkata on August 5 to take stock of the situation. |

| 3 | Here’s what happened todayWe will shortly be closing this live page, but before we do, here’s a quick recap of what happened today:Local media reports in India say an aircraft with Hasina on board lands at Hindon Airbase near New Delhi.Thousands of people storm Hasina’s official residence in Dhaka amid scenes of jubilation in the streets. The head of the army says an interim government will be formed and pledges justice for those who have been killed.General Waker-uz-Zaman urges protesters to stop the unrest amid reports of vandalism. Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has resigned and fled the country following weeks of [deadly demonstrations](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/8/5/bangladesh-protests-live-army-chief-to-address-nation-amid-new-protests) against her government.The removal of Hasina on Monday followed weeks of deadly protests and appears to have averted the threat of further bloodshed. The focus now moves to who will control the South Asian country.In an address to the nation, army chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced that an interim government will now run Bangladesh and called for calm. Hasina, who ruled the country for close to two decades, boarded a military helicopter on Monday, an aide told Al Jazeera, as huge crowds ignored a national curfew to storm her palace in Dhaka. Media reports in India say an aircraft carrying Hasina landed at Hindon Air Base near New Delhi. She was on board a Bangladesh Air Force aircraft which landed at the base in Ghaziabad, India Today news channel reported. Her resignation came after nearly 300 people died in weeks of protest that the authorities sought to crush. A night of deadly violence on Sunday [killed close to 100](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/4/more-than-20-killed-as-bangladesh-protesters-renew-call-for-hasina-to-quit#:~:text=At%20least%2091%20people%20have,Minister%20Sheikh%20Hasina%20to%20resign.) and a curfew was called. On Monday, huge crowds stormed the prime minister’s palace, preventing Hasina from delivering a speech. At least 20 more people were killed during violence in Dhaka as protesters stormed buildings, a police officer told the AFP news agency. “We’ve got 20 bodies here,” said Bacchu Mia, a police inspector at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, without giving details of their deaths, although witnesses and other police officers reported mobs launching revenge attacks on rival groups. Despite the violence, by early afternoon, the mood on the streets had turned to one of celebration after the news of the premier’s departure spread. Jubilant crowds waved flags, some dancing on top of a tank in the streets, before thousands broke through the gates of Hasina’s official residence. Bangladesh’s Channel 24 broadcast images of crowds running into the compound, waving to the camera as they celebrated, looting furniture and books while others relaxed on beds. Al Jazeera’s Tanvir Chowdhury, reporting from Shahbagh Square – the epicentre of the student protests that began last month – said he has “never witnessed something like this” in the capital. Everybody is celebrating, not just students – people from all walks of life. They said this had to happen, there was nothing we could say, democracy was squeezed and now we are free,” Chowdhury said. The message from the protesters is that whoever comes to power next “will now know that they won’t tolerate any kind of dictatorship or mismanagement and that the students will decide”, he added. Bangladesh suffered many years of military rule in the 1970s and 80s following the war that secured its independence from Pakistan in 1971, and many are wary of the danger of a return. Army chief Waker-Uz-Zaman was eager to try to reassure the country. He urged citizens to keep trust in the army, which, he said, would return peace to the country. We will also ensure that justice is served for every death and crime that occurred during the protests,” he said, calling on the public to exercise patience and cease any acts of violence and vandalism. We have invited representatives from all major political parties, and they have accepted our invitation and committed to collaborating with us,” the general added. The military has a “very tough job ahead,” Irene Khan, a UN special rapporteur, said. We are all hoping that the transition would be peaceful and that there will be accountability for all the human rights violations that have taken place,” Khan told Al Jazeera. |

| 4 | \*\*From killing Mujib in 1975 to ‘taking responsibility’ in 2024: the role of the army in BangladeshThe army controlled politics in Bangladesh directly or indirectly for 15 years after the father of the nation was assassinated. The interference of the generals didn't stop until Sheikh Hasina, Mujib's daughter, rose to power in 2008\*\* In his address to the media on Monday (August 5), Bangladesh Army Chief General Waker-uz-Zaman said an interim government will be formed to run the country. He said he was “taking responsibility”, and urged the people to maintain peace and order. Prime Minister [Sheikh Hasina](https://indianexpress.com/about/sheikh-hasina/) had just resigned and fled the country in the face of ongoing protests that began over quotas for the kin of freedom fighters in government jobs. Thousands of people were celebrating in the streets, and many stormed the official residence of the Prime Minister and Home Minister. |

| 5 | back on the streets to give the capital Dhaka a makeover. | Photo Credit: MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/AFP At the crack of dawn on August 15, 1975, a group of renegade officers of the Bangladesh Army’s First Armoured Division stormed into Dhanmondi 32, Dhaka, and gunned down Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, his wife, sons, and 10-year-old grandson. His daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, were spared only by virtue of them being abroad on that fateful day. Half a century later, 10 days to the exact date, Hasina would be forced to make an ignominious and hasty airborne exit out of Dhaka to India, where she had found refuge 50 years ago after her father’s assassination. Across June and July 2024, a wave of student-led protests (first against a judicially reinstated quota system and then against the detention of student leaders) snowballed into larger protests with a single-point agenda: Hasina’s resignation. While she invited protesters for talks, the continued heavy-handedness of security forces on the ground prompted a final “March to Dhaka” across the country. By the time Hasina succumbed, resigned, and flew out of the country on August 5, Bangladesh had lost approximately 300 lives to the clashes and ushered in a new military-backed interim government led by long-time Hasina critic—2006 Nobel Peace Prize awardee Muhammad Yunus. With her political future teetering at the finish line, how did Hasina come to this point after securing her fourth consecutive and fifth overall prime ministerial term in January 2024? Also Read | Bangladesh’s revolution: A surprising lesson in secularism In the early 2000s, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s National Security Adviser Brijesh Mishra sought to offer her policy advice, Sheikh Hasina curtly reminded him: “As a friend of India… I will address all your concerns, but don’t tell me how to run my country.” Hasina’s ties with New Delhi have been defined by the personal relationship built over the years with Delhi’s leaders, a consistent struggle to reconcile the personal with Bangladesh’s political, and an attempt at letting the former power the latter—which succeeded for a while. Indira Gandhi’s refuge to Hasina in 1975 lit an enduring fire of friendship with Hasina in Delhi, but it also gave rise to the expectations that India would have from Bangladesh in return a symbiotic relationship with a nation that had not let go of its violent birth pangs and was not necessarily predisposed to overly amicable bilateral ties with India. Hasina’s political gambit was to nourish this relationship, draw tangible benefits, use these to present a strong domestic case for firm India-Bangladesh ties and thwart the anti-India politics of the opposition, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Islamist parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami. As a first-time premier, Hasina kept a watchful eye on the opposition and catered to it as a credible constituency. Initial missteps Hasina’s initial missteps with India were evident in her first prime ministerial tenure (1996-2001). India raced to secure multiple successful deals (a 30-year water-sharing agreement and the long-sought Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord). However, as Avinash Paliwal, the author of India’s Near East: A New History, says, Hasina’s pace in signing the deals came at a huge political cost, with the BNP accusing the Ganga water deal of being skewed in India’s favour, and Hasina’s government was forced into a minority. Evidently, Hasina’s keenness to rely on these deals did not translate into domestic political gains, showing her initial inability to weather the domestic cost, leading to her ouster in 2001. In any case, Delhi-Dhaka ties soured considerably after a Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) contingent killed 16 personnel from India’s Border Security Force (BSF) in Meghalaya in 2001, even as India seemed willing to let Hasina take time to deliver on other key demands (such as the extradition of ULFA-I general secretary Anup Chetia or access to the Chittagong and Mongla ports). India’s ties with Bangladesh predictably tanked during Khaleda Zia’s tenure from 2001 onwards, with a watershed defence cooperation agreement with China in 2002, increasing contacts with Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), frequent skirmishes between the BSF and the Bangaldesh Rifles (BDR), and resistance to allow Indian transit trade through Bangladeshi ports. The latter pushed India to circumvent Bangladesh and undertake an ambitious sea-land corridor through Myanmar’s Sittwe port (the Kaladan Project) that could connect to India’s north-eastern region. In hindsight, it is evident that both the United Progressive Alliance government in New Delhi and the BNP government in Dhaka attempted to mend ties, but the temptation of anti-India politics always prevailed in Bangladesh. Both under Khaleda Zia and the military caretaker government between 2007 and 2009, it was relatively easier for Hasina to campaign for better ties with India as it dovetailed with other planks that characterised opposition politics. People take photos in front of anti-government graffitis on a vandalised mural depicting Bangladesh’s founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman days after a student-led uprising ended the 15-year rule of his daughter Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka on August 10. People take photos in front of anti-government graffitis on a vandalised mural depicting Bangladesh’s founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman days after a student-led uprising ended the 15-year rule of his daughter Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka on August 10. | Photo Credit: LUIS TATO/AFP It is her second tenure as Prime Minister that featured events that arguably eroded Hasina’s political will to worry about the casualties of pro-India politics. In the 2010-11 period (which featured mutual prime ministerial visits between Dhaka and New Delhi), Hasina stalled the opening of Chittagong and Mongla to India while defending a crucial power deal with New Delhi to treat Bangladesh’s electricity shortfall. This drew immense opposition ire and claims of infringement on Bangladeshi sovereignty. A thorny issue A particularly thorny issue was the demarcation of boundaries on which Hasina staked her political reputation in vain. In any case, the beginning of her second term was marked by the bloodbath from a mutiny by the BDR, now known as the Border Guard Bangladesh, which claimed the lives of 74 individuals, including its Director General, and threatened to plunge the country into enough instability to force Hasina’s ouster. Here, Hasina made a choice. With the Indian military ready to intervene, she made it her principal instrument of leverage to stay the Army chief’s hand against the mutineers.

Regardless of whether Hasina viewed the India card as a carte blanche, it became evident from then on that her appetite for balancing multiple domestic constituencies when dealing with India had reduced significantly. After at least three controversial elections marred by progressively worse clampdowns on the opposition and charges of rigging, Hasina eventually oversaw the resolution of most of the legacy disputes with India, including border demarcation, without having to heed opposition resistance. Under Hasina, India even secured permanent access to Chattogram (official name of Chittagong) and Mongla ports by 2023.Having cultivated an equally strong relationship with the Narendra Modi government (from 2014), she oversaw the zenith of India-Bangladesh ties between 2022 and 2024, even as some key disputes remained (such as sharing the Teesta’s waters). On the other hand, Hasina’s well-entrenched relationship with Delhi also allowed her a bigger appetite for widening ties with China; the biggest testament to this was an unprecedented deal for two Type 035 submarines in 2016 and a new Chinese built submarine base at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal in 2023. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina during a ceremonial reception for Bangladesh PM at Rashtrapati Bhawan, in New Delhi on June 22.Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina during a ceremonial reception for Bangladesh PM at Rashtrapati Bhawan, in New Delhi on June 22. | Photo Credit: SUSHIL KUMAR VERMANaturally, for the BNP and its allies, opposition to Hasina became inextricably linked to their opposition to India. Hasina’s iron hand against basic democratic freedoms that forced the opposition out of the formal political space by 2019 only enhanced this sentiment. In August 2024, the combined resistance that brewed for over 15 years boiled over. In the end, the most potent external instrument that aided Hasina even against other external threats (such as an increasingly critical Washington) evolved into one of her many vulnerabilities. Hasina’s opponents find political space

Hasina’s increasingly unilateral approach to policymaking with India was symptomatic of a larger malaise. Her gradual disinclination to regard opposition politics as credible or legitimate and her inclination for brute force burnt her political wick. Right from the beginning, she made the Awami League’s role in freedom fighting and Sheikh Mujib’s legacy her political centrepiece. While this made her opposition to the Jamaat-e-Islami more fundamental (since the Jamaat carried the tainted legacy of siding with the Pakistan Army in the 1971 massacres), Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman’s BNP offered a greater challenge. The BNP countered Hasina’s politics of nationalism with its own, rooted in Rahman’s legacy of being a hero of the Liberation War, claiming as much agency in Bangladesh politics as Hasina. Zia-ur-Rahman’s assassination by renegade officers in 1981 (like Mujib’s in 1975) gave his wife Khaleda Zia greater ability to encroach on Hasina’s platform.

Hasina’s opponents, such as the Jamaat, found enough political space (including Cabinet berths) in the BNP governments of 1991 and 2001 in continuation of the Zia-ur-Rahman military-led government’s policy of providing greater space to Islamist parties after 1977, revoking an earlier ban on religious parties and obliterating secularism as one of the four state principles. Hasina, on the other hand, spearheaded the movement for Jamaat’s formal political ostracisation with redoubled efforts after 2009. She lobbied for a war crimes tribunal to try its members who sided with Pakistan in 1971 and attempted to ban the party in 2013 when the Dhaka High Court cancelled its registration as a party on account of its charter, which effectively rejected Bangladeshi sovereignty. Hasina also justifiably rejected several of the Jamaat’s Islamist demands such as a blasphemy law. However, such politics did not mean that Hasina was opposed to Islamism in Bangladesh; like the BNP, the Awami League also sought the support of many Islamist parties. A prime example of this was her co-opting of the ultraconservative Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam, which was behind anti-India protests during Modi’s visit to Bangladesh in 2021. She conceded to several of their Islamist demands; she even earned the moniker “Mother of Qawmi” from Hefazat leaders for recognising Qawmi degrees on a par with university qualifications.Prior to the 2018 elections, the Awami League’s alliance included 61 Islamist parties (both registered and unregistered). However, as Bangladeshi political scientist Ali Riaz says, this was driven more by ideological affinity rather than electoral considerations given the paltry vote share of most of these parties (for instance, the Jamaat-e-Islami’s vote share dropped from 12.13 per cent in 1991 to 4.48 per cent in 2008). As Riaz cautions, parties such as the Jamaat were sought to be banned not because of their Islamism but their Pakistan connection. Hasina’s efforts against the Jamaat since then have always been an attempt to consolidate her legacy as a standard-bearer of Bangladeshi nationalism, one of her many tools to decimate the opposition space. This claim to leadership through Mujib’s legacy was evident until her final days in power, especially as she implicitly compared student protesters to “razakars” (Pakistan Army loyalists in 1971). That she saw the BNP through the same lens was evident in her clampdown on the party, especially between 2018 (Khaleda Zia’s arrest) and 2023 (bans on several of BNP’s activities and publications). In the end, protesters turned her nationalism against her, chanting “Ami ke? Tumi ke? Rajakar rajakar” (Who am I? Who are you? Razakar razakar). Khaleda Zia waves to supporters after she was arrested in Dhaka on September 3, 2007. Khaleda Zia waves to supporters after she was arrested in Dhaka on September 3, 2007. | Photo Credit: PAVEL RAHMAN/AP The role that India played in Hasina’s career should take nothing away from the agency she herself has exercised as a politician. Despite the seemingly iron-clad relationship with New Delhi, before her 2017 visit to New Delhi, Hasina publicly blamed India’s Research & Analysis Wing for helping the BNP unseat her in 2001 over interests linked to natural gas. In an election year, Hasina’s political tack to undermine the BNP’s charge of being too close to India reflected her ability to risk Indian sensitivities. She weathered the risk, with India-Bangladesh ties only waxing and waxing. Hasina and the Army Between August and November 1975, Bangladesh had witnessed a coup, a counter-coup, and a second counter-coup. While the first killed the Bangabandhu and his kin, the last led to the Army chief Zia-ur-Rahman’s eventual elevation to President in 1977. In the lead-up to Mujib’s death, the political and military leadership in Bangladesh was embroiled in Byzantian conspiracy and mistrust. Mujib’s retention of a personal martial force, his banning of all political parties except the Awami League, and allegations of corruption, all contributed to the plot. However, a key factor was his revulsion of those soldiers of the Bangladesh Army who had stayed on with the Pakistan Army in the Liberation War without joining the rebel ranks of the Mukti Bahini. When Hasina returned to Dhaka as the president of the Awami League in 1981, the Bangladesh Army was shedding the discrimination within its ranks that her father had desired (to eliminate pro-Pakistan sentiments). The Bangladesh Army then was a force with a double inheritance: the legacies, traditions, and cultures of the British Indian Army and the Pakistan Army of which it was a direct successor. Following the turbulence of the Liberation War, officers across the rank and file of the Army had to negotiate the new politics of liberation and a distinct Bangladeshi identity. Since the man who led this force then (Zia-ur-Rahman) was himself an officer decorated by the Pakistan Army for gallantry in the 1965 war against India, it was natural that both the Bangladesh Army and the BNP would be coloured by anti-India sentiments in addition to those that already simmered. A constant apprehension of Indian military intervention characterised even those officers responsible for the multiple coups. Evidently, despite their shared colonial past, Bangladesh’s civil-military relations since its independence have aligned more closely with Pakistan’s experience than India’s, stopping just short of becoming a garrison state like Pakistan.

Also Read | Bangladesh is considered to be one of the great mysteries in social development: Swati Narayan As a result, Hasina arguably learnt early on that the Bangladesh Army had become what Ayesha Siddiqa, the author of Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy, characterises as an “arbitrator military” with an active interest in dividing state power. Hence, even as Hasina and Khaleda Zia jointly mobilised against General Hussain Muhammad Ershad’s military rule (1983-1990) in its twilight years, the Awami League partnered with Ershad for the most part of this period. Ershad’s initial support for Hasina after she wrested power from Khaleda Zia in 1996 was crucial for her government and is testimony to Hasina’s ability to navigate Army politics. When President Iajuddin Ahmed declared an emergency in 2007, resulting from Hasina’s boycott of elections under his caretaker government owing to perceptions that he was partial to Khaleda Zia, it led to yet another coup by the Army Chief General Mooed Uddin Ahmed. While both “Battling Begums” were arrested on corruption charges in 2007 (soon released), Hasina arguably garnered more valuable lessons on how to keep the Army in the barracks. Guided by this experience, she abolished the constitutional provision for a caretaker government in 2011.

Having herself led the charge to insert the provision in the Constitution in 1996 at the end of Khaleda Zia’s first term and fighting her first successful elections under a caretaker setup, she now feared being at the other end of the spectrum. The Bangladesh Army thus would not take power for the next 15 years, and the Awami League would allow no caretaker governments for three successive elections. Just three years into Hasina’s second prime ministerial stint, the Army even thwarted an attempted coup by a section of mid-ranking Islamist hardliners within the Army in December 2011.

How did Hasina manage this? By heaping money on defence and avoiding public conflict with Army chiefs. Between 2008 and 2017, Bangladesh’s defence spending rose by 123 per cent, according to a report in The Economist from 2021 that pointed to Hasina’s strange silence on an Al Jazeera documentary on alleged corruption by the then Army Chief Gen. Aziz Ahmed. The Bangladesh Army also amassed wealth for its officer cadre (which Ayesha Siddiqa terms MILBUS, or “military capital used for the personal benefit of military fraternity”) through the Sena Kalyan Sangstha and the Bangladesh Army Welfare Trust, which bears an uncanny resemblance to Pakistan’s Army Welfare Trust. Today, retired Army officers run several organisations that add to MILBUS, such as the Sena Kalyan Insurance, with a retired Brigadier General serving as MD and CEO. Even as the US effectively sanctioned (designated) Gen. Aziz Ahmed in May 2024, Hasina pushed back against US criticism, continuing to refrain from speaking out against Aziz. Bangladesh’s civil-military milieu at present has an interesting character. General Waqar-uz-Zaman, the incumbent Army chief, is related to Hasina by marriage; his wife is her cousin and the daughter of former Army chief General Mustafizur Rahman (1997 to 2000). This, however, did not translate into overt support for Hasina, with Zaman protecting his public image (and the Army’s image by extension) and seeking to uphold the Army’s perception as a stabilising force amidst the turmoil. Troops refused to open fire on civilians, thus refusing to become complicit in Hasina’s authoritarian tactics. Over-extending the Army’s role in the future would only dent its credibility, given the freshly mobilised youth’s demands for greater democratic space. It is perhaps testimony to the goodwill that Hasina built over the years with the men in uniform that they facilitated her hasty exit from Dhaka.Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus speaks to the media in Dhaka on August 8. Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus speaks to the media in Dhaka on August 8. | Photo Credit: MONIRUL ALAM/EPA-EFE In hindsight, the violence-ridden history of her personal and political life, coupled with her nationalistic brand of politics, profoundly shaped her approach to leadership. It pushed her incrementally towards authoritarianism, for survival more than anything else. Even as young student leaders stood behind the octogenarian Muhammad Yunus as he took oath as the interim Prime Minister, Bangladesh’s “second liberation” from Hasina has been marked by chaos and targeted violence against Bangladesh’s minorities, particularly Hindus, by Islamist mobs in the immediate aftermath of her exit. While this testifies to Hasina’s ability to have kept such violence (largely, not completely) in check, it also points to her failure to build enduring guardrails against religiously motivated extremist elements. More broadly, it also proves that Hasina’s stewardship of Bangladesh’s upward economic trajectory across the last decade did not guarantee national stability or popular support for her, since it came at the cost of fundamental political freedoms. Hoping to avoid being removed from power (at best) or sharing her father’s fate (at worst), Hasina may have inflicted a far greater tragedy on herself, her party, and her father’s legacy. Perhaps most symbolic of this irony is young protesters pulling down Bangabandhu’s statue, reminiscent of Iraqis toppling Saddam Hussein’s statue in 2003. For Iraq, it was the culmination of the rule of a despot through a US invasion that had little legal basis. For Bangladesh, it was a casualty of Hasina’s Mujib-centric politicking and an over-reliance on the country’s founding impulse up until the moment it meant nothing. |

| 6 | Hours later, however, the Army Chief assured that the country would head toward a "better time", clarifying that the army would not create any hassle. He announced that an interim government would take charge following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation and departure from the country. Author and columnist Shafquat Rabbee, who hopes for a smoother transition of power in India's eastern neighbour, told IndiaTodayTV, "The ball is now in the court of the Bangladeshi Army generals". Despite the army's clarification and promises, many could not dismiss the possibility that Bangladesh's future might once again fall under military rule, given the ongoing turmoil and the precedents.

MILITARY SHADOWS ON DEMOCRACY IN BANGLADESH In recent history, Bangladesh has been ruled by Sheikh Hasina since 2009. However, the country has a long history marked by military rule, beginning with the bloody coup in 1975 that replaced its founding leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He and 18 others of his family were massacred by military officers on August 15, 1975. Shaikh Hasina is Mujibur Rahman's daughter. Since the takeover in 1975, Bangladesh remained under military rule till 1991. While the army isn't as all-powerful in Bangladesh as it is in Pakistan, its shadow has lingered. However, the sidelining of army men from West Pakistan after 1971, led to a fracture in the Bangladesh Army. |

| 7 | \*\*The Bangladesh Coup: The Security Dilemma For India And The Indo-Pacific – AnalysisBangladesh’s democratic process has been disrupted by military coups since 1975 and instability has marked its political landscape. After the restoration of democracy in 1991, parliamentary form was reinstated with Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina alternatively holding power. However, since 2009 it was Sheikh Hasina who controlled power and registered mammoth progress in economic growth. But there has been a consistent pressure from orthodox Muslim schools and the military on government resulting in the current military coup. It has tremendous security implications for India and the Indo-pacific that forms the prime thread in the current article. Bangladesh’s democratic process has faced numerous challenges since its independence in 1971, including autocracy and military interventions. The country’s democratic process was initially influenced by Indian democratic tradition but was disrupted by military coups since1975 and subsequent political instability. After the restoration of democracy in 1991, parliamentary democracy was reinstated, with Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina holding power. Despite progress in economic growth and social measures, Bangladesh’s democratic system remains under pressure from orthodox Muslim schools and the military (Thakur, 2007). Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year tenure has significantly influenced the country’s democratic course, fostering strong economic growth and political stability. However, the political influence of the opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has decreased due to legal disputes, leadership turmoil, and limitations on political engagements. This has led to a ‘single party dominance system’ since 2009, leading to more centralization of power and autocratic rule by the ruling Awami League. Discontent among the BNP and Jamat-e-Islami of Bangladesh has been simmering, with the reservation of seats for freedom fighters serving as a vent for protests. On August 5, 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stepped down amid widespread demonstrations and a military takeover in Bangladesh. Over 560 fatalities occurred, with protesters targeting Awami League (AL) leaders and the Hindu minority. The Bangladesh Army took control and declared an interim government, calling on demonstrators to stop violence. Hasina and her sister escaped to Ghaziabad, India. The military rule in Bangladesh could have multifaceted impacts on Indian security due to geographical, historical, and socio-political ties. Providing asylum to Hasina could also be a contentious issue. The new head of the interim government Mohammed Yunus will remain a duckling under the military junta. Former BNP functionary Gayeshwar Roy warned India that cooperation with the enemy would be difficult if they helped the enemy. The military takeover has implications for India and the world. The presence of the interim government under military ensures the failure of democracy and Bangladesh’s return back to democracy is still vague. While a political vacuum arises in the absence of Sheikh Hasina’s twenty years long rule the regional players like Pakistan and China, the arch rivals of India, may take it as an opportunity to entrench themselves and control the South Asian geostrategic space. India has traditionally supported democratic governance in its neighbourhood, and a shift to military rule could necessitate a recalibration of diplomatic and strategic policies. Bilateral cooperation on various fronts, including counter-terrorism, trade, and water-sharing agreements, might be adversely affected. The lack of a stable and democratically elected government could complicate negotiations and enforcement of existing agreements. Military rule has its own limitations and has mostly fallen to anti-India forces in South Asia. Bangladesh has significant importance as a trading partner for India. Over the last 5 years, India’s exports to Bangladesh have grown consistently at an average annual rate of 14%, reaching $7.17 billion in 2017 and $13.8 billion in 2022. In the year 2022, Bangladesh’s exports to India amounted to a total value of $2 billion. The imposition of military authority may result in economic sanctions or trade interruptions, which might have an impact on economic ties. This might potentially have a cascading impact on the economy of border states and the broader dynamics of regional commerce. The political uncertainty in Bangladesh poses a potential threat to Indian investments in the country. Indian enterprises operating in Bangladesh would be affected by this, perhaps resulting in economic losses. In the future, Bangladesh’s economy, which has seen significant growth in recent decades, may potentially decline. The political transition in Bangladesh has resulted in sectarian violence specifically aimed at minority groups, notably Hindus and political figures (Paul & Dass, 2024). A total of 29 leaders from the All India Muslim League (AL) have been assassinated, suggesting that the demonstrators consist of members from the BNP and those who oppose India and the AL. Khalida Zia, the head of the BNP, who had been placed under house arrest and was facing allegations of corruption, has been freed. The assassination of AL leaders may perhaps be a retaliatory action carried out by BNP members, who have consistently maintained stronger affiliations with Jamat-e-Islami. Jamat-e-Islami has expressed strong disapproval of the Awami League’s establishment of the War Crimes Tribunal in 2008, which was in line with their promise made before the election. The Jamat people have charged the AL’s push for justice against the sacrifices of the independence movement fighters associated with it. There has begun a counter charge process of trapping Sheikh Hasina. Sheikh Hasina is now facing 33 cases against her, including 27 for murder, four for crimes against humanity and genocide, and one for abduction. (The Hindu, August 21, 2024). The new government is demanding her extradition back. Humayun Kabir, president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), “I think we should not rely on a particular individual or party, it is best to keep good relations with all stakeholders. Bangladesh and India are close neighbours and will have to live side by side peacefully. India should keep a relationship as a neighbour, irrespective of the government.” Mohammed Younus, the head of new Interim Government held that ‘Delhi should understand what people of Bangladesh want’. The Hindu minority is specifically targeted, with intentional attacks on Hindu dwellings and places of worship, resulting in some persons seeking shelter. The ramifications of this violence may have enormous implications across India, especially in areas with substantial Muslim populations. The protesters have specifically targeted the Hindu people, their houses, and temples, indicating a possible connection between anti-Hindu Islamist organisations and the demonstrators. The issue of illegal immigration into India has led to political and social tensions, with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise in Assam aimed at identifying undocumented immigrants. The presence of illegal migrants in strategically important areas is alarming, as Rohingya migrants have been found to have collusion with Kashmir militants. The Act provides relief to address security challenges and minority persecution. Despite being introduced in 1951 and 1976 by Indira Gandhi, the NRC has never progressed due to political reasons and lack of political will. Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has appealed to everyone to read the bill (Thakur, 2024). Bangladesh has significant geostrategic importance due to its strategic position in South Asia, bordered by India, Myanmar, and the Bay of Bengal. It functions as a crucial maritime gateway to the Indian Ocean, playing a significant role in facilitating trade and energy routes (Thakur, 2023, p. 424). Additionally, it functions as a channel between South Asia and Southeast Asia, offering feasible routes for regional connectivity initiatives like China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Bangladesh’s geographical location near crucial international maritime routes, along with its strategic partnerships with prominent nations like China and India, significantly amplifies its geopolitical importance in terms of regional security, trade, and economic integration. Furthermore, the country’s location on the Bay of Bengal, which is rich in natural resources, amplifies its strategic significance for South Asia and India. For a considerable duration, Bangladesh’s ties with the US were strained as the US aimed to expand its geopolitical influence in Bangladesh, similar to its interests in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Expressing concern about the potential fragmentation of Bangladesh and the United States’ role in ongoing developments, Sheikh Hasina said that she is engaged in a multifaceted struggle, both domestically and internationally, against persistent plots aimed at establishing a new nation inside Bangladesh. “Similar to East Timor, they plan to establish a Christian nation by annexing territories in Bangladesh (specifically Chattogram) and Myanmar, with a stronghold in the Bay of Bengal,” as reported by the Economic Times in 2024. Hasina’s anxiety also suggests that she has under significant pressure from the United States to secure vital access to the Indian Ocean via Bangladesh. Hasina said that if she had let a certain nation to construct an air base in Bangladesh, she would not have encountered any difficulties, referring to the United States (Economic Times, 2024). The change in US policy also signifies that, considering the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean and escalating strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region, the US is placing more emphasis on the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific. In this context, Bangladesh assumes a crucial role as a significant connection. After pulling out of Afghanistan, the United States has expanded its network of vital allies throughout the Indo-Pacific region. The US has a long-standing policy of promoting autocratic regimes against uncompromising democracies, and the current development in Bangladesh seems to be a continuation of this approach. Because Hasina refused to compromise with the US proposals, she was forced to bear the consequences. Fareed Zakaria discusses a similar incident surrounding then Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Annoyed by persistent American exhortation on democracy, Mubarak reportedly asked, “If I were to do what you ask, Islamic fundamentalists will take over Egypt. Is that what you want?” Interestingly, the 2010-12 Arab Spring claimed Mubarak as one of its first casualties, and the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Islamist leadership took his place. The Saudis, too, have often reminded Americans that if they pressed their government too hard, “the likely alternative to the regime is not Jeffersonian democracy by a Taliban-style theocracy” (Firstpost, 2024). Given the increasing geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region for future maritime security equations and trade flows, which account for about 70 percent of global trade, the US has been enhancing its presence through various channels. It has entered into maritime security understandings with India, Japan, Australia, and the UK. The increased Chinese presence in the ocean also makes it urgent for the US to secure more geostatic bases in the region, and Bangladesh has fallen to these designs. The Indian challenge is to control the new administration in Bangladesh and supporting the progress of democracy. Failure to do so might result in a decline in economic development and the resurgence of military oppression similar to that seen in the 1970s and 1980s. If the new administration does not address the minority suppression by the demonstrators in a forceful and fair manner, it might lead to an excessive degree of communal enmity that may become uncontrollable for both India and Bangladesh. India must recognise that amid the escalating competition between the United States and China in the Indian Ocean, Indian interests are secure when aligned with its neighbouring countries. It has to articulate its interest well while dealing with the newly emerging patterns of strategic engagements.\*\* |

| 8 | US Supreme Court declines to halt Donald Trump's sentencing and gag order in New York hush money case until after election Bangladesh president orders release of jailed ex-PM and opposition chief Khaleda Zia Reliance to hold annual general meeting on August 29 Meghalaya night curfew along its border with Bangladesh NSA Ajit Doval meets Sheikh Hasina at Hindon Airbase Dhaka erupts in jubilation as Hasina resigns Dow sinks 1,000 points, extending a global rout

Salman Khan residence firing case: Accused Vicky Gupta has filed a bail plea before Mumbai Sessions Court EAM Dr S Jaishankar briefed PM Narendra Modi on the situation in Bangladesh ndiGo cancels all flight operations to Dhaka for tomorrow Lok Sabha passes Budgeagaint grants; guillotine applied Air India cancels scheduled operations to and from Dhaka with immediate effect Bangladesh Protests: Sheikh Hasina lands in Hindon Air Base after fleeing BangladeshOn current situation in Bangladesh, US State Department Spokesperson, Matthew Miller says, "We have seen the announcement that Prime Minister Hasina has resigned from her position and departed Bangladesh. We are monitoring the situation carefully. The United States stands with the people of Bangladesh. We urge all parties to refrain from further violence. Too many lives have been lost over the past several weeks, and we urge calm and restraint in the days ahead. We welcome the announcement of the interim government and urge any transition be conducted in accordance with Bangladesh's laws. We are deeply saddened about the reports of Human Rights abuses, casualties and injuries over the weekend in the past weeks...”BJP MP Kangana Ranaut today said it is a matter of great honour that Bangladesh leader Sheikh Hasina "feels safe in Bharat" after Hasina resigned as prime minister and landed near Delhi in a military aircraft amid unrest in her country. Ranaut, a national award-winning actor and BJP MP from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, also criticised those questioning "Hindu Rastra (a Hindu nation)". She claimed that Muslim countries are not safe "even for Muslims".Union Ministers leave from 7, Lok Kalyan Marg after the conclusion of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), in which PM Modi was briefed about the situation in Bangladesh |

| 9 | NEW DELHI: It does not have a defined military rival, but it has a history of violent coups and now the role of the Bangladesh Army seems more questionable than ever. Two big questions remain unanswered after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh—how much of the Bangladesh Army and allied armed forces have been infiltrated by Islamists, and what is the scale of assets that the Bangladesh Army and other armed forces own? These two questions have always hung heavy over the body polity of Bangladesh ever since its very creation. During the 1971 liberation war, which broke away East Pakistan and created Bangladesh, the Bengali soldiers in the east revolted against their west Pakistani commanders and fought the Pakistani Army from the west to push through the cause of independence, fighting side-by-side with civilian revolutionaries, but from the moment independence came, the friction between the civilian leadership and the army was relentless. It was blood-soaked army coups that eliminated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, popularly known as Bangabandhu or the Friend of Bangladesh, and the father of the Bangladeshi nation, with his entire family, barring two daughters who were outside Bangladesh in August 1975; and in 1981, a general who was a participant in earlier coups, and had managed to rise to become the President of Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman, was himself murdered by a different faction of the armed forces. Between 1983 and 1990, the country was ruled by a military dictator, General Muhammad Ershad. In 2011, another faction of the Bangladeshi armed forces, with a stated desire to establish Islamic law in Bangladesh, revolted and attempted a coup. This came only two years after another murderous revolt by a faction of the Bangladesh Rifles, the country’s border security force. In each occasion, there have been questions on the real motive of the coups and attempted coups, how much of these were power grabs, and what portion was driven by extremist religious ideology. In 2008, writing for the Harvard International Review, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, the US-based technology evangelist businessman and consultant, and son of Sheikh Hasina, pointed out that military recruitment in Bangladesh used to have around 5% recruitment from the Islamist groups’ young foot soldiers, but this had gone up to around 35%. As the son of Sheikh Hasina, who was firmly against groups like the Jamaat-e-Islami and pushed the trial of Islamists for siding with Pakistan and participating in war crimes in the 1971 war, Sajeeb Wazed Joy’s assessment could be tempered down for bias, but as the 2011 coup attempt showed, Islamist ideology was prevalent enough within the armed forces to embolden a conspiracy for a coup to capture control of the army and the government. While ideology remains a virulent problem in Bangladesh, there are deeper existential questions about the Bangladeshi military. Unlike India or Pakistan, Bangladesh, with nearly 200 million people, does not have a direct military rival threatening it. It has no critical militaristic challenge and yet the Bangladesh Army, born as it was as an offshoot of the Pakistan Army, has always had expansionistic tendencies. The only country in the Indian subcontinent which has a much more aggressive history of military interference in civilian government is the Pakistan Army, which is widely considered the real seat of power in that country which has often disrupted civilian rule with military coups. The Bangladesh Army, in a sense, has tried to follow suit. There has never been a period in the history of Bangladesh when its government has not had some kind of overhang from the armed forces. The memory of the assassination of Mujibur Rahman and his family, including his young children, by officers of the armed forces still casts a shadow on civilian government-military relations in the country, not least because it is widely known that Mujibur Rahman had been warned by Indian intelligence agencies that a coup was being plotted against him, and that he should leave the country with his children. But he refused arguing that his “own people” would never harm him. In fact, apart from Sheikh Hasina and the Islamists, there are few prominent national leaders in the history of Bangladesh who were not generals and rose to power via coups and authoritarian measures. Hasina’s fierce rival, Khaleda Zia, is the widow of Ziaur Rahman, the general who became President through a military coup. This is why the military, despite its lack of war challenge, has received significant support through its history in Bangladesh; for instance, as the accompanying graph shows, despite being a fraction of India’s size and for most of its history relatively much poorer, military expenditure as a percentage of government expenditure in Bangladesh closely mapped India’s trajectory, sometimes even superseding India. Source: World Bank, SIPRI. Even though the Bangladesh Army has never fought a major war—unlike the Pakistani Army—in the Global Firepower Index (2024), which assesses military strength, its “military strength values” are higher than that of Pakistan. The Index ranks the Bangladesh Army at 43, while the Pakistan Army is ranked four notches below at 47. Hasina, on her part, while doggedly pursuing legal action against the killer of her family, had also tried the appeasement route towards the military. Under her watch, the Bangladesh Army Welfare Trust (modelled after the Army Welfare Trust and Fauji Foundation of Pakistan) and other organisations (sort of holding firms) like the Sena Kalyan Sangstha grew to run a whole range of commercial activities which have an estimated combined turnover of nearly $1 billion. It runs a bank, major cement companies, textile mills, shopping complexes, a clutch of hotels, gas stations, and a golf club, and even a major ice-cream company, among many other assets. Also supported by Hasina, the Bangladesh Army developed an ambitious expansion plan called Forces Goal 2030 which was rolled out around 2017. As the Bangladeshi military analyst Iqram Hossain Mahqoob has written, the army under Hasina received support to grow at an “unprecedented” level, which involved: “… the raising of three full Infantry divisions (7, 10, and 17), engineer construction battalions, armoured regiments, and establishing brigades (a tactical formation of the Army), where eight infantry battalions (a tactical group lower than brigades) and one infantry brigade have been mechanized. In recent years, the number of cantonments has also been increased. The army has already made a number of upgrades to its equipment, including the procurement of helicopters, unmanned planes, and anti-aircraft missiles, in accordance with the strategy. Many of these transactions used Chinese equipment: Bangladesh has ordered 36 WS-22 multiple rocket launcher systems (MRLS), 44 MBT-2000 Main Battle Tanks, two regiments of FM-90 short range surface to air missiles, QW-2 and FN-6 hand-held anti-aircraft missiles, and PF-98 anti-tank rockets.” Perhaps even more elaborate, and certainly more eyebrow-raising (from the perspective of both America and India) developments took place in the Bangladesh Navy. Mahqoob notes, “The Navy has seen a major increase in firepower and weapon production capabilities. Over the past 14 years, the Navy’s Fleet has grown by 31 vessels, including four frigates, six corvettes, four big patrol craft, five fuel craft, and two training ships, transforming it into a fully operational three-dimensional force. Two new Chinese built submarines, two corvettes, and a number of patrol boats have been delivered to the Bangladesh Navy. In order to provide secure jetty facilities for submarines and warships in the harbour, Bangladesh is getting ready to operationalize its first submarine base with modern basin facilities for the Navy at Pekua of Cox’s Bazar. Also, a new naval base (BNS Sher-e-Bangla) in the Bay of Bengal will be able to offer maritime and coastal defence, air support for the seaport and the communities around it, and defence against external enemy attack.” Not to be left out, the Bangladesh Air Force also received, under this expansion plan to 2030, “…23 PT-6 basic trainers, 16 Chengdu F-7BGI fighters, 16 Yakovlev Yak-130 advanced jet trainers, 9 K-8W jet trainers, 3 Let L-410 Turbolet transport trainers, and 16 Yakovlev Yak-130 advanced jet trainers. The Force is poised to acquire high-performance, ultra-modern fighter planes”, says Maqoob, under this plan which had been signed off by Hasina. There was speculation that Hasina, who had never quite trusted the army after the role its members had in the decimation of her own family, including the assassination of her father, wanted to ensure that the armed forces get the financial support they need so that their loyalty to her government, and to her, at a personal level, was not questionable. The appointment of General Waqar uz-Zaman, as the army chief, who is the husband of a cousin of Sheikh Hasina, was meant to further strengthen ties between Hasina and the army so that any fissures could be tackled swiftly and without any errors. But when the mob started towards Ganabhaban, the residence of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Army gave Hasina barely 45 minutes to pack up and exit the country. Reportedly, Hasina was furious that the army would not protect her with greater force. There is also speculation that without the army’s tacit support, the interim government could not have been formed after Hasina left (she is now in exile in India). And the returning any semblance of peace on the streets of Bangladesh, required, and will require the firm hand of the army (especially since the police force has been decimated and is still seen as loyal to Hasina) for the interim government led by the banker Muhammad Yunus to operate. But will Yunus—seen as the favourite candidate of the Western world, especially America—be able to give the army further financial support in an economy that is tottering? How would the West, and especially America, see the Bangladesh Army’s desire to deepen engagement with the Chinese? All of these are questions that loom over Bangladesh especially since Hasina has accused the Americans of wanting control over a strategic outpost called St. Martin’s Island to balance Chinese presence in the Bay of Bengal, something, supposedly, she refused. And finally, it is a rather large question mark on what part of the Bangladesh Army is loyal to the cause of establishing Islamic rule in the country and how will that faction play out in the future. Hindol Sengupta is professor of international relations at O. P. Jindal Global University, and co-founder of the foreign policy platform Global Order. |

| 10 | In an address to the nation, army chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced that an interim government will now run Bangladesh and called for calm. Hasina, who ruled the country for close to two decades, boarded a military helicopter on Monday, an aide told Al Jazeera, as huge crowds ignored a national curfew to storm her palace in Dhaka. Media reports in India say an aircraft carrying Hasina landed at Hindon Air Base near New Delhi. She was on board a Bangladesh Air Force aircraft which landed at the base in Ghaziabad, India Today news channel reported.Jubilant crowds waved flags, some dancing on top of a tank in the streets, before thousands broke through the gates of Hasina’s official residence. Bangladesh’s Channel 24 broadcast images of crowds running into the compound, waving to the camera as they celebrated, looting furniture and books while others relaxed on beds. |

| 11 | Bangladesh’s democratic process has faced numerous challenges since its independence in 1971, including autocracy and military interventions. The country’s democratic process was initially influenced by Indian democratic tradition but was disrupted by military coups since1975 and subsequent political instability. After the restoration of democracy in 1991, parliamentary democracy was reinstated, with Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina holding power. Despite progress in economic growth and social measures, Bangladesh’s democratic system remains under pressure from orthodox Muslim schools and the military (Thakur, 2007). Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year tenure has significantly influenced the country’s democratic course, fostering strong economic growth and political stability. However, the political influence of the opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has decreased due to legal disputes, leadership turmoil, and limitations on political engagements. This has led to a ‘single party dominance system’ since 2009, leading to more centralization of power and autocratic rule by the ruling Awami League. Discontent among the BNP and Jamat-e-Islami of Bangladesh has been simmering, with the reservation of seats for freedom fighters serving as a vent for protests.On August 5, 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stepped down amid widespread demonstrations and a military takeover in Bangladesh. Over 560 fatalities occurred, with protesters targeting Awami League (AL) leaders and the Hindu minority. The Bangladesh Army took control and declared an interim government, calling on demonstrators to stop violence. Hasina and her sister escaped to Ghaziabad, India. The military rule in Bangladesh could have multifaceted impacts on Indian security due to geographical, historical, and socio-political ties. Providing asylum to Hasina could also be a contentious issue. The new head of the interim government Mohammed Yunus will remain a duckling under the military junta. Former BNP functionary Gayeshwar Roy warned India that cooperation with the enemy would be difficult if they helped the enemy. The military takeover has implications for India and the world. The presence of the interim government under military ensures the failure of democracy and Bangladesh’s return back to democracy is still vague. While a political vacuum arises in the absence of Sheikh Hasina’s twenty years long rule the regional players like Pakistan and China, the arch rivals of India, may take it as an opportunity to entrench themselves and control the South Asian geostrategic space. India has traditionally supported democratic governance in its neighbourhood, and a shift to military rule could necessitate a recalibration of diplomatic and strategic policies. Bilateral cooperation on various fronts, including counter-terrorism, trade, and water-sharing agreements, might be adversely affected. The lack of a stable and democratically elected government could complicate negotiations and enforcement of existing agreements. Military rule has its own limitations and has mostly fallen to anti-India forces in South Asia. Bangladesh has significant importance as a trading partner for India. Over the last 5 years, India’s exports to Bangladesh have grown consistently at an average annual rate of 14%, reaching $7.17 billion in 2017 and $13.8 billion in 2022. In the year 2022, Bangladesh’s exports to India amounted to a total value of $2 billion. The imposition of military authority may result in economic sanctions or trade interruptions, which might have an impact on economic ties. This might potentially have a cascading impact on the economy of border states and the broader dynamics of regional commerce. The political uncertainty in Bangladesh poses a potential threat to Indian investments in the country. Indian enterprises operating in Bangladesh would be affected by this, perhaps resulting in economic losses. In the future, Bangladesh’s economy, which has seen significant growth in recent decades, may potentially decline. The political transition in Bangladesh has resulted in sectarian violence specifically aimed at minority groups, notably Hindus and political figures (Paul & Dass, 2024). A total of 29 leaders from the All India Muslim League (AL) have been assassinated, suggesting that the demonstrators consist of members from the BNP and those who oppose India and the AL. Khalida Zia, the head of the BNP, who had been placed under house arrest and was facing allegations of corruption, has been freed. The assassination of AL leaders may perhaps be a retaliatory action carried out by BNP members, who have consistently maintained stronger affiliations with Jamat-e-Islami. Jamat-e-Islami has expressed strong disapproval of the Awami League’s establishment of the War Crimes Tribunal in 2008, which was in line with their promise made before the election. The Jamat people have charged the AL’s push for justice against the sacrifices of the independence movement fighters associated with it. There has begun a counter charge process of trapping Sheikh Hasina. Sheikh Hasina is now facing 33 cases against her, including 27 for murder, four for crimes against humanity and genocide, and one for abduction. (The Hindu, August 21, 2024). The new government is demanding her extradition back. Humayun Kabir, president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), “I think we should not rely on a particular individual or party, it is best to keep good relations with all stakeholders. Bangladesh and India are close neighbours and will have to live side by side peacefully. India should keep a relationship as a neighbour, irrespective of the government.” Mohammed Younus, the head of new Interim Government held that ‘Delhi should understand what people of Bangladesh want’. The Hindu minority is specifically targeted, with intentional attacks on Hindu dwellings and places of worship, resulting in some persons seeking shelter. The ramifications of this violence may have enormous implications across India, especially in areas with substantial Muslim populations. The protesters have specifically targeted the Hindu people, their houses, and temples, indicating a possible connection between anti-Hindu Islamist organisations and the demonstrators. The issue of illegal immigration into India has led to political and social tensions, with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise in Assam aimed at identifying undocumented immigrants. The presence of illegal migrants in strategically important areas is alarming, as Rohingya migrants have been found to have collusion with Kashmir militants. The Act provides relief to address security challenges and minority persecution. Despite being introduced in 1951 and 1976 by Indira Gandhi, the NRC has never progressed due to political reasons and lack of political will. Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has appealed to everyone to read the bill (Thakur, 2024). Bangladesh has significant geostrategic importance due to its strategic position in South Asia, bordered by India, Myanmar, and the Bay of Bengal. It functions as a crucial maritime gateway to the Indian Ocean, playing a significant role in facilitating trade and energy routes (Thakur, 2023, p. 424). Additionally, it functions as a channel between South Asia and Southeast Asia, offering feasible routes for regional connectivity initiatives like China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Bangladesh’s geographical location near crucial international maritime routes, along with its strategic partnerships with prominent nations like China and India, significantly amplifies its geopolitical importance in terms of regional security, trade, and economic integration. Furthermore, the country’s location on the Bay of Bengal, which is rich in natural resources, amplifies its strategic significance for South Asia and India. For a considerable duration, Bangladesh’s ties with the US were strained as the US aimed to expand its geopolitical influence in Bangladesh, similar to its interests in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Expressing concern about the potential fragmentation of Bangladesh and the United States’ role in ongoing developments, Sheikh Hasina said that she is engaged in a multifaceted struggle, both domestically and internationally, against persistent plots aimed at establishing a new nation inside Bangladesh. “Similar to East Timor, they plan to establish a Christian nation by annexing territories in Bangladesh (specifically Chattogram) and Myanmar, with a stronghold in the Bay of Bengal,” as reported by the Economic Times in 2024. Hasina’s anxiety also suggests that she has under significant pressure from the United States to secure vital access to the Indian Ocean via Bangladesh. Hasina said that if she had let a certain nation to construct an air base in Bangladesh, she would not have encountered any difficulties, referring to the United States (Economic Times, 2024). 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Is that what you want?” Interestingly, the 2010-12 Arab Spring claimed Mubarak as one of its first casualties, and the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Islamist leadership took his place. The Saudis, too, have often reminded Americans that if they pressed their government too hard, “the likely alternative to the regime is not Jeffersonian democracy by a Taliban-style theocracy” (Firstpost, 2024). Given the increasing geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region for future maritime security equations and trade flows, which account for about 70 percent of global trade, the US has been enhancing its presence through various channels. It has entered into maritime security understandings with India, Japan, Australia, and the UK. The increased Chinese presence in the ocean also makes it urgent for the US to secure more geostatic bases in the region, and Bangladesh has fallen to these designs.The Indian challenge is to control the new administration in Bangladesh and supporting the progress of democracy. Failure to do so might result in a decline in economic development and the resurgence of military oppression similar to that seen in the 1970s and 1980s. If the new administration does not address the minority suppression by the demonstrators in a forceful and fair manner, it might lead to an excessive degree of communal enmity that may become uncontrollable for both India and Bangladesh. India must recognise that amid the escalating competition between the United States and China in the Indian Ocean, Indian interests are secure when aligned with its neighbouring countries. It has to articulate its interest well while dealing with the newly emerging patterns of strategic engagements. |

| 12 | The political crisis in Bangladesh began with student-led protests in mid-July 2024, primarily triggered by a controversial Supreme Court decision to reinstate job quotas for certain groups, including 30% for descendants of veterans from the 1971 liberation war. This decision reversed a 2018 policy change that had abolished such quotas in response to earlier student protests, sparking widespread dissatisfaction among students and young professionals who felt their merit-based opportunities were being compromised (DW, 2024). The discontent quickly expanded into broader anti-government demonstrations, reflecting deeper issues such as economic challenges, corruption, and human rights abuses. The government’s violent response to these protests, which resulted in over 300 deaths and more than 20,000 injuries, further fueled public outrage (UN News, 2024). The intensity and scale of the protests eventually compelled the military to intervene, leading to Hasina’s resignation and flight. Following Hasina’s departure, General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced the formation of a transitional government. The international community, including the European Union and the United Nations, called for a peaceful transition to a democratically elected government and emphasized the need for respect for human rights during this period (UN News, 2024; DW, 2024).

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| 13 | The international community has been closely monitoring the situation. The United Nations has called for a peaceful transition and a comprehensive investigation into the violence. UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the importance of accountability and justice for the victims (UN News, 2024). The European Union has echoed these sentiments, urging for an impartial investigation and a transparent transition process (DW, 2024).

Implications for Neighboring Countries

The coup in Bangladesh has significant implications for its neighbors, particularly India, China, and Myanmar.

India:

India, which shares a long border with Bangladesh, has a vested interest in the stability of its neighbor. The two countries have enjoyed strong bilateral relations, particularly under Hasina’s administration, which has cooperated closely with India on security and economic issues (Institut d’Études de Géopolitique Appliquée, 2024). The coup could potentially disrupt this cooperation, especially if the new regime takes a different approach to bilateral relations.

India is also concerned about potential instability and violence spilling over the border, which could exacerbate security challenges in its northeastern states. Additionally, the political upheaval in Bangladesh may impact Indian investments and economic interests in the country.

China:

China’s involvement in Bangladesh, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), means that Beijing is also closely watching the developments. Bangladesh joined the BRI in 2016, and China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in the country (Institut d’Études de Géopolitique Appliquée, 2024). The political instability could pose risks to these investments and projects.

Moreover, China has historically supported stable governments that can ensure the completion of BRI projects. The transition period in Bangladesh could lead to uncertainties regarding the continuation and security of these projects.

Myanmar:

Bangladesh’s political turmoil also has implications for its relationship with Myanmar, especially concerning the Rohingya refugee crisis. Bangladesh hosts over a million Rohingya refugees who fled persecution in Myanmar. The instability in Bangladesh could affect its capacity to manage the refugee situation and its diplomatic engagements with Myanmar on repatriation and other related issues.

Broader Regional Implications

The coup in Bangladesh is likely to have broader regional implications in South Asia. Political instability in Bangladesh could influence regional security dynamics, economic stability, and migration patterns.

Regional Security

The political crisis in Bangladesh may embolden extremist groups within the country, which could have spillover effects on regional security. Neighboring countries, particularly India and Myanmar, may face increased security threats if instability in Bangladesh leads to a resurgence of militant activities.

Economic Impact

Bangladesh is an important economic player in South Asia, with significant contributions to regional trade and commerce. Political instability could disrupt economic activities, impacting trade flows and investment climates in the region. Countries with strong economic ties to Bangladesh, such as India and China, may need to reassess their economic strategies and investments in light of the new political landscape.

Migration and Humanitarian Concerns

Instability in Bangladesh could trigger migration flows, both internally and across borders. Neighboring countries may experience an influx of refugees and migrants seeking safety and economic opportunities. This could strain resources and exacerbate existing humanitarian challenges in the region.

Conclusion

The recent coup d’état in Bangladesh marks a pivotal moment in the country’s political history. The resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amidst widespread protests and the subsequent military takeover have set the stage for significant changes in Bangladesh’s governance. The international community’s call for a peaceful transition and respect for human rights underscores the importance of a stable and democratic Bangladesh for regional and global stability.

The implications of the coup extend beyond Bangladesh’s borders, affecting its relationships with neighboring countries and the broader South Asian region. The actions of the interim government, the response of the international community, and the resilience of Bangladesh’s civil society will shape the country’s future trajectory. Ensuring a peaceful and democratic transition is crucial for Bangladesh’s stability and development, as well as for the security and prosperity of the region. |

| 14 | More than 300 people, including many children, are said to have been killed since student-led protests erupted in July, and more than 20,000 injured. The bloodshed was among the worst ever witnessed in Bangladesh.

The unrest began in July with protests by students against civil service job quotas. Though the scheme was withdrawn, protests erupted again last week, with the key demand for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to quit and for those responsible for the violent suppression of demonstrations to be held accountable.

Ms. Hasina had been in power since January 2009, having earlier led the country from 1996 to 2001.

Media reports suggest her departure from Bangladesh was met with widespread jubilation across much of the country.

There were also reports of ransacking and arson at the Prime Ministerial residence; a museum commemorating the country’s first President and Ms. Hasina’s father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; and homes of senior government officials.

Bangladesh’s army chief announced in a televised national address following her departure that an interim government would be formed, although no further details were provided.

There must be no reprisals

Also on Monday, Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, underscored the importance of the transition of power in Bangladesh being “peaceful and guided by human rights”.

“The transition must be conducted in a transparent and accountable way, and be inclusive and open to the meaningful participation of all Bangladeshis,” he said in a statement.

“There must be no further violence or reprisals.”

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Mr. Türk highlighted that democratic order and the rule of law must be ensured as quickly as possible, and that all emergency measures must be limited in accordance with international law.

Everyone arbitrarily detained must be released, all those responsible for human rights violations must be held to account. He stressed that underlying issues and grievances must be addressed.

Independent investigations urged

The High Commissioner reiterated his call or a comprehensive, impartial and transparent investigation into all alleged human rights violations since July.

“In the current circumstances, and to ensure public confidence, an investigation should be conducted independently, and my Office stands ready to support this,” he said.

“The demands for justice and reform must be heeded,” he added.

“This is a time for national healing, including through an immediate end to violence, as well as accountability that ensures the rights of victims to truth and reparations, and a truly inclusive process that brings the country together on the way forward.” |

| 15 | Bangladesh’s embattled prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, fled the country on Aug. 5, 2024, after weeks of protests that have resulted in scores of deaths.

Her departure is a landmark moment, but one that has left the South Asian nation facing a power vacuum into which the army – for the time being, at least – has stepped.

To understand what led to the crisis and what could happen next, The Conversation turned to Tazreena Sajjad, an expert on Bangladeshi politics at American University’s School of International Service.

What sparked the demonstrations in Bangladesh?

The protests stem from long-running resentment over a quota system that saw 56% of government positions in Bangladesh reserved for various groups, including 30% for the descendants of freedom fighters who fought in the 1971 War of Independence.

This quota system has proved an enormous barrier to highly coveted civil service positions for the country’s large youth population, many of whom are unemployed.

It had also become a subject of controversy due to how many of those quota jobs went to supporters of the ruling Awami League party.

Under immense pressure from an earlier student mobilization over the issue, Hasina abolished the entire quota system in 2018.

But in June 2024, the country’s high court ruled that move illegal, sparking a fresh round of protests across the country.

Then, in July, Bangladesh’s public universities saw a series of walkouts by faculty and students over new pension reforms that, if implemented, would involve salary deductions.

Initially, the protests were peaceful, but an incendiary speech by Hasina – in which she suggested that the students were “rajakaar,” a term used to identify pro-Pakistan collaborators during Bangladesh’s War of Independence – inflamed tensions.

The Bangladesh Chhatra League – the armed wing of the Awami League – began attacking students with tear gas and live bullets, with support from the police. The Rapid Action Battalion, a controversial paramilitary group with a history of extrajudicial killings, torture and enforced disappearances, was also deployed.

After a video of one of the first to be killed – a university student named Abu Sayeed – circulated online, more joined the protests, leading to a further violent crackdown by police and armed groups.

It is estimated that about 266 people, mostly students, were killed in the protests, including at least 32 children.

The government closed schools and universities, imposed a curfew and cut internet and telecommunications. Meanwhile, student leaders were arrested and coerced to withdraw their list of demands.

But this only led to the declaration of a total noncooperation movement and a massive uprising of protesters demanding Hasina’s immediate resignation.

As thousands of protesters gathered for a long march to Dhaka in defiance of the curfew, the prime minister resigned and left the country.

Is there a wider context to the political unrest?

Absolutely. While attention has focused largely on the quota protests, a litany of grievances had piled up against the government.

Under Hasina’s rule, Bangladesh has seen GDP growth – but this has not translated into economic well-being for many Bangladeshis. Lack of opportunities, high unemployment rates among youth and soaring inflation have been ongoing sources of tension.

Meanwhile, despite the Awami League espousing a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption, money laundering, bribery and nepotism scandals have dogged government ministers.

And since its landslide victory in 2008, the Awami League has eroded the country’s democracy. For example, in 2011 the government ended an arrangement that allowed a 90-day caretaker administration, consisting of technocrats, to organize elections and oversee transfers of power.

Suppression of dissent has also grown. The harassment and detention of activists, opposition figures and human rights defenders have become more frequent. Meanwhile, there has been criminalization of any criticism of the government, including satire and social media posts.

Why is the 1971 war still relevant to Bangladeshi politics?

The War of Independence remains central to Bangladesh’s identity and its politics.

Its seeds were sown decades earlier in the 1947 British partition of the Indian subcontinent. This resulted in the violent division of the state of Bengal, with the eastern part becoming East Pakistan.

After partition, West Pakistan tried to maintain political and economic dominance over East Pakistan, while at the same time attempting to cultivate a singular national identity – based on their common Muslim majority populations – despite separate cultures and linguistic heritages.

Policies to marginalize Bengali – the vernacular of 56% of then East Pakistanis – and “purify” East Pakistan from Hindu influence contributed to a backlash that saw widespread student protests and growing calls for independence.

In 1971, a West Pakistani military incursion aimed at snuffing out pro-independence sentiments resulted in a genocidal war with East Pakistan that lasted nine months and resulted in the deaths of 500,000 to 3 million Bangladeshis.

The circumstances of that war have shaped Bangladesh’s politics ever since. The parties that have dominated the country’s politics, including Hasina’s Awami League, frequently politicized their War of Independence credentials. Political leaders have also used 1971 as a means of legitimizing positions, shoring up support, or delegitimizing opposition parties.

Does Hasina’s exit mark the end of Bangladesh’s political dynasties?

The resignation of Hasina signals – at least for the time being – the end of Awami League rule in Bangladesh.

Countries in South Asia, including Bangladesh, have largely been shaped by political dynasties. So the rejection of the Awami League, and the fact that many are also rejecting other established political parties – the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat-i-Islami and the Jatiya Party – is extraordinary.

These established parties will no doubt try to regroup. While the Awami League may not be able to effectively organize in the near future given public sentiment, the others will make a concerted effort to participate in the promised forthcoming elections.

For the moment, there may be an opportunity for Bangladesh to have fresh voices and faces in politics, potentially emerging from the student movement.

What should we make of the military taking interim control?

Since Bangladesh’s independence, the army has played a huge role in shaping the political trajectory of the country.

From 1975 to 2011, Bangladesh experienced at least 29 military coups and counter-coups. It also experienced direct military rule from 1977 to 1981 and between 1981 and 1990.

Given the army’s frequent incursion into Bangladesh politics, it is not surprising that it has taken interim control of the country now.

For many Bangladeshis, this may represent some level of stability, given the political vacuum that has opened up and the uncertainty of the moment.

Student leaders, however, have made it clear they do not want military involvement in politics. Seemingly heeding this call, General Waker-uz-Zaman, the army chief of staff, has assured protesters that the army would meet their demands.

But it remains to be seen whether the military will keep its promises and hand over full authority to a civilian interim administration.

What could happen next?

It is too early to speculate what the future holds for Bangladesh – the situation is extremely fluid and unfolding by the minute.

The abrupt departure of Hasina has been a cause of relief and celebration among the millions of protesters who helped bring about an end to her rule.

Police use tear gas to disperse student protesters in Bangladesh on Aug. 4, 2024. AFP via Getty Images

Protest leaders have expressed a clear vision for an inclusive, corruption-free, democratic government. What they don’t want is an interim government that is formed without their involvement and input. Student leaders have put together a list of candidates they want to see in the interim government. Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus has accepted a role as chief adviser. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-i-Islami leaders are vying for positions in the interim government.

But political transitions are extremely challenging and volatile. There have been incidences of looting, arson and violence around the country, as well as attacks on the Hindu community.

Armed wings of the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami and the Bangladesh Chhatra League are being blamed for much of the violence, which, it is alleged, is carried out to delegitimize the protest movement. In response, students and the general public have stepped in to protect minority places of worship.

Rumors and disinformation campaigns will certainly have some significant impact in a volatile situation.

Meanwhile, the enormous damage done to the country’s economy by the political turmoil and military curfew will also require attention.

Neighboring countries, particularly India, are paying a lot of attention to the volatile situation. International donors and strategic partners including the U.S., EU, and China likewise await what comes next, given Bangladesh’s regional geopolitics and the global economy. |

| 16 | Bangladesh imposes curfew, calls in military as unrest continues

A government curfew was in place Saturday as military forces patrolled cities around Bangladesh after another day of violent clashes between student protesters and police over civil service job quotas left more than 130 people dead and nearly 300 police officers injured. The latest bout of violence prompted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to cancel her diplomatic visits to Spain and Brazil, initially scheduled for Sunday.

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Bangladesh soldiers stand guard along the road following a curfew and the deployment of military forces in Dhaka on July 20, 2024.

Bangladesh soldiers stand guard along the road following a curfew and the deployment of military forces in Dhaka on July 20, 2024. © Munir Uz Zaman, AFP

By:

NEWS WIRES

Soldiers were patrolling Bangladeshi cities on Saturday to quell growing civil unrest sparked by student demonstrations, with riot police firing on protesters who defied a government curfew.

This week's violence has killed at least 133 people so far, according to an AFP count of victims reported by police and hospitals, and poses a monumental challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's autocratic government after 15 years in office.

A government curfew went into effect at midnight and the premier's office asked the military to deploy troops after police again failed to subdue widespread mayhem.

"The army has been deployed nationwide to control the law and order situation," armed forces spokesman Shahdat Hossain told AFP.

The curfew will remain in effect until at least 10:00 am (0400 GMT) Sunday, private broadcaster Channel 24 reported.

FOCUS05:08

FOCUS © FRANCE 24

Streets in the capital Dhaka were almost deserted at daybreak, with troops on foot and in armoured personnel carriers patrolling the sprawling megacity of 20 million.

But thousands returned to the streets later in the day in the residential neighbourhood of Rampura, with police firing at the crowd and wounding at least one person.

"Our backs are to the wall," protester Nazrul Islam, 52, told AFP at the scene. "There's anarchy going on in the country... They are shooting at people like birds."

Hospitals have reported a growing number of gunshot deaths to AFP since Thursday.

"Hundreds of thousands of people" had battled police across the capital on Friday, police spokesman Faruk Hossain told AFP.

"At least 150 police officers were admitted to hospital. Another 150 were given first aid treatment," he said, adding that two officers had been beaten to death.

"The protesters torched many police booths... Many government offices were torched and vandalised."

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Staff at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital told AFP that two more police officers and nine others were killed on Saturday, while four people admitted to intensive care succumbed to their injuries.

Three more protesters were killed in the industrial town of Savar on Dhaka's outskirts, a major centre of Bangladesh's garment exports.

Enam Medical College Hospital spokesman Zahidur Rahman confirmed the latter deaths to AFP, adding that "nine people came here with bullet wounds".

A spokesman for Students Against Discrimination, the main group organising the protests, told AFP that two of its leaders had been arrested since Friday.

Hasina had been due to leave the country on Sunday for a planned diplomatic tour but abandoned her plans after a week of escalating violence.

"She has cancelled her Spain and Brazil tours due to the prevailing situation," her press secretary Nayeemul Islam Khan told AFP.

'Not about students anymore'

Near-daily marches this month have called for an end to a quota system that reserves more than half of civil service posts for specific groups, including children of veterans from the country's 1971 liberation war against Pakistan.

Critics say the scheme benefits families loyal to Hasina, 76, who has ruled the country since 2009 and won her fourth consecutive election in January after a vote without genuine opposition.

Hasina's government is accused by rights groups of misusing state institutions to entrench its hold on power and stamp out dissent, including by the extrajudicial killing of opposition activists.

Since the first deaths on Tuesday, protesters have begun demanding Hasina leave office.

"It's not about the rights of the students anymore," business owner Hasibul Sheikh, 24, told AFP at the scene of the Rampura protest.

"We are here as the general public now," he added. "Our demand is one point now, and that's the resignation of the government."

'Shocking indictment'

Pierre Prakash of Crisis Group told AFP the lack of competitive elections since Hasina took office had led to mounting public frustration.

"With no real alternative at the ballot box, discontented Bangladeshis have few options besides street protests to make their voices heard," he said.

"The rising death toll is a shocking indictment of the absolute intolerance shown by the Bangladeshi authorities to protest and dissent," Babu Ram Pant of Amnesty International said in a statement.

Authorities imposed a nationwide internet shutdown on Thursday that remains in effect, severely hampering communication in and out of Bangladesh.

Government websites remain offline and major newspapers including the Dhaka Tribune and Daily Star have been unable to update their social media platforms since Thursday.

Bangladesh Television, the state broadcaster, also remains offline after its Dhaka headquarters was set on fire by protesters the same day.

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| 17 | As Unrest in Bangladesh Intensifies, All Eyes Are on the Army

The military has a history of coups and counter coups. But in this showdown, it has seemed uncomfortable with the police crackdown on protesters.

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A man walks by a row of soldiers wearing helmets and holding rifles.

Bangladeshi soldiers with a cutout of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last month. Though she has assiduously courted the army’s loyalty, the military has seemed troubled by the recent crackdown.Credit...Rajib Dhar/Associated Press

By Mujib Mashal and Shayeza Walid

Aug. 5, 2024

With Bangladesh’s security forces seemingly on a deadly collision course with angry protesters after a crackdown on Sunday, eyes were turning to the country’s powerful military establishment to see how it might respond.

Protesters are demanding that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leave office, after 15 years of rule that have turned increasingly authoritarian. If the violence on the street leads to instability and chaos, the military — which has sought to distance itself from the violent police reaction through weeks of unrest — would certainly be a central player.

It has been before. Bangladesh’s army has a history of staging coups and counter coups. But over the past couple decades, the military has taken a less overt role in public affairs, choosing more often to exercise influence from behind the scenes.

Part of that shift has been attributed to Ms. Hasina. Her father, Bangladesh’s first leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as well as much of her family, was killed in a deadly military coup in 1975. In her time in office, she has stacked its leadership ranks with loyalists, and allowed them access to lucrative government contracts and other businesses.

There are international incentives for the military, as well, which has been a major contributor to United Nations peacekeeping missions that have given it another important side business. Any involvement in a coup would subject the army to criticism — or ostracism — from the United Nations, whose human rights chief responded to the recent killings by calling for restraint and accountability from those with “command responsibility.”

While the army was deployed on the streets during the crackdown to clear the protesters late last month, there have been reports of discomfort in the ranks over it. Dozens of former senior officers also issued a statement calling on the military not “to rescue those who have created this current situation” — a statement seen by some as referring to the police and paramilitaries, and possibly even to Sheikh Hasina herself.

On Sunday, the army’s chief, Gen. Waker-uz-Zaman, gathered senior officers for a meeting that was seen as an attempt to allay concerns. In a statement after the meeting, the army said its chief had reiterated that “the Bangladesh Army will always stand by the people in the interest of the public and in any need of the state.”

If Ms. Hasina’s power becomes untenable, analysts said the army would be unlikely to opt for a takeover. It might, though, try to aid some transition period from the sidelines with a caretaker government — something that happened in 2007.

“There are major international ramifications to a military coup. And more than leaders it is the younger officers who are hesitant to go ahead with anything of the sort,” said M. N. Khan, a retired general of the Bangladeshi Army. |

| 18 | Military coup in Bangladesh

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to resign on August 5 and the military has taken over the country, reports Republic TV. Hasina according to reports is safely evacuated to Agartala in Indian State of Tripura.

At least 96 people, including 13 Police officers were killed and more than thousands others were injured in a series of clashes that broke out in several parts of the country centred on the student-led non-cooperation movement under the banner of Students Against Discrimination, reports The Daily Star and Dhaka Tribune on August 5. Since August 1, when the government banned Jamaat-e Islami (JeI) and its students' front Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the violence started to spread, where an angry mob killed 13 police officers at a police station, and clashes in Raiganj Upazila added five more killings, bringing Sirajganj District's total death toll to 18 on August 4. Meanwhile, 12 people were killed in Dhaka, eight in Laxmipur, and 100 were injured. Narsingdi District reported that six Awami League leaders were beaten to death. In Chattogram, 172 people were hospitalized. In the last three weeks, the total death toll in anti-government protests crossed 300. |

| 19 | The military coup in Bangladesh on August 15 of 1975 was launched by mid-ranking army officers in order to assassinate founding president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,[3][4] whose administration post-independence grew corrupt and authoritarian until he unscrupulously established a one-party state led by the socialist BaKSAL.[1][2] Mujib, along with his resident family members, were killed during the coup but was survived by his two then-expat daughters, one of them being future prime minister Sheikh Hasina.[5][6] The officers were led by Capt. Abdul Majed, Maj. Syed Faruque Rahman, Maj. Khandaker Abdur Rashid and Maj. Shariful Haque Dalim.[5]

Immediately following the coup, one of Mujib's close associates and cabinet ministers Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad, with support of the officers, took control of the government and declared himself President of Bangladesh.[7] Under martial law, he made a proclamation on 20 August to amend the constitution to omit the provision for the legal basis for one-party system.[8] He reportedly praised the assassin officers, calling them "Children of the Sun", and proclaimed the Indemnity Ordinance, which granted them immunity from prosecution.[9][10]

Background

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won the 1970 Pakistani general election but was denied by the Pakistani military dictatorship the position of the prime minister of Pakistan; this was a result of long time political oppression of Bengali citizens of Pakistan who were vocally opposed to the authoritarian tyranny of the establishment. As the democratic demands and protests continued, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered a speech on 7 March that brought the Bengalis together to become prepared for things to come. On 25 March 1971, as part of Operation Searchlight, the Pakistan Army launched an armed operation killing intellectuals in Dhaka University and the following day Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan,[11] triggering the 9-month 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War that ended with the surrender of Pakistani forces in Bangladesh to an allied force of Bangladesh Mukti Bahini and Indian Armed forces.[12] In 1973, Sheikh Mujibur's Bangladesh Awami League won the first parliamentary election in independent Bangladesh by a landslide.[13]

During the war, perpetrators of the coup, already hatched the plan of assassinating Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Many of the conspirators were army officers who were dissatisfied with the decision of independence as they received benefits from a military run administration and they feared a democratic administration might not provide them with as many benefits as administrations of Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan had been giving them. Besides military officers, career politicians and bureaucrats like Khondoker Mostaq Ahmed and some other ministers who worked in the Pakistani government and Rahman's government were involved in the conspiracy as well because they still wanted to be part of Pakistan and blamed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for the 1971 liberation war.[14] According to these plans, they got involved in scuffles that made it seem they were unrelated to a deep-seated conspiracy and intentionally engineered political crises.

In 1973, Shariful Haque Dalim and his wife were involved in a scuffle with the sons of Gazi Golam Mostafa, a leader of the Awami League, at a function at the Dhaka Ladies club. In retaliation, some officers and soldiers of the Lancer unit and 2 Field Artillery Regiment of the Bangladesh Army attacked Golam Mostofa's residence. As a result, Major Dalim, Major S.H.M.B Noor Chowdhury, and other officers were charged with breach of discipline. Major Dalim had sought help from President Sheikh Mujib but was refused. Major Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan resigned from the army over the incident. Major Dalim and Major Noor were among the officers who lost their commissions over the charges of indiscipline.[15]

In 1974, Syed Faruque had become dissatisfied with the Awami League government. He would often discuss his dissatisfaction with Major General Ziaur Rahman who was the deputy chief of army staff. Ziaur Rahman had suggested that Faruque "do something" about the situation in one such meeting.[16]

Abdur Rashid was able to communicate with Commerce Minister Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed about the situation in the country. Rashid, Dalim, and Moshtaque decided that they must dissolve BaKSAL and remove Sheikh Mujib. Rashid informed Faruque, who agreed with the plan, and he was also told that Major General Zia would support them.[16]

Execution of the coup

Grave of the victims at Banani Graveyard, Dhaka

The mutineers decided to divide into teams, and each team was to be given specific instructions and targets.[15]

Bangabandhu Bhaban

The operation at the personal residence of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was led by Major A.K.M. Mohiuddin Ahmed. Major Bazlul Huda was placed in the team as he was the adjutant to the 2nd Field Regiment of Artillery, which was guarding the home of the President. The team also included Major S.H.M.B Noor Chowdhury.[16] Captain Abul Bashar, who was in charge of the guards, had served under Major Dalim.[17]

Some of the guards were killed defending the residence after the mutineers tried to force their way in.[18] Sheikh Kamal was injured defending the residence, and was executed by Captain Huda after the attackers had crossed into the compound. Sheikh Mujib asked "what do you want?" to the mutineers. Major Noor and Captain Huda shot Sheikh Mujib as he was coming down the stairs. Sheikh Mujib's son, Lieutenant Sheikh Jamal, Jamal's wife Rosy, Sheikh Kamal's wife Sultana Kamal, and Sheikh Mujib's wife Sheikh Fazilatunnesa were taken to the bathroom on the first floor. They were shot and killed there by Major Abdul Aziz Pasha and Risaldar Moslemuddin. Major Faruque promoted Captain Huda to major and Subedar Major Abdul Wahab Joardar to lieutenant on the spot. Faruque had arrived and left on a tank.[17][19][20] Colonel Jamil Uddin Ahmad, military secretary to the president, was killed on the way to Bangabondhu Residence after he was called by Sheikh Mujib.[21]

The guards surrendered after a brief firefight and were lined up outside the house. Major Noor shot Sheikh Nasser, the brother of Sheikh Mujib, in the reception area bathroom. Major Pasha ordered a Havilder to kill Sheikh Russel, who was crying for his mother. A witness reported soldiers looting the house. A dead policeman was seen at the entrance. Major Huda went to Sher Shah road at Mohammadpur to order 10 coffins from carpenters. Major Huda also removed the bodies the next day through an army escort.[17]

Sheikh Fazlul Haque Mani residence

Sheikh Fazlul Haque Mani was the nephew of Rahman and viewed as a likely successor. He was killed in his home along with his wife, Begum Arzu Moni, who was believed to be pregnant at the time. His sons Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh and Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash survived.[22] His home on Road 13/1 in Dhanmondi was surrounded by 20-25 army personnel on 15 August 1975.[23][24]

Abdur Rab Serniabat residence

Abdur Rab Serniabat, a former minister of water resources and brother-in-law of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was killed in his home in Mintoo road, Dhaka at 5:00 am. His home was attacked by a team that was led by Major Aziz Pasha, Captain Majed, Major Shahriar Rashid, and Captain Nurul Huda. Serniabat's nephew Shahid Serniabat, daughter Baby Serniabat, grandson Sukanto Abdullah Babu, and son Arif Serniabat were also killed in the attack. Three domestic servants were also killed in the attack. His son, Abul Hasnat Abdullah, survived the attack and nine other people were injured in the household.[23][24]

Artillery support

Artillery under command of Fauque fired mortar shells towards Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur. In Mohammadpur, 14 people died from the mortar fire near Sher Shah Suri road.[23]

Rakkhi Bahini camp

Major Faruque attacked the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini camp with 26 tanks under his command. The Rakkhi Bahini surrendered without incident, Faruque moved towards the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after the neutralization of the Rakkhi Bahini was completed.[25]

Bangladesh Betar

The main office of Bangladesh Betar (radio) in Dhaka was attacked by the mutineers early in the morning. They quickly disarmed the police stationed there and took control of the radio. Major Dalim and Major Shahriar were in charge of the operation at the radio station. They controlled the flow of information from there.[26]

Aftermath

Khandaker Mostaq Ahmad addressed the nation from the radio station. His speech, written by Taheruddin Thakur, announced the formation of a new government led by him. Following him, the Chief of the army, his deputy, the chief of naval staff, the chief of the air force, the police chief and Bangladesh Rifles pledged their allegiance to the new government. Khandaker Moshtaque appointed General M. A. G. Osmani as his defence adviser. General Ziaur Rahman was made the chief of army staff on 24 August 1975 and Khalilur Rahman was made the first Chief of Defence Staff of Bangladesh Army.[15]

On 26 September 1975, Khandaker Moshtaque proclaimed the Indemnity Ordinance which protected those involved in the coup legal protection. On 5 October 1975, the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini (Absorption in the Army) Ordinance was passed with strong support from Ziaur Rahman; which absorbed the Rakkhi Bahini into the Bangladesh Army.[27]

On 3 November 1975, the situation had grown tense with some officers of the Bangladesh Army led by Brigadier General Khaled Mosharraf and Colonel Shafaat Jamil launching a coup to remove the mutineers and restore order to the Army. Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem replaced Khandaker Moshtaque as president and Mosharraf was made the chief of army staff. The mutineers in the morning had killed former president Syed Nazrul Islam, former prime minister Tajuddin Ahmed and ministers M Mansur Ali and AHM Qamruzzaman in Dhaka Central Jail where they were locked up since the mutiny on 15 August. Zia was placed under house arrest. On 4 November the mutineers were provided safe passage to Bangkok.[28][29]

On 7 November 1975, Khaled Mosharraf was killed in another coup that restored Ziaur Rahman to the chief of army staff. The coup was led by the revolutionary soldier's organisation and Colonel Abu Taher.[30] Taher himself was executed for the killing of Khaled under the government formed by Major General Zia on 21 July 1976, in order to restore discipline in the Army and prevent any further coups.[31]

In 1976, the military regime of Bangladesh provided the coup plotters with diplomatic jobs. AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed was made the second secretary of the embassy in Algeria, AM Rashed Chowdhury was made the consulate general in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, S.H.M.B Noor Chowdhury was made the second secretary in the embassy in Tehran, Shariful Haque Dalim was made the first secretary to the embassy in Beijing, and Abdul Aziz Pasha was made the first secretary to the embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. They held the positions until 1996, when the Bangladesh Awami League formed the government and recalled them to Bangladesh. They refused to comply and as a result were fired from their positions.

Trial

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party returned to power in 2001 and reinstated the officers who had been dismissed in 1996 to their diplomatic positions.[32]

Major Faruque, Major Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, and former state minister Taheruddin Thakur were arrested on 14 August 1996, the same year Bangladesh Awami League returned to power. Three months later, the Bangladesh Parliament, controlled by Bangladesh Awami League, removed the indemnity Act, making way for trials to start.[33]

AFM Mohitul Islam, personal assistant to President Sheikh Mujib, filed a charge against the mutineers with Dhanmondi Police Station on 2 October 1996. The Criminal Investigation Department started investigating the case the next day. The CID pressed charges against 20 people on 15 January 1997.[33]

On 12 March 1997, the trial started with six accused in jail and 14 being outside the country. Zobaida Rashid, wife of Khandaker Abdur Rashid, was relieved of charges after she filed a number of appeals, reducing the accused to 19. Other cases filed with the High Court challenged the legality of the trial court and its location, the cancellation of the indemnity act, which delayed the trial. Major Huda was bought from Thailand in 1998, through the signing of an extradition treaty between Thailand and Bangladesh. Dhaka district Justice Kazi Golam Rasul, sentenced 15 accused to death on 8 November 1998. Appeals were filled with Bangladesh High Court. On 14 November 1998 the High Court delivered a split verdict with Justice Md Ruhul Amin upholding the death penalty of 10 of the convicts, Justice ABM Khairul Haque upholding the death penalty of all 15. The case was referred to a third Justice, Mohammad Fazlul Karim, who broke the tie by sentencing 12 of the accused to death.[33]

Then Chief Justice Ruhul Amin constituted an appeal court with five justices: Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, Justice Md Abdul Aziz, Justice Md Tafazzul Islam, Justice BK Das, and Justice Md Muzammel Hossain. The verdict of the Appellate Division confirmed the death sentences of the 12 convicts on 19 November 2009. Three sought presidential pardons but were refused. On 27 January 2010, Bangladesh Supreme Court refused the convicts application for review. On 28 January 2010, five of the convicts in custody were executed.[33] The hanged were Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Syed Faruque Rahman, Bazlul Huda.

On the 7 April 2020, Captain Abdul Majed who was hiding in Kolkata, India, was arrested at Mirpur by the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police. He was sent to Dhaka Central Jail, Keraniganj, and was executed by hanging a few days later on the 12 April 2020.[34] |

| 20 | The resignation came after a violent day of protests that left almost 100 dead.

Jubilant crowds thronged the streets of Bangladesh’s capital on Monday after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled the country. The army chief said in a statement to the nation that the army would oversee the formation of an interim government.

Ms. Hasina, 76, had ruled Bangladesh since 2009. She was forced out by weeks of protests that began peacefully and then transformed into deadly clashes with security forces. She was spotted at the airport in the capital, Dhaka, but hours after her resignation, her exact location was not clear.

The student-led protests grew into a broader movement seeking the removal of Ms. Hasina, who was seen as an increasingly authoritarian leader. On Sunday, the deadliest day of the protests, almost 100 people were reported killed in clashes between security forces and demonstrators across Bangladesh.

Ms. Hasina, one of the world’s longest-ruling female leaders, had blamed the violence on her political opponents and called for “resisting anarchists with iron hands.”

Here’s what to know:

Ms. Hasina played a pivotal role in the politics of Bangladesh, a nation of around 170 million people that proclaimed its independence in 1971. She won re-election to a fourth consecutive term in January. She is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country’s charismatic founding leader, who was killed in a military coup in 1975, when Ms. Hasina was 28. She served as prime minister from 1996 to 2001 and regained power in 2009.

Under her leadership, the economy, helped by investment in the garment export industry, grew quickly, and average income levels at one point surpassed those in neighboring India. Bangladesh also experienced rapid development in education, health, female participation in the labor force and preparedness against climate disasters, including flooding — a national priority in a delta nation.

But her critics said that she tried to turn the country into a one-party state, and the protests that began last month reflected broader discontent against her rule.

Show more

Eve Sampson

Aug. 5, 2024, 1:30 p.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Eve Sampson

Crowds swarm the prime minister’s residence after Bangladesh's leader flees.

Video

Video player loading

Protesters broke into the home of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after she resigned and fled the country.CreditCredit...Mohammad Ponir Hossain/Reuters

Exuberant looters made off with furniture, bedding and potted plants as they swarmed the Bangladesh residence of the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, after she resigned her office and fled the country, according to local broadcast footage.

People scaled the residence’s black gates, the videos showed, throwing items against walls inside, bashing portraits and helping themselves to a spread of food in catering dishes.

The footage showed many people with hands and fists raised in celebration and some jumping for joy on the street. Many in the crowd appeared to be filming the event on their own cellphones.

Social media posts and live television footage also showed people taking animals from the residence, including chickens, ducks and rabbits, and some people posing with the animals.

Video

Video player loading

CreditCredit...Channel 24, via Reuters

Monsur Ali, a garment worker, said he was among the thousands of people who entered the prime minister’s residence, many of them taking away objects. He grabbed a plate.

“We went there out of anger,” he said. “Nothing is left there.”

Ms. Hasina, 76, was driven out of office by weeks of protests — initially about coveted government jobs and who is entitled to them — that began without conflict but turned deadly when government security forces cracked down. Nearly 300 people are reported to have died in those clashes.

Many in the country also oppose Ms. Hasina’s increasing authoritarianism after 15 years in power.

The country’s army chief confirmed Ms. Hasina’s resignation in a statement to the nation and said an interim government would be formed.

Show more

Matthew Mpoke Bigg

Aug. 5, 2024, 10:44 a.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Matthew Mpoke Bigg

Protesters defied the risk of fresh violence to drive Hasina from power.

Image

People in front of and on top of a large white building with columns.

Protesters wave Bangladesh’s national flag as they storm the prime minister’s palace in Dhaka on Monday.Credit...K M Asad/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Hours after almost 100 people were reported killed on Sunday in clashes between security forces and demonstrators across Bangladesh, the protest leaders made a decision that may have been pivotal in the downfall of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

They had planned to hold a mass march to Ms. Hasina’s official residence, known as the Ganabhaban, on Tuesday. But responding to Sunday’s violence, they moved up their march by a day to increase the pressure on Ms. Hasina, whose resignation they were now demanding.

Ms. Hasina had ruled for years through fear. But the protests had swelled to such large numbers, persisting even after days of deadly crackdown, that the demonstrators’ fear of Ms. Hasina did not keep them off the streets. Instead of backing down in the face of a new curfew and other restrictions, the protesters planned a march that would take them straight back into the maw of the security forces.

Their determination carried the risk of another blood bath. What followed instead, from the perspective of the protesters, was victory. Ms. Hasina fled in a helicopter, a crowd stormed her residence and the army announced that, after more than 15 years in power, she had resigned.

In the aftermath, tens of thousands of people, many shaking their fists in celebration, marched through the center of the capital, Dhaka, and what had been shaping up to be another day of street battles turned into a street party.

That atmosphere of jubilation may be short-lived, however. Bangladesh’s politics have long been violent, and the animosities between Ms. Hasina’s party and the opposition are unlikely to fade soon. Before Bangladesh settles into its next chapter, revenge for years of harsh suppression under Ms. Hasina will be on the minds of many.

Show more

Mujib Mashal

Aug. 5, 2024, 9:36 a.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Mujib MashalReporting from New Delhi

How the prime minister’s crackdown weakened her grip on power.

Image

Ms. Hasina looks out of a window in her office.

Sheikh Hasina, then the prime minister of Bangladesh, at her office in Dhaka, the capital, in 2023.Credit...Atul Loke for The New York Times

For those watching from outside, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh presented a compelling story. She was among the world’s longest-serving female heads of government, a secular Muslim in colorful saris who fought Islamist militancy, lifted millions out of poverty and deftly kept both India and China at her side.

But this seeming success came at a heavy cost. Over the past 15 years, Ms. Hasina deeply entrenched her authority and divided the nation. Those who kissed the ring were rewarded with patronage, power and impunity. Dissenters were met with crackdowns, endless legal entanglement and imprisonment.

The sustained protests that convulsed Bangladesh in recent weeks were a backlash against Ms. Hasina’s formula for power: absolute, disconnected and entitled. She cracked down hard, and the resulting challenge to her rule was a crisis largely of her own making, analysts said. The student-led protests started as a peaceful expression of opposition to quotas that reserve sought-after government jobs for specific groups. The violent response by government security forces and vigilantes from Ms. Hasina’s party sent the country to the verge of anarchy.

Ms. Hasina, 76, deployed every force at her service onto the streets, including a feared paramilitary unit whose leaders have in the past faced international sanctions over accusations of torture, extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances.

Show more

Saif Hasnat

Aug. 5, 2024, 8:41 a.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Saif HasnatReporting from Dhaka, Bangladesh

Monsur Ali, a garment worker, said he was among the thousands of people who entered the prime minister’s residence, many of them taking objects away with them. He grabbed a plate.

“We went there out of anger,” he said. “Nothing is left there.”

Saif Hasnat

Aug. 5, 2024, 8:37 a.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Saif HasnatReporting from Dhaka, Bangladesh

People were pouring into the streets across Dhaka late into the afternoon, and the mood was jubilant. Some came with their families, others beat drums and booed Hasina. “It is the victory of the students, the victory of the people. After a long time, we are happy to be out of a dictatorial regime,” said Towfiqur Rahman, who said he was preparing for an entrance exam for a government job. “You can suppress anger for a while, but it erupts — today is proof of that.”

Image

Credit...Toby Melville/Reuters

Mujib Mashal

Aug. 5, 2024, 8:11 a.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Mujib MashalReporting from New Delhi

Hours after her resignation, Hasina’s exact whereabouts was not clear. Diplomatic officials said she was possibly on her way to London, transiting through India. The former prime minister has family both in Britain, where her sister and her family live, and the United States, where her son lives.

Mujib Mashal

Aug. 5, 2024, 7:07 a.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Mujib MashalReporting from New Delhi

Hasina’s resignation and departure from Bangladesh after 15 years at the helm does not necessarily mean easy days ahead for a deeply troubled nation. She has long crushed her political opposition and put many of its leaders in prison, so they will be relieved to see her go. But the process of agreeing on an interim government could be bumpy. Interparty animosity and anger is widespread and deep-rooted, even at the local level.

Shayeza Walid

Aug. 5, 2024, 6:58 a.m. ETAug. 5, 2024

Shayeza WalidReporting from Dhaka, Bangladesh

Wild with glee over news of Hasina’s departure, protesters who had stormed her official residence caused pandemonium within. Social media posts and live TV footage showed people removing furniture, bedding, potted plants — and even pets. Demonstrators posed for pictures with the prime minister’s menagerie, including chickens, ducks and rabbits. |

| 21 | How Military Coups Have Shaped Bangladesh's Political Landscape Over The Years?

By Madhuri Adnal

Time Published: Monday, August 5, 2024, 16:47 [IST]

Google Oneindia News

Bangladesh Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced on Monday that he will form an interim government following the resignation and flight of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amid widespread protests.

In a national broadcast, General Waker-Uz-Zaman, dressed in military fatigues and cap, declared, "I am taking full responsibility." However, it remains unclear if he will lead the caretaker government.

How Military Coups Have Shaped Bangladesh s Political Landscape Over The Years

He confirmed that Hasina had resigned and stated that he would consult with the president to establish the interim government. While he has engaged with opposition parties and civil society members, he has not yet spoken with Hasina's Awami League.

WATCH | Bangladesh In Chaos: Protesters Storm Presidential Palace Amid Widespread Violence

WATCH | Bangladesh In Chaos: Protesters Storm Presidential Palace Amid Widespread Violence

This development marks a return to a historical pattern of military intervention in Bangladesh's politics, reminiscent of past coups:

The 1975 Coup:

In 1975, a pivotal coup led to the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of Bangladesh, along with most of his family. Junior army officers orchestrated the coup, leading Major General Ziaur Rahman to seize power and declare himself President.

Two Subsequent Coups:

The initial coup leaders failed to maintain control, leading to further unrest. On November 3, Brigadier General Khaled Mosharraf and Colonel Shafaat Jamil staged another coup to oust the previous leaders, resulting in the execution of four national leaders and the house arrest of Ziaur Rahman.

On November 7, a third coup led by Left-wing army personnel and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) politicians resulted in the death of Brigadier General Khaled Mosharraf and the release of Ziaur Rahman from house arrest. Rahman eventually became President and ruled until his assassination in 1981.

Shame On You! Bangladesh Leaders Slam Sheikh Hasina For Fleeing Country Amid Political Uproar

Shame On You! Bangladesh Leaders Slam Sheikh Hasina For Fleeing Country Amid Political Uproar

The 1982 Coup:

Lieutenant General Hussain Muhammad Ershad led a bloodless coup in 1982, establishing martial law, suspending the constitution, and consolidating control over both military and civilian sectors. Despite some development achievements, Ershad's rule faced criticism for its repressive and authoritarian nature. His regime ended in 1990 after a popular uprising demanding the restoration of democracy.

Since the 1990s, Bangladesh's political scene has been dominated by Sheikh Hasina's Awami League and Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), continuing the rivalry established by Ziaur Rahman. |

| 22 | After three years of civil administration, Bangladesh is back under military rule as Lt General HM Ershad, chief of the army, took over power in a swift and bloodless coup. Ershad has designated himself the chief marshal law administrator of the strife-ridden 11-year old republic. The nation on the brink of an army takeover since the assassination of President Zia-ur-Rahman in May last year saw the exit of the four month government of President Abdus Sattar and Prime Minister Azizur Rahman with a categorical declaration by General Ershad that the armed forces have taken over power to save the country from social, economic and political bankruptcy. The general said that he was not a politician and had never nourished any political ambition.

Indo-Pak Talks

External Affairs Minister P V Narasimha Rao has said that he has seen some positive signs from Pakistan which has made him hopeful of resumption of bilateral talks. Responding to members on a call-in-attention motion, Rao said the recent speeches of General Zia in which he talked of improving relations with India and the dropping of the reference to Jammu and Kashmir in the document of the United Nations Commission of Human Rights were two developments that he hoped could pave the way for talks.

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CPI’s Dilemma

While pledging to follow the Bhatinda line of building a left and democratic alternative to the present system, the CPI is unwilling to identify the left and democratic parties. Its draft political resolution being debated in Varanasi mentions only the CPM. But the difference in the attitude towards the BJP is amongst the major issues in the two parties working together. |

| 23 | In conclusion, Bangladesh's history is marked by a series of tumultuous coups, each shaping its political landscape. From the 1975 coups that saw the fall of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the rise of Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, to the violent 2009 Bangladesh Rifles revolt, and the 2011 coup attempt, these events reflect ongoing struggles over governance and power. Each coup and attempt underscores the complex interplay of military, political, and social forces in shaping Bangladesh's modern history.

Major Military coups in Bangladesh

On Monday, the resignation of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, announced by the army chief in a televised address, thrust the country once more into the world spotlight for its turbulent history of political instability and military coups.

In 1975, their first prime minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman--Hasina's father--was assassinated along with most of his family in a military coup, which ushered in a long period of military rule. The same year also saw two more coups that culminated in General Ziaur Rahman seizing power in November.

On May 30, 1981, Rahman was murdered by rebels who stormed a government guest house in Chittagong where he was staying. Although this violence was carried out by only a few army officers, the majority of the army remained loyal and quelled the rebellion.

In November 1982, Rahman's successor Abdus Sattar was overthrown in a bloodless coup led by Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who took over as chief martial-law administrator and later assumed the presidency.

In 2007, the army staged yet another coup that backed the caretaker government that ruled until Hasina took power in 2009.

Military Coups in Bangladesh: A Turbulent History

The next year, discontented paramilitary forces, unhappy with their wages and living conditions in Dhaka, revolted and killed over 70 people, mostly army officers. The mutiny, which spread to almost a dozen cities, ended after six days when the rebelling guards surrendered following negotiations.

Hundreds of people gathered on Dhaka's parliament grounds after Prime Minister Hasina resigned and fled to a safe house in India on Monday.

When the Bangladesh army said that it had thwarted a coup attempt in 2012, the army chief reported that it was the work of retired and serving officers driven by what they called a campaign to introduce Sharia law- that is, Islamic law- throughout the country.

In 2024 General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Army Chief of Staff, announced the resignation of Prime Minister Hasina in the face of violent anti-quota demonstrations, saying that an interim government would be formed to lead the nation.

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| 24 | Bangladesh marks as a nation known for its history pronouncing struggle to keep independence and its political tumoils intact while witnessing series of military coups attempting to take over the democratic nation into anarchic military rule. In the recent success of enforcing military power as Hasina Sheikh abruptly resigned while seeking refuge in India.

Timeline Of Military Coup Attempts

1975- The First Major Coup:

The first-ever military coup after the adaption of democracy wqs established after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, regarded as founder of the nation. Major General Khandaker Mudhtaque Ahmed who was a former ally of Sheikh Mujib became the leader of the military coup lead government.

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Bipasha Basu Shares Video Of Daughter Devi Singing For Gannu Baba's Welcome

Major General Khandaker Mudhtaque Ahmed

Major General Khandaker Mudhtaque Ahmed | Facebook

- August 15, 1975:

Due to the turn of political events, Major General Ziaur Rahman arose as a prominent leader of the coup, leading a military-backed government.

1977- The Consolidation of Power:

Ziaur Rahman consolidated his power through the suppression of political dissent and the implementation of martial law. He established the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and legalised political parties.

Ziaur Rahman

Ziaur Rahman | X

1981- Attempted Coup Against Ziaur Rahman:

A military coup attempted to overpower against Ziaur Rahman which was led by dissident military officers but the attempt deemed to be unsuccessful. The coup highlighted the tension within military and obstacles for Rahman to keep his power intact.

1982- Another Military Intervention:

General Hussain Muhammad Ershad assumed presidency as the military coup led by him deemed success against Abdus Sattar government. Military coup under Ershad's leadership stayed in power till 1990 and was known for its widespread corruption and infrastructural development.

General Hussain Muhammad Ershad

General Hussain Muhammad Ershad | X

1990- Fall of Ershad’s Regime:

Massive civilian protests and political turmoil led General Ershad to resign from his post. The military did not side the General during the protests signalling to change in dynamics which led to a path indicating return of the democratic governance in Bangladesh.

2007-2008- The “Interim Government”:

President Iajuddin Ahmed had declared emergency following the establishment of the military-backed interim government. General Moeen Uddin Ahmed led the interim government, was established to control elections and regain power amid political disruptions.

General Moeen Uddin Ahmed

General Moeen Uddin Ahmed | x

- December 2008:

The interim government led by Ahmed ended its reign with democratic elections leading to the restoration of civil rule and return of Sheikh Hasina as the Prime Minister.

2014- Alleged Coup Plot:

There were estimations of alleged military planning to seize power and over the nation with the plan to overthrow the Sheikh Hasina as the serving prime minister. The plan was caught and conspirators were arrested leading to win for the Sheikh government but highlighted dissatisfaction in the military.

Bangladesh former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Bangladesh former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina | AFP

2018- Rumors of Military Discontent:

There were rumours regarding the potential militaru take over during the general elections in Bangladesh earlier this year due to the irregularities and political disputes. However no attempt was made until August 5, months after the fourth consecutive win of Sheikh Hasina as the prime minister when the military was successful in overthrowing Sheikh due to the extreme communal distress. |

| 25 | Bangladesh Quota Protest: Amid violent protests calling for her resignation, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has departed the capital, Dhaka and reportedly landed in Agartala to escape threat to her life. "She and her sister have left Ganabhaban, the Prime Minister's official residence, for a safer location," a source informed AFP. As per reports, Hasina wanted to record a video statement but did not get time as lakhs of protestors marched towards the Prime Minister's official residence.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's army chief Waker-Uz-Zaman has confirmed the military coup in a press conference and announced the formation of an interim government to restore law and order in the country. He has appealed to the public to keep faith in the military and to stay peaceful.

"PM Hasina has resigned, interim government to run the country. We will return peace to the country. We ask citizens to stop violence. We will investigate all killings that have happened over the past few weeks," says Bangladesh's army chief Waker-uz-Zaman

"The economy is suffering, and civil society members were present at the meeting held here. We have come here, and there was no one from the Awami League. The army will work to maintain peace, and I have ordered the army and police not to fire any shots. We will try to find a solution by tonight. Students also have a role to play, and they should remain calm," he added.

According to reports, the Bangladeshi Army chief earlier asked her to resign from the post. Around 20 lakh people were marching towards her palace in Dhaka amid the violent unrest. Minutes after she fled Dhaka, protestors stormed her residence and were seen carrying out vandalism. Protesters opened the gates of the Gono Bhaban (PM's residence) and entered the premises of the prime minister's residence around 3:00pm today. The reservation protest has been going on for over a month in Bangladesh.

Watch - PM Hasian Flees In Helicopter

A senior official from the Bangladesh Prime Minister's Office, who requested anonymity, told ANI earlier today, "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left the official residence in Dhaka after violence erupted. Her current whereabouts are unknown. The situation in Dhaka is highly sensitive, and the Prime Minister's residence is under siege by a mob."

Protests that began last month against civil service job quotas have escalated into some of the worst unrest of Prime Minister Hasina's 15-year rule, expanding into broader calls for the 76-year-old leader to step down. The protest did not stop even after the country's court slashed the quoa to 15%.

As per reports, it was claimed that the Oppositon BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) collaborated with Pakistan's ISI to create chaos and dethrone Hasian, who has been considered pro- India while Zia is termed pro-Pakistan. The nation following the death of 98 people in intense clashes yesterday, bringing the total death toll to over 300 since the protests began last month. |

| 26 | The resignation came after a violent day of protests that left almost 100 dead.

Jubilant crowds thronged the streets of Bangladesh’s capital on Monday after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled the country. The army chief said in a statement to the nation that the army would oversee the formation of an interim government.

Ms. Hasina, 76, had ruled Bangladesh since 2009. She was forced out by weeks of protests that began peacefully and then transformed into deadly clashes with security forces. She was spotted at the airport in the capital, Dhaka, but hours after her resignation, her exact location was not clear.

The student-led protests grew into a broader movement seeking the removal of Ms. Hasina, who was seen as an increasingly authoritarian leader. On Sunday, the deadliest day of the protests, almost 100 people were reported killed in clashes between security forces and demonstrators across Bangladesh.

Ms. Hasina, one of the world’s longest-ruling female leaders, had blamed the violence on her political opponents and called for “resisting anarchists with iron hands.”

Here’s what to know:

Ms. Hasina played a pivotal role in the politics of Bangladesh, a nation of around 170 million people that proclaimed its independence in 1971. She won re-election to a fourth consecutive term in January. She is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country’s charismatic founding leader, who was killed in a military coup in 1975, when Ms. Hasina was 28. She served as prime minister from 1996 to 2001 and regained power in 2009.

Under her leadership, the economy, helped by investment in the garment export industry, grew quickly, and average income levels at one point surpassed those in neighboring India. Bangladesh also experienced rapid development in education, health, female participation in the labor force and preparedness against climate disasters, including flooding — a national priority in a delta nation.

But her critics said that she tried to turn the country into a one-party state, and the protests that began last month reflected broader discontent against her rule. |

| 27 | Crowds swarm the prime minister’s residence after Bangladesh's leader flees.

Video

Crowds Loot Bangladesh Prime Minister’s Residence

0:20

Protesters broke into the home of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after she resigned and fled the country.CreditCredit...Mohammad Ponir Hossain/Reuters

Exuberant looters made off with furniture, bedding and potted plants as they swarmed the Bangladesh residence of the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, after she resigned her office and fled the country, according to local broadcast footage.

People scaled the residence’s black gates, the videos showed, throwing items against walls inside, bashing portraits and helping themselves to a spread of food in catering dishes.

The footage showed many people with hands and fists raised in celebration and some jumping for joy on the street. Many in the crowd appeared to be filming the event on their own cellphones.

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Video

CreditCredit...Channel 24, via Reuters

Monsur Ali, a garment worker, said he was among the thousands of people who entered the prime minister’s residence, many of them taking away objects. He grabbed a plate.

“We went there out of anger,” he said. “Nothing is left there.”

Ms. Hasina, 76, was driven out of office by weeks of protests — initially about coveted government jobs and who is entitled to them — that began without conflict but turned deadly when government security forces cracked down. Nearly 300 people are reported to have died in those clashes.

Many in the country also oppose Ms. Hasina’s increasing authoritarianism after 15 years in power.

The country’s army chief confirmed Ms. Hasina’s resignation in a statement to the nation and said an interim government would be formed. |

| 28 | New Delhi: The sudden fall of Sheikh Hasina after 15 years as prime minister has generated a sense of disbelief, relief and euphoria in Bangladesh.

Across the border, however, there is a conspicuous silence. India, which surrounds Bangladesh on three sides, has maintained a studied reticence for over 24 hours as it grapples with the fast-changing developments, trying to understand the new polity and its attitude towards New Delhi.

As Hasina made India her first pit stop while awaiting clearance from the UK, Bangladeshis were keenly awaiting the first official response from New Delhi.

The reticence was explained, as per Indian official sources, due to India taking time to assess the ground situation in Bangladesh as it faced the dilemma of a trusted ally being removed from power. There was also uncertainty about how long Hasina would stay on in India.

The ongoing parliament session was another factor, with Indian external affairs minister S Jaishankar preparing to first brief opposition parties and then making a statement on the floor of the Lok Sabha.

But, there is broad consensus that India, like Bangladeshis themselves, was caught off guard by the speed of the change in Dhaka.

Former Indian ambassador to Bangladesh, Deb Mukharji remarked that he had commented earlier that the only way that Hasina would go was through an arm takeover.

“But, nobody is ready for what has happened so far. So we have to just keep quiet and wait for things to settle down,” he said.

The reports from Dhaka indicated that Hasina’s departure was sudden. She had been adamant till late morning on Monday that the security forces, including the army, had to use force against protestors who had broken curfew.

However, the heavy toll of over 100 deaths on Sunday had apparently dampened the army’s willingness to fire on their own people. Ultimately, the army appeared to have orchestrated her exit, which proceeded smoothly once she was convinced there was no other choice. She didn’t even have time to record a farewell speech, which she had wanted to do.

Smruti S Pattanaik of the Delhi-based think tank Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses stated that she always believed that removal of “such kind of leader was possible only through a third-party intervention, and that is the army”.

As an astute observer of Bangladesh, she had closely followed the Quota reform movement, noting its ups and downs as the government used force, imposed curfews, banned mobile networks, deployed the army, and saw the Supreme Court reverse an earlier judgment.

She questioned whether the previous Bangladeshi government had a reliable feedback loop in place if it believed the Supreme Court ruling had quelled the movement. “I was very surprised that Sheikh Hasina government didn’t get adequate intelligence on the nature of the protests, that it was more than just about quotas”.

While Indian diplomats monitored the developments closely, Pattanaik concluded, “They probably did not anticipate that the end would come so soon.”

Since Hasina returned to power in the 2008 elections, both the UPA government under Manmohan Singh and the NDA government under Narendra Modi have worked to strengthen their ties and advance numerous items on the bilateral agenda.

Despite Dhaka’s concerns about a significant trade deficit, economic connections have deepened. India remains Bangladesh’s largest export destination in Asia, with approximately $2 billion worth of Bangladeshi exports in 2022-23.

From finalising the land boundary agreement to signing the transit accord, the Hasina-led Awami League government has reciprocated the gesture. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had described Bangladesh as the “key pillar” for his government’s “Neighbourhood first” policy.

In September of the previous year, Bangladesh was the only South Asian country specially invited to the G-20 summit held in Delhi. Additionally, just six weeks ago, Hasina visited Delhi as the first foreign dignitary of Modi’s third term as prime minister.

Throughout the last three general elections, India – along with China – provided diplomatic support to Hasina’s controversial strategies, even when two of the contests were officially boycotted by the principal opposition party.

In contrast, the United States and other Western countries had always challenged the democratic legitimacy of Hasina’s government due to doubts about the fairness of the elections.

According to prominent observers in Bangladesh, India must recognise that the movement that ousted Hasina was driven by the common people of Bangladesh.

“My message will be that this is a people’s revolution,” said Shafqat Munir, head of the Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security. “It is not a revolution by a party or the radicals or anything like that. This is the people’s revolution. It is largely a student’s revolution. It is also a secular revolution which is for Bangladesh”.

He emphasised that the “perception that India’s relations with Bangladesh is through the Awami League needs to change”.

Retired Bangladesh ambassador to United States, M Humayun Kabir observed that quota reform movement has been unprecedented in his country’s history. “I am now 73 years old. I have been an activist since the 1960s, taken part in the liberation war of 1971, the nineties movement against Ershad. I have not seen anything like this ever,” he told The Wire from Dhaka.

He also noted that while Bangladeshis “didn’t like that you have too much association with Sheikh Hasina obviously”, but they also know the reality that India is the next-door neighbour.

“There are sentiments, but if Indian government understands what is going on and if they honour the aspirations of the common people in this country as they have done in 1971, I think things could become better,” he said.

Kabir had suggested that template for India’s reaction should be its earlier statement on the quota reforms movement that it was the “internal matter” of Bangladesh.

“I think if it still thinks that it is an internal affair and doesn’t put too much of colour into that, I think that will give some clarity to the unfolding scenario and as it happened in Bangladesh, and then I don’t believe that our relationship with India will transform or change too much,” he said.

This sentiment was echoed by Debapriya Bhattacharya, a former Bangladeshi ambassador and distinguished fellow at Dhaka-based Centre for Policy Dialogue.

“Let me step back a bit. In the initial reaction to the recent events, India said that this is an internal matter for Bangladesh. I think that is the right thing to say. So it remains our internal matter,” he said.

However, Bhattacharya noted that India may have concerns as it had “invested heavily in the immediate past government, on a prime minister who had very questionable democratic legitimacy.”

The growing influence of China would have also been an input in India’s calculation in boosting ties with the Hasina government, he said.

“But the point is that bilateral relationships cannot remain hostage to one single party—because in a democratic system, parties will come and go.”

He observed that at one time, the Bangladesh government, regardless of its nature, was “very comfortable with the Congress in power.”

“But the people of India have chosen a different government, and Bangladesh has learned to live with the change of government. So similarly, India has to learn to live with the change of governance and whatever may come as a result of people’s will,” Bhattacharya told The Wire.

Munir expressed a similar stance. “India needs to align with the people of Bangladesh and convey that it seeks a productive and constructive relationship with the next government. It must honour the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people,” he told The Wire.

For India, the relationship with Bangladesh is viewed through two primary lenses: national security, due to concerns over insurgency in its northeastern states, and connectivity, encompassing both physical infrastructure and energy links.

The Chief of the Bangladesh Army, Waker-Uz-Zaman, had listed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami, and Jatiya Party as the parties consulted for the interim government, with the Awami League notably excluded.

Mukharji, who served as India’s envoy from 1995 to 2000, remarked that India had faced difficulties with the BNP when it was in government. “We had tried to work with them, but were slapped back”.

Bangladesh President announced late on Monday night that BNP leader Khaleda Zia, who had been jailed for last six years, would be released. Her son, Tarique Rahman, who has been in exile in London since 2008, is also expected to return to Bangladesh soon, as per a senior BNP party leader.

The inclusion of the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islam, with its perceived Pakistan links, in talks for the interim government raises red flags in India.

Indian institutional memory constantly recalls the sensational seizure of weapons at Chittagong port which were allegedly intended for the separatist insurgent group ULFA, during the BNP-Jamaat coalition government.

Pattanaik stated that while India had kept some doors open to the BNP over the past 15 years, it is the “Jamaat of which India is very, very apprehensive”.

Bhattacharya, who was also concerned about the deterioration of law and order due to the power vacuum, said that he does not “underplay that concern,” but emphasised that these issues must be addressed through ideological and value-based politics.

He observed that such views could not be suppressed in a modern society, so democratic and progressive forces needed to confront them politically.

“Take, for example, your own country. You have gone through this whole experience as well, and only through your recent national election have we seen how people have reacted. If you can place trust in your own citizens, you should also trust the citizens of your neighbour,” said the former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the World Trade Organization and UN offices in Europe.

As Bangladesh awaited the formation of the new interim government, social media was filled with posts about violent actions by mobs targeting facilities associated with the Awami League, statues of Bangladesh’s founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hasina’s father, as well as attacks on religious minorities.

The New Age reported that the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council stated that numerous Hindu houses and businesses were subjected to communal attacks in 20 districts on Monday.

Munir said that there should not be any space for tolerance of violence and harassment against minorities. “If there is any anti-Hindu element or violence, the government should step in. we don’t want this. The students have also said this”.

The student coordinators of the anti-quota movement also made repeated appeals in media throughout Monday night against violence targeting minorities.

“We, the protesters, have united to protest against the fascist government. There is no grouping or division among us. We are against any kind of religious incitement, sabotage or division. We will prevent any such attempts,” said Nahid Islam, one of the key organisers in Dhaka on Monday.

The Bangladeshi analyst, Munir said the interim government should give confidence to India. These are all well-meaning civil society people who would also want a productive relationship, constructive relationship with India”.

The path forward, as per Ambassador Kabir, is that India should rectify the perception among Bangladeshis that New Delhi has gained more than Dhaka in trade, political access, and connectivity. “Let’s see how we can make it more mutually beneficial so that people in Bangladesh can fully appreciate the advantages,” he said.

In a similar vein, Bhattacharya noted that Bangladesh has not received equitable treatment on issues such as multimodal transport systems, water sharing, trade, investment, and finance. “India needs to tackle these very valid concerns,” he added.

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| 29 | Bangladesh’s embattled prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, fled the country on Aug. 5, 2024, after weeks of protests that have resulted in scores of deaths.

Her departure is a landmark moment, but one that has left the South Asian nation facing a power vacuum into which the army – for the time being, at least – has stepped.

To understand what led to the crisis and what could happen next, The Conversation turned to Tazreena Sajjad, an expert on Bangladeshi politics at American University’s School of International Service.

What sparked the demonstrations in Bangladesh?

The protests stem from long-running resentment over a quota system that saw 56% of government positions in Bangladesh reserved for various groups, including 30% for the descendants of freedom fighters who fought in the 1971 War of Independence.

This quota system has proved an enormous barrier to highly coveted civil service positions for the country’s large youth population, many of whom are unemployed.

It had also become a subject of controversy due to how many of those quota jobs went to supporters of the ruling Awami League party.

Under immense pressure from an earlier student mobilization over the issue, Hasina abolished the entire quota system in 2018.

But in June 2024, the country’s high court ruled that move illegal, sparking a fresh round of protests across the country.

Then, in July, Bangladesh’s public universities saw a series of walkouts by faculty and students over new pension reforms that, if implemented, would involve salary deductions.

Initially, the protests were peaceful, but an incendiary speech by Hasina – in which she suggested that the students were “rajakaar,” a term used to identify pro-Pakistan collaborators during Bangladesh’s War of Independence – inflamed tensions.

The Bangladesh Chhatra League – the armed wing of the Awami League – began attacking students with tear gas and live bullets, with support from the police. The Rapid Action Battalion, a controversial paramilitary group with a history of extrajudicial killings, torture and enforced disappearances, was also deployed.

After a video of one of the first to be killed – a university student named Abu Sayeed – circulated online, more joined the protests, leading to a further violent crackdown by police and armed groups.

It is estimated that about 266 people, mostly students, were killed in the protests, including at least 32 children.

The government closed schools and universities, imposed a curfew and cut internet and telecommunications. Meanwhile, student leaders were arrested and coerced to withdraw their list of demands.

But this only led to the declaration of a total noncooperation movement and a massive uprising of protesters demanding Hasina’s immediate resignation.

As thousands of protesters gathered for a long march to Dhaka in defiance of the curfew, the prime minister resigned and left the country.

Is there a wider context to the political unrest?

Absolutely. While attention has focused largely on the quota protests, a litany of grievances had piled up against the government.

Under Hasina’s rule, Bangladesh has seen GDP growth – but this has not translated into economic well-being for many Bangladeshis. Lack of opportunities, high unemployment rates among youth and soaring inflation have been ongoing sources of tension.

Meanwhile, despite the Awami League espousing a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption, money laundering, bribery and nepotism scandals have dogged government ministers.

And since its landslide victory in 2008, the Awami League has eroded the country’s democracy. For example, in 2011 the government ended an arrangement that allowed a 90-day caretaker administration, consisting of technocrats, to organize elections and oversee transfers of power.

Suppression of dissent has also grown. The harassment and detention of activists, opposition figures and human rights defenders have become more frequent. Meanwhile, there has been criminalization of any criticism of the government, including satire and social media posts.

Why is the 1971 war still relevant to Bangladeshi politics?

The War of Independence remains central to Bangladesh’s identity and its politics.

Its seeds were sown decades earlier in the 1947 British partition of the Indian subcontinent. This resulted in the violent division of the state of Bengal, with the eastern part becoming East Pakistan.

After partition, West Pakistan tried to maintain political and economic dominance over East Pakistan, while at the same time attempting to cultivate a singular national identity – based on their common Muslim majority populations – despite separate cultures and linguistic heritages.

Policies to marginalize Bengali – the vernacular of 56% of then East Pakistanis – and “purify” East Pakistan from Hindu influence contributed to a backlash that saw widespread student protests and growing calls for independence.

In 1971, a West Pakistani military incursion aimed at snuffing out pro-independence sentiments resulted in a genocidal war with East Pakistan that lasted nine months and resulted in the deaths of 500,000 to 3 million Bangladeshis.

The circumstances of that war have shaped Bangladesh’s politics ever since. The parties that have dominated the country’s politics, including Hasina’s Awami League, frequently politicized their War of Independence credentials. Political leaders have also used 1971 as a means of legitimizing positions, shoring up support, or delegitimizing opposition parties.

Does Hasina’s exit mark the end of Bangladesh’s political dynasties?

The resignation of Hasina signals – at least for the time being – the end of Awami League rule in Bangladesh.

Countries in South Asia, including Bangladesh, have largely been shaped by political dynasties. So the rejection of the Awami League, and the fact that many are also rejecting other established political parties – the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat-i-Islami and the Jatiya Party – is extraordinary.

These established parties will no doubt try to regroup. While the Awami League may not be able to effectively organize in the near future given public sentiment, the others will make a concerted effort to participate in the promised forthcoming elections.

For the moment, there may be an opportunity for Bangladesh to have fresh voices and faces in politics, potentially emerging from the student movement.

What should we make of the military taking interim control?

Since Bangladesh’s independence, the army has played a huge role in shaping the political trajectory of the country.

From 1975 to 2011, Bangladesh experienced at least 29 military coups and counter-coups. It also experienced direct military rule from 1977 to 1981 and between 1981 and 1990.

Given the army’s frequent incursion into Bangladesh politics, it is not surprising that it has taken interim control of the country now.

For many Bangladeshis, this may represent some level of stability, given the political vacuum that has opened up and the uncertainty of the moment.

Student leaders, however, have made it clear they do not want military involvement in politics. Seemingly heeding this call, General Waker-uz-Zaman, the army chief of staff, has assured protesters that the army would meet their demands.

But it remains to be seen whether the military will keep its promises and hand over full authority to a civilian interim administration.

What could happen next?

It is too early to speculate what the future holds for Bangladesh – the situation is extremely fluid and unfolding by the minute.

The abrupt departure of Hasina has been a cause of relief and celebration among the millions of protesters who helped bring about an end to her rule.

Police use tear gas to disperse student protesters in Bangladesh on Aug. 4, 2024. AFP via Getty Images

Protest leaders have expressed a clear vision for an inclusive, corruption-free, democratic government. What they don’t want is an interim government that is formed without their involvement and input. Student leaders have put together a list of candidates they want to see in the interim government. Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus has accepted a role as chief adviser. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-i-Islami leaders are vying for positions in the interim government.

But political transitions are extremely challenging and volatile. There have been incidences of looting, arson and violence around the country, as well as attacks on the Hindu community.

Armed wings of the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami and the Bangladesh Chhatra League are being blamed for much of the violence, which, it is alleged, is carried out to delegitimize the protest movement. In response, students and the general public have stepped in to protect minority places of worship.

Rumors and disinformation campaigns will certainly have some significant impact in a volatile situation.

Meanwhile, the enormous damage done to the country’s economy by the political turmoil and military curfew will also require attention.

Neighboring countries, particularly India, are paying a lot of attention to the volatile situation. International donors and strategic partners including the U.S., EU, and China likewise await what comes next, given Bangladesh’s regional geopolitics and the global economy. |

| 30 | Bangladesh: Political violence grips country as election looms

2 November 2023

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Anbarasan Ethirajan

BBC News

EPA Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporters participate in a protest demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 28 October 2023.EPA

Police have set up barricades in the capital to contain the unrest

Weeks of mounting political tension have erupted into protests and bloodshed in Bangladesh, leaving the country on edge ahead of general elections due in January.

Several senior opposition leaders were arrested last Sunday, a day after a massive rally against the government turned violent, resulting in the deaths of at least two opposition supporters.

The rejuvenated main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has intensified protests calling on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign.

The BNP and its allies want a neutral interim government ahead of the general elections, arguing that free and fair polls are not possible under Ms Hasina. The government led by her Awami League has rejected this demand.

The BNP rally in the capital Dhaka attracted tens of thousands of people - one of the biggest gatherings seen there in a decade.

But things soon turned violent.

Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas while opposition supporters threw stones and bricks. Some roads in the capital were strewn with exploded sound grenades, tear gas shells and broken glass.

Both sides accuse each other of starting the violence.

EPA A police box set on fire as Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporters participate in a protest demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 28 October 2023.EPA

Some structures were set on fire during the protests

"The opposition supporters attacked police, journalists, hospitals, ambulances and the houses of the chief justice and other judges, creating chaos," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told the BBC.

The BNP said it was the other way round.

"It was a peaceful and non-violent rally, but the government was baffled by the massive turn out. So, they decided to disrupt the meeting," senior party leader Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury told the BBC.

"The rally was attacked from two sides. It resembled a war zone. So, we had to stop our public meeting midway."

The governing Awami League rejects accusations that their supporters provoked opposition activists taking part in the rally.

A three-day nationwide blockade called by the BNP to protest against the police action began on Tuesday.

Protesters have set fire to buses and clashed with security forces in several places. Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse them. Two opposition activists were killed in clashes with police on Tuesday. Most vehicles have stayed off the roads fearing violence.

Political unrest is not uncommon in Bangladesh. Over the years parties have taken to the streets to press their demands, resulting in shutdowns, violence and loss of life.

But in recent years the political divide has been widening and the bitterness growing, with the Awami League midway through a second decade in office and seeking a fourth straight five-year term. The two main parties are in no mood to compromise and the chances of dialogue ahead of the vote appear slim.

'Battling Begums'

The arrested BNP leaders include secretary-general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir who has led the party since its leader, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, was arrested and jailed in a corruption case five years ago.

She's now 78 and under effective house arrest.

Ms Hasina, 76, and Ms Zia, who have dominated Bangladesh politics for more than three decades, are heirs to political dynasties.

Both are bitter rivals - locally described as the "battling Begums". Begum refers to a Muslim woman of high rank.

Reuters Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) gives a speech at the Suhrawardy Udyan during a rally as part of a nationwide protest against attack on sit-in programmes in the capital Dhaka, Bangladesh, July 31, 2023.Reuters

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir is among opposition leaders under arrest

Ms Hasina came to power for a second time in January 2009 and since then her party has won two more elections, although there have been accusations of widespread vote-rigging.

The political unrest ahead of the election is happening at a time when the country is facing economic hardship, with most voters struggling to cope with the escalating cost of living, especially rising food prices. Inflation was around 9.6% in September.

The country's foreign exchange reserves have also dropped from a record $48bn (£39.49bn) in August 2021 to around $20bn now - not enough for even three months of imports.

Bangladesh was forced to reach out to the International Monetary Fund earlier this year for assistance.

Blindfolded and held in a secret underground cell

'Can't afford rice' quote lands journalist in jail

Gang violence stalks world's largest refugee camp

Fears for democracy as buoyant Bangladesh turns 50

Although big opposition rallies in Bangladesh are not unusual, analysts say they are attracting particularly large crowds due to widespread discontent over rising food costs.

"The economy is on the brink of a disaster and people are suffering. That's why hundreds of thousands of people are joining our rallies despite attempts by the Awami League to stop them by cancelling transport, carrying out arrests and intimidation," Mr Chowdhury told the BBC.

But Ms Hasina, the daughter of the country's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, points to the sustained economic growth of the country over the past 15 years under her rule.

Clampdown on dissent

The arrest of Mr Alamgir, along with hundreds of opposition supporters, after the rally has triggered criticism from rights groups.

"The intensified crackdown on opposition party leaders and protesters over the weekend signals an attempt at a complete clampdown of dissent in Bangladesh ahead of the general elections in January," Amnesty International said.

The Office of the UN Human Rights Commissioner urged the government to show restraint and ensure that human rights were fully upheld for all Bangladeshis.

The government has already been accused of carrying out human rights violations on a large scale.

EPA Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporters participate in a protest demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 28 October 2023.EPA

BNP supporters, seen here in Dhaka, want Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign

The BNP alleges that hundreds of its supporters have become victims of enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings carried out by the security forces, some of whom have been sanctioned by the US for their actions.

The Bangladeshi government has flatly denied charges of abuses and killings - but it also severely restricts visits to foreign journalists who want to investigate these allegations.

"Definitely, there is a climate of fear, especially while expressing dissent on any kind of digital forum because the government uses the draconian Digital Security Act [DSA] to imprison people," Shireen Huq, a prominent women's rights activist, told the BBC.

Rights groups say the act has been used to silence critics and stifle free expression. They say more than a thousand court cases have been filed against journalists, politicians and activists since it was enacted in 2018.

AFP Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrives to address the 78th United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City on September 22, 2023.AFP

Sheikh Hasina says she will not resign

Following widespread opposition, including from the UN, the government recently replaced the DSA with a new Cyber Security Act. But activists say the new law still retains repressive measures.

Ms Huq says she has no confidence the government will conduct a free and fair poll in January.

The opposition alleges the same, which is why it is demanding a return to installing a neutral caretaker administration ahead of the vote - a safeguard abolished by parliament in 2011.

Foreign Minister Momen rejects such calls.

"There is no history in any country that the sitting government will step down and allow some non-elected people to run the government. We believe in democracy, therefore that type of demand is not acceptable," he told the BBC.

The BNP has threatened to boycott the January poll if their demand is not met. This tactic hasn't worked in their favour in the past however.

The party's refusal to take part in the December 2014 election helped the Awami League win another landslide.

With hardening positions, Bangladeshis are staring at the possibility of protracted political unrest and possibly more street violence. |

| 31 | DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Thousands of students and others on Thursday rallied in Bangladesh’s capital to mark one month since former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted from power by a mass uprising initially led by students over a quota system for government jobs.

Hasina fled to India on Aug. 5 after weeks of violence left more than 600 people dead, including students. The uprising ended the 15-year-rule of the country’s longest-serving prime minister who began a fourth consecutive term in January following an election boycotted by the major opposition parties, who questioned the credibility of the electoral process.

The demonstrators chanted slogans such as “Where is Hasina? Bury her, bury her!” and “Hasina-Modi, warning, be careful!” or “Naraye Takbeer, Allahu Akbar.”

They were referring Narendra Modi, India’s prime minister, as Hasina is known to be a trusted ally of India. Many protesters do not like India for promoting Hinduism and demonstrating what they see as a big brotherly dominance, and condemned it for sheltering Hasina.

The central procession, styled as a “shaheedi march” or “procession for the martyrs” began from the Dhaka University campus and marched through streets. In addition to the many Bangladeshi flags, some participants carried a giant Palestinian flag.

Tens of thousands joined rallies across the Muslim-majority nation of 170 million people.

In Dhaka’s Uttara neighborhood, thousands of school and madrasah students in uniform took part in processions, chanting anti-Hasina slogans. Some carried banners and placards, reading “We want Hasina’s execution” and “We want reforms of the state.”

Thursday’s development came as Bangladesh was returning to normalcy after the protests, despite challenges such as a struggling economy. An interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, who had a frosty relationship with Hasina for many years, has prioritized law and order to stabilize the country.

Yunus in an interview with the Press Trust of India, or PTI, news agency released Thursday said that Hasina should stay quiet, and that her political remarks from India are an “unfriendly gesture.”

The protesters and other opponents of Hasina want her and her associates to stand trial for mass killings during the demonstrations that began in July.

“If India wants to keep her until the time Bangladesh wants her back, the condition would be that she has to keep quiet,” the PTI quoted Yunus as saying.

“No one is comfortable with her stance there in India because we want her back to try her. She is there in India and at times she is talking, which is problematic … No one likes it,” he said.

Yunus was apparently referring to Hasina’s statement on August 13 in which she demanded “justice”, saying those involved in recent “terror acts”, killings and vandalism must be investigated, identified and punished.

Yunus’ administration is reorganizing police, bureaucracy and other state institutions to take control amid reports of violence and continuing unrest.

Days of street protests by garment workers and other industries forced owners to shut their factories for days before they restarted their operations on Thursday amid heightened security in two major industrial hubs outside Dhaka.

Also, media reports said that a young Hindu man was beaten on Wednesday by a Muslim mob in the presence of security officials in the southwestern Khulna region after he allegedly posted derogatory comments online about the Prophet Muhammad.

The country’s two leading Bengali-language dailies, Prothom Alo and Samakal, reported online that the man, named as Sri Utso, was lynched by the mob, but they later removed the stories from their websites and republished new versions, saying that he did not die and was now receiving medical treatment. The reports provided no further details about the whereabouts of the 22-year-old man.

The military’s Inter Service Public Relations office in a statement later Thursday said that the soldiers rescued Utso after an angry mob attacked him inside the office of a senior police official. It said he survived and was out of danger, and he would be handed over to police for legal actions against him.

Yunus in the interview with the PTI refuted earlier reports that the Hindu minority had been targeted since Hasina’s fall. Modi had also earlier voiced concern over the reports of attacks on Hindus.

Yunus said the issue of attacks on minority Hindus in Bangladesh is “exaggerated” and questioned the manner in which India projected it.

He said the attacks on minorities in Bangladesh are more political than communal: he described them as the fallout of political upheaval as there is a perception that most Hindus supported the now-deposed Awami League regime of Sheikh Hasina.

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How has Indo-Bangladesh relations evolved over time

What is the significance of Bangladesh to India

What are the areas of cooperation between India and Bangladesh

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How has Indo-Bangladesh relations evolved over time?

India and Bangladesh share a unique relationship, marked by cultural, linguistic, and historical ties.

India and Bangladesh share an organic bond due to their shared cultural heritage and historical events, including the loss suffered during the Partition of India in 1947 and the separation of families on a massive scale.

India played a great role in the emergence of independent Bangladesh during its Liberation War in 1971 and was the first country to recognize Bangladesh as a separate state. Bangladesh liberation day, 16th December, is celebrated as “Vijay Diwas” in India.

India-Bangladesh relations the unique ties are forged in shared sacrifices.

Also, the Prime Minister of India recently referred to the current state of the bilateral relationship as 'Sonali Adhyay' (golden phase).

What is the significance of Bangladesh to India?

Bangladesh is important to India for several reasons, including

Geopolitical: Bangladesh is India's neighbour and shares a long land, riverine and maritime boundary. This makes it important for India's security and foreign policy. For example, India needs cooperation from Bangladesh to counter the Chinese ‘String of Pearls’.

Economic: India-Bangladesh have close economic ties, with India being one of Bangladesh's largest trading partners. For example, The bilateral trade in 2021-2022 was USD 18.2 billion.

Cultural: India and Bangladesh have a shared history, culture, and heritage. The people of the two countries are linked by strong cultural and familial ties, and there is a large population of Indian-origin people living in Bangladesh.

Strategic: Bangladesh is located at the crossroads of South Asia and Southeast Asia and is important for India's Act East Policy, which aims to build closer ties with the countries of Southeast Asia.

Environmental concerns: Bangladesh and India share trans-boundary rivers and ecological systems, making it important for the two countries to cooperate on issues such as water management and flood control. For example, coordinated efforts are needed for the conservation of Sunderbans.

What are the areas of cooperation between India and Bangladesh?

Economic and Commercial

Bangladesh is India’s biggest trade partner in South Asia, and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh. Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade and the exports of Bangladesh have tripled over the last decade to cross $1 bn in 2018-19.

Connectivity

Various measures are undertaken to restore the pre-1965 rail links and other connectivity links that existed between India and Bangladesh. The newly restored railway link between Chilahati (Bangladesh) and Haldibari (India) was inaugurated in 2021.

To enhance people-to-people contact, the frequency of two passenger trains is increased - Maitree Express and Bandhan Express.

Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) was signed for the transportation of goods and keeping their respective waterways navigable while providing infrastructure facilities.

Agartala - Akhaura Rail Link: between Agartala (Tripura) and Akhaura (Bangladesh) would be the first train from the northeastern region to Bangladesh.

Development partnership

Bangladesh is the biggest development partner of India today. India has extended 3 Lines of Credit (LOC) to Bangladesh since 2010, amounting to US$ 8 billion for the development of infrastructure in various sectors, including roads, railways, shipping, and ports.

Capacity building and human resource development

Human resource development is a key component of India’s development cooperation efforts in Bangladesh through its several ongoing training programmes and scholarships.

India has been training 1800 Bangladesh Civil Service officials since 2019 at National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG), Mussoorie.

Cultural cooperation

Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC), Dhaka plays an important role in the celebration of common cultural links between the two countries. Its training programs include Yoga, Kathak, Manipuri dance, Hindi language, and Hindustani classical music.

Defence cooperation

High-level exchanges include the edition of India-Bangladesh CORPAT ‘Bangosagar’ exercise, Regional Commanders meeting of Coast Guards and the Annual Defense Dialogues.

Countering China’s influence: Enhancing India’s connection with Bangladesh by assisting Bangladesh with nuclear technology, artificial intelligence, modern farming methods, and the exchange of flood data help in countering China’s influence in Bangladesh.

Water sharing: Through the Kushiyara Pact, India and Bangladesh agreed to share the waters of a significant transboundary river, the Kushiyara.

In order to maximize the benefits of their shared river systems, the two nations have a bilateral Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), for developing flood control measures, formulating proposals for advance flood warnings, etc.

Border cooperation: Border haats have been organized which will act as trading posts on the Bangladesh–India border. Example: Kamalasagar-Tarapur Border Haat has been set up in Tripura- Bangladesh border.

Multilateral cooperation: India and Bangladesh have been cooperating on multilateral platforms such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, etc.

Energy: Construction of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh with India-Russia cooperation.

Cooperation on the Rohingya crisis: India launched “Operation Insaniyat” to provide relief assistance for the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has acknowledged Indian Oil Corporation Limited as a registered government to government supply of refined petroleum products.

What are the existing challenges in India-Bangladesh relations?

India-Bangladesh relations have been generally cordial, but there are a few challenges, including

Geopolitical challenges:

Border disputes: Long-standing disputes over the demarcation of the shared border, particularly in the regions of Assam and Tripura.

Illegal immigration: The flow of migrants across the Bangladeshi border as a result of the country’s unrest has further strained the relationship between the two countries.

The inhabitants of the Indian states bordering Bangladesh have experienced substantial socio-economic-political challenges as a result of the significant influx of migrants.

Economic challenges:

Non-tariff barriers: Both face non-tariff barriers, such as lengthy customs procedures and bureaucratic red tape, which have hindered trade.

Sharing river water: One of the main issues is the disagreement over river water sharing. There are 54 rivers cross-border rivers.

Connectivity challenges:

Border disputes: Tensions along the border between Bangladesh and India are nothing new. A 4,096 km long land border and a 180 km long marine border separate India from Bangladesh. The Comilla–Tripura land border, which stretches for 6.5 kilometers, has not been demarcated, leaving the border dispute unresolved.

Lack of infrastructure: Insufficient infrastructure and connectivity, hindering the development of economic ties between the two countries.

Security challenges:

Terrorism: India has accused Bangladesh-based terrorist groups of carrying out attacks in India and has called for greater cooperation in combating terrorism.

Insurgency: According to media sources, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, and the National Liberation Front of Tripura all run camps in Bangladesh.

Additionally, there are suspicions that the ULFA has a number of successful income-generating ventures in Bangladesh that it uses to fund its insurgent operations in India.

China factor: China has been increasing its investments in Bangladesh, particularly in the areas of infrastructure development, energy, and telecommunications. For example, BRI and investment in Chittagong port.

Energy challenges:

Water-sharing: Tension over the distribution of the waters of common rivers, particularly the Brahmaputra and the Ganges.

Teesta river dispute: In order to keep the river’s water flow to a minimum, an agreement was concluded in 2011 that gave India 42.5% of the water, Bangladesh 37.5%, and the remaining 20% of the river’s water flow-free rein. Due to some disagreement, this agreement has not been put into effect to this point.

Farakka barrage dispute: Diversion of water from the Ganges to the Hooghly River is a major source of concern raised by Bangladesh many times in the past.

What measures could enhance Indo-Bangladesh relations?

The present issues in the India-Bangladesh relationship can be resolved through the following measures:

Addressing the Teesta river water dispute: To establish a consensus towards demarcating the extent of Teesta river water sharing and reaching a mutual agreement in a time-bound manner..

Better connectivity: There is a need to enhance connectivity in the region through strengthening cooperation in coastal connectivity, road, rail, and inland waterways.

Energy security: As the global energy crisis continues to rise, it is imperative that India and Bangladesh cooperate in making use of clean and green energy to make South Asia Energy self-sufficient.

India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline: which will help move high-speed diesel to Northern Bangladesh from India, needs to be fastened.

Shifting focus towards Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) negotiations since 2018:

It will strengthen economic ties between India and Bangladesh.

Countering China: Assisting Bangladesh with critical technologies and financial assistance will further strengthen India's relationship and help India counter China’s influence to a greater extent.

Tackling the refugee Crisis: India and Bangladesh can encourage other countries in the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to develop a SAARC declaration on refugees, laying down a specific procedure for determining the status of refugees and economic migrants. |

| 33 | As a developing economy Bangladesh has encouraged to develop its banking industry to promote economic growth. Over the last three decades or so the country has seen spectacular expansion of the banking industry. The banking industry in Bangladesh has even gone a step further by promoting financial inclusion of the very poor in rural areas of which microfinance and microcredit are the policy instruments to achieve that objective. This has helped to expand the monetisation of the rural economy, and as a consequence it has become more market-oriented. Such market orientation of the rural economy also facilitated continuous resource transfer from rural areas to urban areas. Now the biggest threat to achieving sustained economic growth has become the banking industry itself, especially the state-owned banks. This is despite Bangladesh adopting internationally recognised banking practices such as Basel III Accord.

The increased financialisation of the Bangladesh economy also created an environment where huge wealth has been accumulated by a section of the rich by defrauding banks, in particular state-owned banks. It is generally suggested that the stock market scams in Bangladesh are most likely to be linked to this fraudulent financial practice with the ultimate goal of acquiring control of various listed companies by bankrupting small investors.

The legal system also plays a distinct role to enable owners of capital to consolidate and expand their wealth as we have seen in the post-GFC (2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis) period in developed economies. A capital-friendly legal bias is quite evident in market-oriented economies in both developed and developing economies. Even the central bank of Bangladesh - Bangladesh Bank, was a target of robbery in February 2016 where US $101 million were stolen from its account with the Federal Reserve in New York. No clear picture is available still now who were involved in the heist and where the money has ended up. The heist has been described as one of the biggest bank robberies in history. It appears that this is not the only time money has been stolen from Bangladesh Bank. A senior official of the bank was convicted in February this year for stealing money from the bank. But what is surprising that it took almost 21 years to resolve the case.

Bangladesh's banking system is now faced with a slow-motion banking crisis principally at the government-run banks along with some private sector banks. The Finance Minister himself last month said the current banking and non-banking financial sectors are in the most vulnerable position. The situation is anything but getting any better largely due to very fast credit growth and state directed lending and loan restructuring. All this raises the risk of a credit crunch. Six state-owned commercial banks account for almost a quarter of all bank assets in the country. The government appoints their chief executives and board members and often influences them to activities with disastrous effects.

The state appears to want to have pliant banks who will listen to their diktats to lend to such areas as infrastructure projects and to buy government bonds. But far more odious is the collusion between business and political elite in influencing state-owned banks' loan allocations in their favour and these are the ones most likely to get defaulted. The result is a huge amount of nonperforming loan (NPL) now estimated to be in excess of Tk 1.0 trillion (US$ 12 billion) (FE, 18/2/19). And half of it is owed to six state-owned banks requiring continuous recapitalisation of these banks with tax-payers' money. The rest are owed to private and foreign-owned banks. The share of NPL now stands at close to 11 per cent of the total loan portfolio. When restructured and rescheduled loans are included, the share of NPL goes up to about 20 per cent.

The term NPL can be a contested term in the context of Bangladesh in the sense that loans are not performing in the businesses loans were allocated for, therefore business enterprises defaulted or close to default. Technically, a loan becomes a NPL after being in default for 90 days. But in Bangladesh loan obtained for a particular business activity can be channelled into some other business activity and performing very well there or into Benami properties, worse even money might have left the country altogether and invested in properties overseas or in an offshore bank account. After all, if one steals money from banks, in particular from state-owned banks, the person does not want lose his/her ill-gotten money to someone else's scam or confiscation by the state. Therefore, a more accurate term under the circumstances is "debt default''. A debt default shows that a bank has difficulty in collecting interest and principal payments and that may lead to profit squeeze, or even the closure of the bank.

To understand the consequences of debt defaults one has to clearly understand how commercial banks operate. A bank does not lend money, but creates money when it advances loans. The bank has converted one asset (cash) into another asset (the promise of repayment). But the loan now has added an additional amount of money. And that is how banks create money. When banks create money through lending, they only rely on borrower's ability to repay the loan with interest when it is due. However, banks' ability to create money is constrained by capital. In contrast, a Central Bank's ability to create money is constrained by willingness of the government to back it and the ability of the government to tax the population. But in practice most central banks create money using their assets. They create new money when they buy new assets in open market operation or QE and when they lend to banks.

Banks also create money when they buy assets whether real or financial. Joseph Schumpeter in his book History of Economic Analysis about 60 years ago said "it proved extraordinarily difficult for economists to recognise that bank loans and bank investments do create deposits'' i.e. create money. When a loan is extended to a customer, the bank simply opens an account for the customer with the agreed loan amount in the account. The customer signs a legally enforceable contract to repay the loan with interest within a stipulated timeframe. This constitutes a future income stream for the bank. Now it is crystal clear that no money has been taken out of any other account or accounts. The bank itself does not have any money, but opening the loan account, it now has created money. If the borrower defaults, it becomes a bad debt, if bad debt continue to rise the bank will become insolvent and close its doors or must receive bailout from the government. When such a situation extends to the whole banking industry in the country, a credit crunch ensues resulting in rises in interest rates (interest rates in Bangladesh now vary between 13-15 per cent) leading to a downturn in the economy. There is a saying that if one owes one million dollars to the bank the person has serious problem, but if he/she owes 100 million dollars to the bank, then the bank has a serious problem, and if the person owes 1000 million dollars to the bank, then the whole country has a serious problem at hand.

According to Bangladesh Bank, by the middle of 2018 seven state-owned and three private sector banks were running capital deficits, that necessitated state-funded recapitalisation or bailouts of these banks to maintain public confidence in the banking system. But such bailouts will create moral hazard problem and likely to encourage banks to continue with such behaviour. State also must refrain from directing lending to certain specific sectors or purposes and such activities can better be undertaken through budgetary provisions. The existing regulatory capital requirements to ensure banks remain financially viable have not yielded the desired results as reflected in many banks experiencing capital inadequacy. That raises the question whether those requirements are fit for the purpose. If that is the case they ought to be revisited. The banking regulatory regime in Bangladesh also at the same time should focus on mitigating the risk of misconduct and must assess the culture drivers of misconduct. As for the banks themselves, they must put in place effective credit risk management to ensure loans are matched with ability to repay and used for the purpose these were intended for and must forestall any insider lending and mitigate any information asymmetry.

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| 34 | A systematic review estimated the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders as between 0.2 and 0.8% in Bangladesh.10 A 2013 study reported that 25% of adolescents in urban schools experienced depressive symptoms (girls: 30%, boys: 19%).11 A 2018 study among adolescents in urban and semi-urban schools found that 36.6% suffered from depressive symptoms (girls: 42.9%, boys: 25.7%).12 A similar prevalence of depression (38.9%) was reported among Bangladeshi medical students in 2013.13 A 2019 study among university students reported a 22.5% increase in the prevalence of depression (meeting provisional diagnostic criteria) and a 27.1% increase in the prevalence of anxiety within a 15-month period.14

Go to:

Mental healthcare delivery, services and systems

Of approximately 7000 graduates each year from medical schools across the country, only a few choose to specialise in psychiatry.15

Mental health services are provided by psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses and clinical psychologists, with little to no multidisciplinary teamwork between them. It is difficult for rural populations to access psychiatrists and other mental health professionals.16 Mental health services are often limited to a divisional tertiary level, where psychiatrists work at public medical college hospitals located within cities. With only 260 psychiatrists serving a country of 162 million, much of the population is unable to access mental health services.17

The few community care facilities for psychiatric patients available throughout the country are greatly strained in terms of both human and financial resources. There is currently only one national-level mental health institute in the country, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), in Dhaka.18 A 200-bed mental health hospital comprises part of the NIMH, with an additional 500-bed psychiatric hospital located nearby.16 An additional 15 beds exist in forensic in-patient units and 3900 beds in residential facilities, including homes for the destitute, in-patient detoxification centres and homes for people with severe neurodevelopmental disorders. A few substance misuse treatment and rehabilitation facilities are organised by private practitioners and unregulated. At the community level, 31 psychiatric in-patient units exist,16 which account for only 8% of the total number of hospital beds in the country.5 Mentally ill persons constitute 4.2% of the patients served in in-patient units, suggesting possible reluctance of health professionals to assign in-patient stays for mental illness.5 The average length of stay for a mental health in-patient is 137 days.

The first out-patient clinic for mental illness was established by the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital in 1969. There are currently 50 out-patient mental health facilities in the country, but the majority of them are located in urban areas.15 Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also contribute to the provision of mental healthcare in Bangladesh. Although the NIMH began to provide mental health training to primary care physicians and health workers in 1981, community-based follow-up is limited, especially for those in rural areas.

The limited knowledge about mental health in Bangladesh contributes to a lack of sufficient care programmes, thereby neglecting the mental health needs of the population. Unfortunately, few NGOs cater to improving mental health. When disasters strike, mental health is overlooked by authorities, evidenced by the absence of attention given to disaster-related mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Bangladeshi clinical and policy fields. The term PTSD was first brought to public attention in relation to war veterans, but this disorder can result from a variety of traumatic incidents, such as muggings, rape, torture, being kidnapped or held captive, childhood abuse, car accidents, train wrecks, plane crashes, bombings and natural disasters, including floods and earthquakes.19 PTSD is not emphasised as an important health concern in the healthcare system of Bangladesh, begetting a fundamental gap in mental healthcare, given the country's proneness to natural disasters owing to its geography and the frequency of man-made disasters, such as building collapses and urban fires. In 2017, the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) was implemented with relative success by the government of Bangladesh to address the humanitarian crisis at Cox's Bazar.20 However, this programme has yet to be scaled up to the rest of the nation.

Although antipsychotics, anxiolytics, antidepressants, mood stabilisers and anti-epileptic drugs are included in the list of essential medicines recommended by the WHO, psychotropic drugs are not widely available in Bangladesh.21,22 Only a few patients visiting the government healthcare facilities have access to these psychotropic medications. Despite the well-structured three-tier healthcare delivery system in Bangladesh,23 a lack of qualified mental healthcare professionals and limited logistical support lead to a discrepancy in meeting the mental healthcare needs of the population.17 Studies have highlighted low levels of help-seeking as well as poor service delivery for mental health conditions in Bangladesh.7

Referrals of patients with mental illness to mental health specialists by primary care physicians or other healthcare providers are near non-existent.24 Superstitious beliefs regarding the causation of psychiatric disorders prevent help-seeking from mental health services. Psychiatric disorders, including psychotic disorders, are commonly perceived as being triggered by supernatural influences, with the cure often sought from traditional healers. Although these traditional practices have been shown to benefit outcomes for some mental health conditions, these practices show little to no benefit for psychotic illness and are a wasteful economic cost to the majority low-income population. Some practices may also be physically and psychologically harmful, further complicating prognosis.7

Go to:

Financing of mental health services

Mental health expenditures by the Bangladeshi government are 0.44% of the total health budget.25 Of all the expenditure on mental health, 67% is dedicated to mental hospitals. Less than 0.11% of the population have access to free essential psychotropic medications. Daily out-of-pocket expenses for the lowest-priced antipsychotic and antidepressant medication is 5.00 taka (US$ 0.07) and 3.00 taka (US$ 0.04) respectively. Health insurance is a rarity and, in any case, typically does not cover drugs for mental illness.5

Go to:

Human resources for mental healthcare

Very few healthcare workers in Bangladesh are trained in providing mental health services (0.49%), and there are even fewer psychiatrists (0.16 per 100,000 population).17 The majority of these professionals work in the urban areas of the country, namely the capital city of Dhaka. Types of mental healthcare providers in Bangladesh include psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists and general mental health workers.5,15 Approximately half the psychiatrists (54%) in Bangladesh work in government mental health facilities or private sector clinics; 46% work for NGOs, for-profit mental health facilities or in private practice.5 Psychiatrists working in government facilities are allowed to concurrently work in the private sector as well. Around 62% of psychosocial professionals, including clinical psychologists, social workers, nurses and occupational therapists, work for government-administered mental health facilities, 26% work for NGOs or in private practice, and 12% work for both the public and the private sectors. The distribution of human resources between urban and rural areas is grossly disproportionate, with a heavy concentration in urban areas.26–28 The density of psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses in or around the largest city, the capital Dhaka, is five times greater than the density of these professionals in the rest of the country.5 Bangladesh's available workforce in mental healthcare is scarce and skewed in distribution, an immense barrier to improving mental healthcare in the country.

Go to:

Social stigma, inequalities and sociocultural influences

High social stigma attached to mental illness also affects help-seeking behaviour. Consequently, mentally ill persons suffer in silence, with social isolation and discrimination. Morbidity from psychiatric illness remains high and is seldom regarded as a public health concern. Widespread stigma towards the mentally ill in Bangladesh is attributable to superstitions surrounding causation of mental illness. Mental disorder is perceived to be a consequence of possession by evil spirits, as opposed to biological or psychological mechanisms, leading to neglect and abuse of those with mental illness.29

Other mental health issues pertinent to Bangladesh include gender-based violence and substance misuse. Approximately 60% of ever-married women in Bangladesh reported experiences of sexual and physical intimate partner violence, a matter that remains largely ignored by the government and policymakers. Very little is known about violence against unmarried female adolescents.30 Domestic violence, dowry-related acid attacks, rape, forced abortion and trafficking for prostitution are common gender-based violence problems, with victims often facing severe psychological and psychosomatic symptoms.31

The perceived physical health of the population is another important predictor of mental disorder in Bangladesh. A recent study among university students revealed a significant association between students’ self-perceived physical health conditions and symptoms of depression and anxiety.32 Additionally, a growing national concern is substance misuse, which has increased in recent years among young women.33 Drug use is highest among Bangladeshi young people between the ages of 15 and 30 years. Despite the proven mental health consequences arising from substance misuse, Bangladesh has limited services available to rehabilitate this population. There are only a few public, private sector or NGO-run facilities for those struggling with substance misuse. Moreover, these services are primarily located in urban areas, leaving a vast majority of the population devoid of such services.5 |

| 35 | The recent coup d’état in Bangladesh is a critical event with far-reaching implications for the country and its surrounding region. On August 5, 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India amidst escalating anti-government protests, leading to a military takeover. This article will explore into the causes, the events leading up to the coup, the international reaction, and the potential implications for neighboring countries and the broader South Asian region.

Background and Causes

The political crisis in Bangladesh began with student-led protests in mid-July 2024, primarily triggered by a controversial Supreme Court decision to reinstate job quotas for certain groups, including 30% for descendants of veterans from the 1971 liberation war. This decision reversed a 2018 policy change that had abolished such quotas in response to earlier student protests, sparking widespread dissatisfaction among students and young professionals who felt their merit-based opportunities were being compromised (DW, 2024).

The discontent quickly expanded into broader anti-government demonstrations, reflecting deeper issues such as economic challenges, corruption, and human rights abuses. The government’s violent response to these protests, which resulted in over 300 deaths and more than 20,000 injuries, further fueled public outrage (UN News, 2024). The intensity and scale of the protests eventually compelled the military to intervene, leading to Hasina’s resignation and flight.

The Coup and Its Aftermath

Following Hasina’s departure, General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced the formation of a transitional government. The international community, including the European Union and the United Nations, called for a peaceful transition to a democratically elected government and emphasized the need for respect for human rights during this period (UN News, 2024; DW, 2024).

The coup has raised significant concerns about the future of democracy in Bangladesh. The country has a history of military coups, and there is skepticism about whether the current military leadership will facilitate a genuine return to civilian rule. The actions of the interim government in the coming months will be crucial in determining the political trajectory of Bangladesh.

International Reactions

The international community has been closely monitoring the situation. The United Nations has called for a peaceful transition and a comprehensive investigation into the violence. UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the importance of accountability and justice for the victims (UN News, 2024). The European Union has echoed these sentiments, urging for an impartial investigation and a transparent transition process (DW, 2024).

Implications for Neighboring Countries

The coup in Bangladesh has significant implications for its neighbors, particularly India, China, and Myanmar.

India:

India, which shares a long border with Bangladesh, has a vested interest in the stability of its neighbor. The two countries have enjoyed strong bilateral relations, particularly under Hasina’s administration, which has cooperated closely with India on security and economic issues (Institut d’Études de Géopolitique Appliquée, 2024). The coup could potentially disrupt this cooperation, especially if the new regime takes a different approach to bilateral relations.

India is also concerned about potential instability and violence spilling over the border, which could exacerbate security challenges in its northeastern states. Additionally, the political upheaval in Bangladesh may impact Indian investments and economic interests in the country.

China:

China’s involvement in Bangladesh, particularly through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), means that Beijing is also closely watching the developments. Bangladesh joined the BRI in 2016, and China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects in the country (Institut d’Études de Géopolitique Appliquée, 2024). The political instability could pose risks to these investments and projects.

Moreover, China has historically supported stable governments that can ensure the completion of BRI projects. The transition period in Bangladesh could lead to uncertainties regarding the continuation and security of these projects.

Myanmar:

Bangladesh’s political turmoil also has implications for its relationship with Myanmar, especially concerning the Rohingya refugee crisis. Bangladesh hosts over a million Rohingya refugees who fled persecution in Myanmar. The instability in Bangladesh could affect its capacity to manage the refugee situation and its diplomatic engagements with Myanmar on repatriation and other related issues.

Broader Regional Implications

The coup in Bangladesh is likely to have broader regional implications in South Asia. Political instability in Bangladesh could influence regional security dynamics, economic stability, and migration patterns.

Regional Security

The political crisis in Bangladesh may embolden extremist groups within the country, which could have spillover effects on regional security. Neighboring countries, particularly India and Myanmar, may face increased security threats if instability in Bangladesh leads to a resurgence of militant activities.

Economic Impact

Bangladesh is an important economic player in South Asia, with significant contributions to regional trade and commerce. Political instability could disrupt economic activities, impacting trade flows and investment climates in the region. Countries with strong economic ties to Bangladesh, such as India and China, may need to reassess their economic strategies and investments in light of the new political landscape.

Migration and Humanitarian Concerns

Instability in Bangladesh could trigger migration flows, both internally and across borders. Neighboring countries may experience an influx of refugees and migrants seeking safety and economic opportunities. This could strain resources and exacerbate existing humanitarian challenges in the region.

Conclusion

The recent coup d’état in Bangladesh marks a pivotal moment in the country’s political history. The resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amidst widespread protests and the subsequent military takeover have set the stage for significant changes in Bangladesh’s governance. The international community’s call for a peaceful transition and respect for human rights underscores the importance of a stable and democratic Bangladesh for regional and global stability.

The implications of the coup extend beyond Bangladesh’s borders, affecting its relationships with neighboring countries and the broader South Asian region. The actions of the interim government, the response of the international community, and the resilience of Bangladesh’s civil society will shape the country’s future trajectory. Ensuring a peaceful and democratic transition is crucial for Bangladesh’s stability and development, as well as for the security and prosperity of the region. |

| 36 | Bangladesh’s democratic process has been disrupted by military coups since 1975 and instability has marked its political landscape. After the restoration of democracy in 1991, parliamentary form was reinstated with Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina alternatively holding power. However, since 2009 it was Sheikh Hasina who controlled power and registered mammoth progress in economic growth. But there has been a consistent pressure from orthodox Muslim schools and the military on government resulting in the current military coup. It has tremendous security implications for India and the Indo-pacific that forms the prime thread in the current article.

Introduction

Bangladesh’s democratic process has faced numerous challenges since its independence in 1971, including autocracy and military interventions. The country’s democratic process was initially influenced by Indian democratic tradition but was disrupted by military coups since1975 and subsequent political instability. After the restoration of democracy in 1991, parliamentary democracy was reinstated, with Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina holding power.

Despite progress in economic growth and social measures, Bangladesh’s democratic system remains under pressure from orthodox Muslim schools and the military (Thakur, 2007). Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year tenure has significantly influenced the country’s democratic course, fostering strong economic growth and political stability. However, the political influence of the opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has decreased due to legal disputes, leadership turmoil, and limitations on political engagements. This has led to a ‘single party dominance system’ since 2009, leading to more centralization of power and autocratic rule by the ruling Awami League. Discontent among the BNP and Jamat-e-Islami of Bangladesh has been simmering, with the reservation of seats for freedom fighters serving as a vent for protests.

Military coup 2024 and the decline of democracy

On August 5, 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stepped down amid widespread demonstrations and a military takeover in Bangladesh. Over 560 fatalities occurred, with protesters targeting Awami League (AL) leaders and the Hindu minority. The Bangladesh Army took control and declared an interim government, calling on demonstrators to stop violence. Hasina and her sister escaped to Ghaziabad, India. The military rule in Bangladesh could have multifaceted impacts on Indian security due to geographical, historical, and socio-political ties.

Providing asylum to Hasina could also be a contentious issue. The new head of the interim government Mohammed Yunus will remain a duckling under the military junta. Former BNP functionary Gayeshwar Roy warned India that cooperation with the enemy would be difficult if they helped the enemy. The military takeover has implications for India and the world. The presence of the interim government under military ensures the failure of democracy and Bangladesh’s return back to democracy is still vague.

Tension in diplomatic zones

While a political vacuum arises in the absence of Sheikh Hasina’s twenty years long rule the regional players like Pakistan and China, the arch rivals of India, may take it as an opportunity to entrench themselves and control the South Asian geostrategic space. India has traditionally supported democratic governance in its neighbourhood, and a shift to military rule could necessitate a recalibration of diplomatic and strategic policies.

Bilateral cooperation on various fronts, including counter-terrorism, trade, and water-sharing agreements, might be adversely affected. The lack of a stable and democratically elected government could complicate negotiations and enforcement of existing agreements. Military rule has its own limitations and has mostly fallen to anti-India forces in South Asia.

Trade disruptions

Bangladesh has significant importance as a trading partner for India. Over the last 5 years, India’s exports to Bangladesh have grown consistently at an average annual rate of 14%, reaching $7.17 billion in 2017 and $13.8 billion in 2022. In the year 2022, Bangladesh’s exports to India amounted to a total value of $2 billion.

The imposition of military authority may result in economic sanctions or trade interruptions, which might have an impact on economic ties. This might potentially have a cascading impact on the economy of border states and the broader dynamics of regional commerce. The political uncertainty in Bangladesh poses a potential threat to Indian investments in the country. Indian enterprises operating in Bangladesh would be affected by this, perhaps resulting in economic losses. In the future, Bangladesh’s economy, which has seen significant growth in recent decades, may potentially decline.

The dual offensive and the targeted killings

The political transition in Bangladesh has resulted in sectarian violence specifically aimed at minority groups, notably Hindus and political figures (Paul & Dass, 2024). A total of 29 leaders from the All India Muslim League (AL) have been assassinated, suggesting that the demonstrators consist of members from the BNP and those who oppose India and the AL. Khalida Zia, the head of the BNP, who had been placed under house arrest and was facing allegations of corruption, has been freed. The assassination of AL leaders may perhaps be a retaliatory action carried out by BNP members, who have consistently maintained stronger affiliations with Jamat-e-Islami. Jamat-e-Islami has expressed strong disapproval of the Awami League’s establishment of the War Crimes Tribunal in 2008, which was in line with their promise made before the election. The Jamat people have charged the AL’s push for justice against the sacrifices of the independence movement fighters associated with it.

There has begun a counter charge process of trapping Sheikh Hasina. Sheikh Hasina is now facing 33 cases against her, including 27 for murder, four for crimes against humanity and genocide, and one for abduction. (The Hindu, August 21, 2024). The new government is demanding her extradition back. Humayun Kabir, president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), “I think we should not rely on a particular individual or party, it is best to keep good relations with all stakeholders. Bangladesh and India are close neighbours and will have to live side by side peacefully. India should keep a relationship as a neighbour, irrespective of the government.” Mohammed Younus, the head of new Interim Government held that ‘Delhi should understand what people of Bangladesh want’.

The Hindu minority is specifically targeted, with intentional attacks on Hindu dwellings and places of worship, resulting in some persons seeking shelter. The ramifications of this violence may have enormous implications across India, especially in areas with substantial Muslim populations. The protesters have specifically targeted the Hindu people, their houses, and temples, indicating a possible connection between anti-Hindu Islamist organisations and the demonstrators. The issue of illegal immigration into India has led to political and social tensions, with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise in Assam aimed at identifying undocumented immigrants. The presence of illegal migrants in strategically important areas is alarming, as Rohingya migrants have been found to have collusion with Kashmir militants. The Act provides relief to address security challenges and minority persecution. Despite being introduced in 1951 and 1976 by Indira Gandhi, the NRC has never progressed due to political reasons and lack of political will. Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar has appealed to everyone to read the bill (Thakur, 2024).

Repercussions for the Indo-Pacific

Bangladesh has significant geostrategic importance due to its strategic position in South Asia, bordered by India, Myanmar, and the Bay of Bengal. It functions as a crucial maritime gateway to the Indian Ocean, playing a significant role in facilitating trade and energy routes (Thakur, 2023, p. 424). Additionally, it functions as a channel between South Asia and Southeast Asia, offering feasible routes for regional connectivity initiatives like China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Bangladesh’s geographical location near crucial international maritime routes, along with its strategic partnerships with prominent nations like China and India, significantly amplifies its geopolitical importance in terms of regional security, trade, and economic integration. Furthermore, the country’s location on the Bay of Bengal, which is rich in natural resources, amplifies its strategic significance for South Asia and India.

For a considerable duration, Bangladesh’s ties with the US were strained as the US aimed to expand its geopolitical influence in Bangladesh, similar to its interests in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Expressing concern about the potential fragmentation of Bangladesh and the United States’ role in ongoing developments, Sheikh Hasina said that she is engaged in a multifaceted struggle, both domestically and internationally, against persistent plots aimed at establishing a new nation inside Bangladesh. “Similar to East Timor, they plan to establish a Christian nation by annexing territories in Bangladesh (specifically Chattogram) and Myanmar, with a stronghold in the Bay of Bengal,” as reported by the Economic Times in 2024. Hasina’s anxiety also suggests that she has under significant pressure from the United States to secure vital access to the Indian Ocean via Bangladesh. Hasina said that if she had let a certain nation to construct an air base in Bangladesh, she would not have encountered any difficulties, referring to the United States (Economic Times, 2024). The change in US policy also signifies that, considering the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean and escalating strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region, the US is placing more emphasis on the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific. In this context, Bangladesh assumes a crucial role as a significant connection.

After pulling out of Afghanistan, the United States has expanded its network of vital allies throughout the Indo-Pacific region. The US has a long-standing policy of promoting autocratic regimes against uncompromising democracies, and the current development in Bangladesh seems to be a continuation of this approach. Because Hasina refused to compromise with the US proposals, she was forced to bear the consequences. Fareed Zakaria discusses a similar incident surrounding then Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Annoyed by persistent American exhortation on democracy, Mubarak reportedly asked, “If I were to do what you ask, Islamic fundamentalists will take over Egypt. Is that what you want?” Interestingly, the 2010-12 Arab Spring claimed Mubarak as one of its first casualties, and the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Islamist leadership took his place. The Saudis, too, have often reminded Americans that if they pressed their government too hard, “the likely alternative to the regime is not Jeffersonian democracy by a Taliban-style theocracy” (Firstpost, 2024). Given the increasing geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region for future maritime security equations and trade flows, which account for about 70 percent of global trade, the US has been enhancing its presence through various channels. It has entered into maritime security understandings with India, Japan, Australia, and the UK. The increased Chinese presence in the ocean also makes it urgent for the US to secure more geostatic bases in the region, and Bangladesh has fallen to these designs.

Conclusions

The Indian challenge is to control the new administration in Bangladesh and supporting the progress of democracy. Failure to do so might result in a decline in economic development and the resurgence of military oppression similar to that seen in the 1970s and 1980s. If the new administration does not address the minority suppression by the demonstrators in a forceful and fair manner, it might lead to an excessive degree of communal enmity that may become uncontrollable for both India and Bangladesh. India must recognise that amid the escalating competition between the United States and China in the Indian Ocean, Indian interests are secure when aligned with its neighbouring countries. It has to articulate its interest well while dealing with the newly emerging patterns of strategic engagements. |

| 37 | The 76-year-old Hasina, who is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first Prime Minister of the country, had become increasingly authoritarian in recent years. But it was the clashes between police and anti-government protesters—which have officially left at least hundreds dead, though diplomatic sources have told TIME the true toll could be over 1,000—that ultimately proved her undoing.

As Hasina’s resignation was announced by the military on Monday, protesters ransacked the Ganabhaban, the Prime Minister’s official residence in capital Dhaka. Mohammed Shahabuddin, who holds the largely ceremonial role of President of Bangladesh, announced the dissolution of parliament, which had been led by Hasina’s ruling party the Awami League for a fourth straight term after January elections that observers deemed neither free nor fair, and Shahabuddin promised fresh elections as soon as possible. By early Wednesday, Shahabuddin’s office announced that 84-year-old Bangladeshi Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, a popular figure among the protesters and who had been prosecuted by Hasina’s government, was tapped to lead an interim government.

“The president has asked the people to help ride out the crisis. Quick formation of an interim government is necessary to overcome the crisis,” the presidential press office said in a statement cited by the media, adding that the national police chief had been sacked.

As the nation of 175 million faces political instability, here’s what to know about Hasina, Yunus, and what comes next.

Who is Sheikh Hasina and why was she ousted?

Hasina’s Awami League was central to Bangladesh’s independence in 1971 and has played a prominent role in the country’s politics since its founding. Hasina, in office since 2009 after an earlier term from 1996 to 2001, was the world’s longest-serving female head of government when she left office, and she had overseen a period of rapid growth for Bangladesh, which today is South Asia’s second-largest economy after India. Hasina’s focus on public health and economic development led to one of the most successful public health campaigns in South Asia and a dramatic reduction in the number of people in the country living in poverty. In the last years of her rule, however, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, and extra-judicial killings of her political opponents had become more frequent, and the last three elections were deemed to have too many irregularities to be declared free and fair by international observers.

Read More: 5 Takeaways from TIME’s Interview with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Trouble for Hasina began when protests broke out last month after a Supreme Court ruling reinstated a 30% quota for the descendents of Bangladesh’s independence fighters for government civil service jobs. These jobs are among the most secure and well-paying jobs available to young Bangladeshis—who face a youth unemployment rate of 15.7%, according to the World Bank—and many university students believed the law was discriminatory and disproportionately benefited Hasina’s political allies.

What were initially peaceful student-led demonstrations turned violent when the Chhatra League—the notoriously aggressive student wing of the Awami League—were dispatched to confront the demonstrators. Resultant clashes led to the closure of all universities across the nation, curfews, shutdowns of the internet, and the deployment of security forces whose deadly, heavy-handed crackdown garnered public sympathy and brought even more protesters.

Read More: How Mass Protests Challenge Bangladesh’s Past—and Threaten to Rewrite Its Future

Over the weekend, hundreds of thousands poured onto the streets, demanding Hasina’s ouster, and by Monday their numbers had swelled to millions as they marched toward the Ganabhaban.

“Sheikh Hasina ruled by fear and that was the core element keeping her whole edifice of power intact,” Mubashar Hasan, a Bangladeshi scholar at the University of Oslo in Norway, told TIME. “But it has now come to a point where people have said, ‘Enough is enough.’ It’s not a protest anymore; it’s a people’s uprising.”

The key turning point appeared to come on Sunday when army chief General Waker-uz-Zaman said the military “always stood by the people,” and his influential predecessor, General Ikbal Karim Bhuiyan denounced “egregious killings” by Hasina’s police forces and Awami League-aligned militias. Hasina—who had remained defiant up until the very end, calling protesters “terrorists” and “traitors”—was ultimately reported on Monday evening to be fleeing the country, and Waker-uz-Zaman confirmed her resignation in an address to the nation, as the protesters’ indignation turned to celebration.

What happened after Hasina left?

In his televised address on Monday, Waker-Uz-Zaman told the public that the military would ensure a peaceful transition of power and hold accountable those responsible for the killing of student protestors.

Some have described Hasina’s ouster as a “coup.” Bangladesh has faced over 20 coups or coup attempts since it achieved independence in 1971. The country had previously been under the rule of multiple military generals between 1975 and 1990 until a democratic government was reestablished. The military has historically held a significant amount of political power in the country, with the most recent foiled coup attempt occuring in 2012.

​​“Keep faith in the military, we will investigate all the killings and punish the responsible,” Waker-Uz-Zaman said Monday, according to the Associated Press. “I have ordered that no army and police will indulge in any kind of firing.”

Waker-Uz-Zaman also announced restoration of internet services and the lifting of curfews and blockades, and he asked student protestors to cooperate with the interim government. “Now, the students’ duty is to stay calm and help us,” he added.

Shahabuddin also ordered the release of former Prime Minister and opposition leader Khaleda Zia. Zia, who had been convicted of corruption in 2018, was freed from house arrest on Tuesday. The rivalry between Hasina and Zia, the official chair of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the largest opposition party in Bangladesh, has dominated Bangladeshi politics. But at 78 years old, Zia struggles with health issues. Whether or not she takes a prominent role in the country’s new government remains to be seen. Tarique Rahman, Zia’s son and the vice chair of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party who was forced into exile by Hasina’s government, encouraged people to exercise restraint and patience as they wait for a new permanent government to form. “It would defeat the spirit of the revolution that toppled the illegitimate and autocratic regime of Sheikh Hasina if people decide to take the law into their own hands without due process,” he posted on X.

Nahid Islam, a leader of the student protests, said students wouldn’t accept a government led or backed by the military, and he and other student leaders said they’d spoken with Yunus and he’d be willing to lead. After negotiations on Tuesday between the student protest leaders, the President, and military leaders, the President announced that Yunus had been agreed upon to head the transitional government. Yunus is currently in Paris, where he was an advisor to the organizers of the Olympics and is reportedly due to have a “medical procedure,” but Nahid said he was expected to return to Bangladesh “soon.”

Who is Muhammad Yunus?

Born in 1940 in the seaside city of Chittagong, Yunus is a banker and economist by profession. He studied and taught in the U.S. and Bangladesh, where in 1983, as head of the economics department at Chittagong University, he founded Grameen Bank, which pioneered a system of “microlending”—providing small, collateral-free and low-interest loans to people who would otherwise be unable to access credit so that they can start successful businesses to escape poverty.

Yunus, who had earned the nickname “banker to the poor,” and Grameen Bank won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. But his relationship with Hasina, who has since called him a “bloodsucker,” soured when he began to show an interest in politics in 2007. Hasina’s administration began investigating Yunus in 2008, accusing him of using force to recover payments from poor, rural women—an accusation he has denied. In 2011, Yunus was forced out from Grameen Bank, widely believed to be under Hasina’s pressure, though the current managing director of Grameen Bank insists the government played no role in his ouster.

Read More: From ‘Banker to the Poor’ to ‘Bloodsucker’: The Sorry Saga of Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus

More recently, Yunus, who has been a vocal critic of Hasina, has been sentenced and is out on bail for one of more than 100 cases (mostly civil) he faces for alleged corruption, embezzlement, violations of labor laws, and more—charges he maintains are unfounded and politically motivated.

In an interview with TIME earlier this year, when asked what’s behind Hasina’s hellbent crusade against him, Yunus said: “Nobody can really answer; it doesn’t make sense to anyone. But it goes on.”

After Hasina’s ouster, Yunus told the Washington Post: “We’re all rejoicing—the monster who is on top of us has left. Today we are free,” adding that he expected his “fake cases” to be dropped.

As for the future, he also told the Post: “We had an imaginary election in the past. Now we need a real election.”

—With reporting by Charlie Campbell.

Correction, Aug. 7

The original version of this story misspelled the last name of Muhammad Yunus and misstated his age, which is 84 not 87. It also misspelled the name of the student wing of the Awami League, which is the Chhatra League, not the Chatra League. And it misnamed the largest opposition party in Bangladesh, which is the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, not the Bangladesh National Party. |

| 38 | The dramatic resignation of Bangladesh’s long-serving prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her flight to India ironically underscore the close ties between the two countries.

Ms Hasina ruled Bangladesh, a nation of 170 million, for close to 15 years until a protest by students to abolish civil service quotas snowballed into a broader and violent anti-government movement. At least 280 people have died in clashes between police and anti-government protesters so far.

Back in June, Ms Hasina visited India twice in two weeks.

Her first visit was to attend Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's oath-taking ceremony. After that, she made a two-day state visit, the first by a head of government to India after Mr Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition's third consecutive victory in parliamentary elections.

"We have met 10 times in the last one year. However, this meeting is special because Sheikh Hasina is the first state guest after the third term of our government,” Mr Modi said at a joint news conference.

The bonhomie was unmistakable. “Bangladesh greatly values its relations with India,” said Ms Hasina. “Come to Bangladesh to witness what all we have done and plan to do”.

India has a special relationship with Bangladesh. The neighbours share a 4,096km (2,545 miles)-border and linguistic, economic and cultural ties. Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, was born after a war in 1971 with West Pakistan (now Pakistan), with India supporting Bengali nationalists. Bilateral trade between the two countries is around $16bn (£12bn), with India being Bangladesh’s top export destination in Asia.

To be sure, the ties are not perfect: differences arise over Bangladesh’s close relationship with China, border security, migration issues and some Bangladeshi officials' discomfort with Mr Modi’s Hindu nationalist politics.

Getty Images A rickshaw puller is crossing the road when protesters are clashing with police and pro-government supporters after an anti-quota protester is demanding the stepping down of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the Bangla Motor area, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on August 4, 2024.Getty Images

At least 280 people have died as a result of the unrest so far

After Ms Hasina's resignation, Bangladesh's army chief Waker-uz-Zaman has announced plans for an interim government. He will meet President Mohammed Shahabuddin and reports say he's hoping for a solution by the day's end after speaking with opposition parties, led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Leadership of the interim government remains unclear.

So far, India has only described the violent protests as an "internal matter" of Bangladesh. Can it say - and do - more about the unfolding developments?

"NOTHING. Nothing for now," wrote Happymon Jacob, an Indian foreign policy expert, on X (formerly Twitter) on what India should be doing.

"It is still unfolding. And, it's not about India; it's about politics in Bangladesh. Let them figure it out."

Michael Kugelman of the Wilson Center, an American think-tank, believes Ms Hasina's resignation and flight are "close to a worst-case scenario for India, as it has long viewed any alternative to Ms Hasina and her party as a threat to Indian interests".

Mr Kugelman told the BBC that Delhi will likely reach out to Bangladesh's military to convey its concerns and hope its interests are taken into account in an interim government.

"Beyond that, India will have to watch and wait nervously. It may support free and fair elections in the interest of stability, but it doesn’t want the BNP - even if it has grown weak and divided - to return. Delhi likely wouldn’t oppose a long period of interim rule for that reason."

EPA Protesters hold up placards during a 'March for Justice' in front of the Supreme Court area in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 31 July 2024. A nationwide 'March for Justice' was called on 31 July by the Students Against Discrimination group, which has led the quota reform protests, in courts, campuses and on the streets to protest against the 'killings, attacks, and enforced disappearances', and to demand an investigation by the United Nations into the violence that occurred during the student-led protests against the government's job quota system, according to the group's coordinator. Anti-quota protesters call for nationwide 'March for Justice' in Bangladesh, Dhaka - 31 Jul 202EPA

Student protests, which erupted over civil service quotas, have evolved into a broad anti-government movement

Ms Hasina's sudden downfall would have caught her allies off guard.

The daughter of Bangladesh's founding president and the world’s longest-serving female head of government, Ms Hasina led her country for nearly 15 years. She had overseen one of the world's fastest-growing economies and a major boost in living standards in South Asia.

But her rule had also been marked by accusations of forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and repression of the opposition. She and her party Awami League denied these charges, while her government blamed opposition parties for fuelling protests.

In January, Ms Hasina won her fourth consecutive term in a controversial election. The opposition BNP boycotted the vote, and allegations of a rigged poll were compounded by mass arrests of its leaders and supporters.

Some of the anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh stems from India's support for Ms Hasina's government, which critics view as interference in domestic politics. Historical grievances and accusations of overreach also contribute to some of the negative perception.

Ali Riaz, a Bangladeshi-American political scientist at Illinois State University, told the BBC that India's silence is “not surprising as it has been the principal backer of the Hasina government for the past 14 years and practically contributed to the erosion of democracy in Bangladesh".

“The unqualified support to Sheikh Hasina has acted as a bulwark against any pressure on her for human rights transgressions. India has benefitted economically and seen Ms Hasina as the only way to keep the country within India’s sphere of influence.”

AFP Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel, along with the youths, are taking part in a cycle awareness rally at the India-Bangladesh border in Pariyal village near Raiganj, in North Dinajpur district of West Bengal, on May 14, 2024AFP

The two sides share a 4,096km-long international border

India sees the current Bangladeshi opposition and its allies as “dangerous Islamic forces”. Ms Hasina cracked down on anti-India militants on her soil and granted transit rights to secure trade routes to five Indian states which border Bangladesh.

“A peaceful, stable and prosperous Bangladesh is in India’s interests. India should do everything to ensure that those conditions are maintained. Essentially you want to keep peace and calm,” Harsh Vardhan Shringla, a former Indian foreign secretary and high commissioner to Bangladesh, told the BBC, hours before Ms Hasina resigned.

For the moment, the situation is uncertain. "India doesn’t have too many options at this point in time," a senior diplomat told the BBC. "We have to tighten control on our borders. Anything else would be construed as interference". |

| 39 | Bangladeshis are celebrating the resignation of their long-serving prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, after weeks of protests made her leadership untenable.

Ms Hasina had helmed Bangladesh for the past 15 years, facing increasing criticism after the opposition boycotted the most recent elections.

This time, the protests were against a quota system for government jobs in the country, which are highly sought after as one of the only stable means of employment in a jobs crisis.

As protests, initially led by students, engulfed the country's universities and streets in July, Ms Hasina used police and even the army to crack down, with various reports estimating the total death toll to be around 300.

Hasina's residence takeover

People stormed the prime minister's residence and looted items on Monday. (Reuters: Mohammad Ponnir Hossain)

Mobile and internet services were shut off, and social media was taken down as protesters uploaded footage of police brutality and appealed to the international community for help.

Protesters on Monday stormed the prime minister's residence, looting and defacing items, forcing Ms Hasina to flee the country.

SK Labib Hassan is one of the student protesters in Bangladesh who felt the heavy-handedness of the government.

He said government loyalists within a student union abducted him by pretending to be police after he posted against the government online.

During Monday's unrest, just before Ms Hasina fled, he said the police turned abruptly violent.

"It was a peaceful protest, then suddenly they started shooting. I was shot in the leg. Many were seriously injured, and two were killed," he said.

"They were shooting at us for no reason. When they ran out of supplies, they'd go away and come back with more," Mr Hassan said.

A mural of Sheikh Hasina stands defaced.

A mural of Sheikh Hasina stands defaced as people celebrate her resignation in Dhaka. (Reuters: Mohammad Ponir Hossain)

For him, as for many in the country, Ms Hasina's resignation comes as a hard-fought victory.

Diaspora celebrates

Ridwan Quaium moved to New South Wales from Bangladesh in 2016, but most of his family and in-laws are back in Bangladesh.

He said he was worried about his friends and loved ones when the government brought in the army to quell protests.

For him, Ms Hasina's eventual resignation was welcome.

"What a relief. My chest was getting heavier and heavier," he told the ABC.

"Victory has come at a cost," he said.

"But all the lives and blood that have been lost in the last three weeks did not go in vain after all."

Sayida Khan lives in Melbourne now, but has a lot of friends and family in Bangladesh.

For her too, the news was a ray of hope.

"What we were seeing and hearing broke our hearts. My uncle was a freedom fighter, my father was a freedom fighter, and they are happy too," she said.

"So this [the resignation] is like our Christmas, our Eid," she said.

What is behind Bangladesh's deadly protests?

Photo shows A protester holds a placard reading 'stop killing students'A protester holds a placard reading 'stop killing students'

Here's what has caused mass death, 2,500 arrests and a country of 171 million people to go without internet for almost a week.

Shabbir Ahmed, also in Melbourne, was overcome with emotion when he heard.

"I cried when I heard the news, I was so emotional with the relief, after 15 years of dictatorship," he said.

Mr Quaium, however, did credit the Hasina government with controlling domestic terrorism and restoring the country's secular image during her rule.

But he said along the way, something went wrong.

"Things started to take a turn. Corruption, abduction, extrajudicial killing, rigging elections … these became the norm," he said.

On Monday, Ms Hasina fled to India, leaving a power vacuum that the army sought to fill.

Bangladesh's military chief, General Waker-uz-Zamam, said he was temporarily taking control of the country, and soldiers tried to stem the growing unrest.

The country's figurehead president, Mohammed Shahabuddin, announced late on Monday that parliament would be dissolved and a national government would be formed as soon as possible, leading to fresh elections.

But the country has a long history of coups and military interventions in government.

Fifty years of coups

Ever since Bangladesh declared independence in 1971, the country has been plagued by government coups and bloody military interventions.

The country's first prime minister, Ms Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was assassinated in 1975.

So too was his official successor, Muhammad Mansoor Ali, six years later.

In the years that followed, Bangladesh went through a revolving door of martial law, coups spearheaded by the army or small factions within it, caretaker governments, and anti-government protests.

Protesters in Dhaka vandalise a statue of Sheikh Hasina's father.

Protesters climb and deface the statue of Sheikh Hasina's father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a former prime minister. (Reuters: Mohammad Ponir Hossain)

Ms Hasina took power in 2009, and although she went on to become the longest-serving female leader in the world, her tenure was rife with turbulence.

Professor Bina D'Costa, a UN expert from the Australian National University's department of international relations, said Ms Hasina's sudden removal was in step with the country's historical "precedent" for political tumult.

She attributed the longevity of Ms Hasina's run to a changed legal and political system under her leadership that restrained military intervention and thwarted bureaucratic push-back.

"Although in private, people have expressed their disappointment and their frustration, we haven't seen any visible dissent from the bureaucracy this time," Dr D'Costa said, adding that would likely impact the trajectory of the country going forward.

The death toll of the recent protests was much higher than years past and, Dr D'Costa said, had garnered significantly less international support, but she believed their coordination proved effective.

"Protest movements learn how to engage more strategically," Dr D'Costa said, noting that many of the students involved in the 2015 education protests and in the 2018 road safety activism were now in positions of leadership in these protests.

So what happens next?

The country is currently in a state of limbo while it awaits the appointment of a caretaker government.

Parliament was dissolved on Tuesday, according to the press secretary of President Mohammed Shahabuddin in a statement.

The prime minister's residence stands trashed as protesters enter and look for items to loot.

The prime minister's residence was trashed as people looked for items to loot. (Reuters: Mohammad Ponir Hossain)

As negotiations for a potential chief advisor are underway, Bangladesh has entered into what Dr D'Costa called a typical state of post-victory lawlessness.

"We've seen it in Sri Lanka, we've seen it in Afghanistan — looting and arson and chaos after the euphoria which indicates a system change," she said.

While the army has taken a strict line on this, and student leaders and religious institutions have stepped in to assist with stability, Dr D'Costa, who lived in Bangladesh through countless regime changes, said the aftermath of any political struggle was always the most dangerous time for the country.

"Who is going to be part of it and who is going to be excluded?" she said.

"This is where you will see disunity and fragmentation and anger coming up with people who think they're being let down by one kind of solution or the other," Dr D'Costa said.

Niaz Asadullah is a professorial fellow at North South University, Bangladesh.

He said the government overestimated the loyalty they had and that led to its demise.

How Bangladesh's 'Iron Lady' was toppled

Photo shows A woman in a veil walks past armed men carrying bayonetsA woman in a veil walks past armed men carrying bayonets

As she flew to neighbouring India, thousands of protesters stormed Sheikh Hasina's official residence, some lying on a bed, another munching on chicken leg pieces and others trying on her clothes.

Professor Asadullah said they depended on the police, party cadres, and the army to suppress student protests and underestimated the backlash to the mass killings.

He also labelled the army chief's response "disappointing" and said there is a "genuine risk of a severe breakdown in law and order".

Professor Asadullah said that ongoing unrest in the post-conflict phase posed significant dangers to Bangladesh's civil society, including grounds for the military to step in and take the country back into authoritarian rule.

"If unchecked, post-transition chaos and violence could lead Bangladesh into another Arab Winter," he said.

What do the people want?

Mr Hassan does not believe the army will take over, but is still cautious.

"The army hasn't taken any interest in keeping power, but we never know what will happen next as [General Waker-Uz-Zaman] is a relative of Sheikh Hasina," he said.

"I don't want any of the past political parties in power as all of them are full with corruption. I want someone who will understand the youths and can bring their full potential," Mr Hassan said.

Mr Quaium said Ms Hasina's resignation brought hope.

"I'm eagerly waiting for a new, prosperous, reformed Bangladesh where people can vote freely, get a fair chance at jobs, and enjoy a decent standard of living," Mr Quaium said.

"People in Bangladesh are now fed up with the major political parties including the Awami League, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Jamaat," he said.

The BNP is the country's main opposition party against the ruling Awami League, while Jamaat is the largest Islamist party.

BNP's ex-prime minister Khaleda Zia has since been released after years of house arrest, her party said on Tuesday.

"She is now freed", BNP party spokesman, A.K.M Wahiduzzaman, told AFP.

Meanwhile, Mr Quaium said he and others were awaiting change.

"I'm looking forward to supporting a new party with fresh ideas and ambitions that promises to truly support democracy, and that supports the youth," he said. |

| 40 | DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — A month ago, a student-led movement ousted Bangladesh’s prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, after weeks of protests and clashes that killed over 600 people and pushed the country to the brink of chaos.

What began as student protests over government jobs became a large-scale revolt against the country’s longest-serving prime minister.

Hasina, 76, fled to India on Aug. 5 as anger against her government swelled. But the ouster triggered more violence. Police went on strike and mobs rampaged across the country until a new interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus was sworn in.

Here is where things stand now, a month after the country was roiled by its worst bloodshed in decades:

What is the interim government focused on?

Since he was sworn in, Yunus declared that his key tasks would be to restore peace and law and order, fight corruption, and prepare for new elections.

His Cabinet, which includes two student leaders who spearheaded the protests, has fixed its sights on overhauling and reforming Bangladesh’s institutions, from its courts and police to the Election Commission. To do this, it’s also seeking support from the United Nations Development Program.

RELATED COVERAGE

Image

Rallies in Bangladesh mark one month since ex-premier Sheikh Hasina was ousted

Image

Shanto believes historic cricket triumph in Pakistan will bring smiles in Bangladesh

Image

UAE leader pardons 57 Bangladeshis imprisoned for rallying in the Arab nation over turmoil back home

Reforms have been a key priority as demonstrations against Hasina quickly escalated into anger against her increasingly autocratic rule. Her government had jailed opposition members, curbed independent media and curtailed civil society.

Protesters also accused Hasina’s Awami League of corruption and said that public institutions, including the Election Commission, had been eroded under her 15-year rule.

What Yunus needs is time.

The 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate who pioneered microcredit to help impoverished people, especially women, asked for patience in an address to the nation. He said his Cabinet has worked hard to curb the violence and lawlessness that set in after Hasina was ousted.

“I request everyone to be patient,” he said. “It is one of our objectives that public institutions regain public trust.”

What is the mood in Bangladesh?

Unrest persists. Garment workers demanding better wages have forced about 100 factories to shut down and tensions are simmering, with lingering but widespread anger against Hasina and her Awami League.

Hasina, now in self-imposed exile, is facing murder charges in more than 100 cases. Key officials perceived as close to her resigned after mass protests.

Many cases have also been registered against those associated with Hasina, her party or her government — from former ministers and judges to journalists and even a prominent cricket player. They’ve been attacked, stopped from leaving the country and even jailed. Rights groups have also condemned these lump charges.

Most of the cases are legally weak and politically driven, said Zillur Rahman, executive director of the Center for Governance Studies, a Dhaka-based think tank.

This form of “vigilante justice” has sparked fears that “the system that Hasina perpetuated is still alive, just the victims have changed,” Rahman said.

What about the students?

Within a week of unseating Hasina, the students who drove her out were directing traffic in the capital, Dhaka.

Some schools and universities have since reopened, including Dhaka University, which became the epicenter for the protests against Hasina. But things are not back to normal yet.

Many heads of educational institutions have been forced to resign and in some cases, even though classes have formally restarted, few students are attending them.

Still, many students remain optimistic about the interim government’s potential to bring about real change.

Sneha Akter, a student at Dhaka University, believes the removal of those who were previously in power is the first step.

“By replacing them, we are correcting past mistakes,” she said. “It is not possible to change the entire country in one month. … We need to give the government some time.”

There are those who say the Yunus-led temporary government should remain in power until meaningful reforms are enacted, “whether that takes three months, three years or even six years,” said Hafizur Rahman, another Dhaka University student.

What’s next?

There is a sense that normalcy is slowly returning — Dhaka’s streets are no longer a battleground between security forces and students. Internet is back on and a nationwide curfew with a shoot-on-sight order has been lifted.

With much of the violence eased, there is hope for a new chapter. Shops, banks, hotels and restaurants are open, and police — who went on strike over fears for their own safety — are back at work.

However, their morale is low. Officers are less visible on the streets and seemingly unwilling to tackle disturbances as their crackdown against the students remains fresh in the minds of many Bangladeshis.

Dozens of police were killed during the uprising, their stations torched and looted.

Another challenge is restoring the economy, which was disrupted by the weekslong shutdown during the uprising, sending prices of food and commodities soaring.

The biggest question is: When will the new elections be held?

Some experts say the interim government doesn’t have the mandate to enact major reforms and that it should focus on building consensus among political parties on reforms — and schedule the polls.

Hasina’s Awami League has remained under the radar so far.

Yunus is banking on the support he enjoys among the country’s youth, but Michael Kugelman, director of the Wilson Center’s South Asia Institute, says that support may have an expiration date.

“If security continues to be a problem and economic relief is slow to come … young people could grow impatient and anxious,” Kugelman said.

Hasina’s chief opposition — the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or BNP — is seen as having the greatest chance of winning the polls and has been pushing for the elections to happen soon.

“That raises an unsettling question: What happens if the BNP, which has no formal role in the interim government, doesn’t get the elections it wants to see soon?” Kugelman said. “Will it launch a movement? Will it trigger unrest?”

“That could pose new risks to law and order and deepen political uncertainty and volatility,” he said. |

| 41 | Police and security officials in Bangladesh fired bullets and tear gas at protesters and banned all gatherings in the capital on Friday, as internet and mobile services were cut off after days of deadly clashes over the allocation of government jobs.

The protests, which began weeks ago but escalated sharply on Monday, represent the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina since she won a fourth consecutive term in a January election that was boycotted by the main opposition parties.

Somoy TR, a local television channel, reported that four more people died in the latest clashes.

This comes a day after the bloodiest day of demonstrations to date when 22 people were killed, according to local media, as protesting students attempted to impose a “complete shutdown” on the country.

Authorities could not be reached immediately to confirm figures for the deaths.

The chaos has highlighted cracks in Bangladesh’s governance and economy and the frustration of young graduates who face a lack of good jobs.

An Associated Press reporter saw border guard officials fire at a crowd of more than 1,000 protesters who had gathered outside the head office of state-run Bangladesh Television, which was attacked and set on fire by protesters the previous day.

Bangladeshi students set fire to the country's state broadcaster on July 18, a day after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appeared on the network seeking to calm escalating clashes that have killed at least 32 people.

Smoke rises from burning vehicles after protesters set them on fire near the Disaster Management Directorate office in Dhaka, Bangladesh on July 18, 2024. AFP via Getty Images

The border guards shot at the right crowd with rifles and sound grenades, while police officers fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Bullets littered the streets, which were also marked by smears of blood.

A news producer and reporter at Bangladesh Television on Thursday told the Associated Press that protesters had broken through the main gate and set fire to vehicles and the reception area. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

“I escaped by leaping over the wall but some of my colleagues got stuck inside. The attackers entered the building and set furniture on fire,” the producer said by phone.

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Guns in America

Two students, two teachers killed at Apalachee High School, 14-year-old in custody

At least 22 people were killed on Thursday, a local TV station reported, following six deaths earlier this week. Authorities could not be reached to immediately confirm figures for the deaths.

On Friday morning, internet services and mobile data appeared to be down in the capital, Dhaka, and social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were not loading.

A statement from the country’s Telecommunication Regulatory Commission said they were unable to ensure service after their data center was attacked Thursday by demonstrators, who set fire to some equipment. The Associated Press has not been able to independently verify this.

Student protesters said they will extend their calls to impose a shutdown on Friday as well, and urged mosques across the country to hold funeral prayers for those who have been killed.

Bangladesh students vowed on July 18 to continue nationwide protests against civil service hiring rules, rebuffing an olive branch from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who pledged justice for seven killed in the demonstrations.

Anti-quota protesters beat a policeman with sticks during clashes in Dhaka on Thursday.Munir Uz Zaman / AFP via Getty Images

The protesters are demanding an end to a quota system that reserves up to 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh’s war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan.

They argue the system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, and they want it replaced with a merit-based system.

But Hasina has defended the quota system, saying that veterans deserve the highest respect for their contributions in the war regardless of their political affiliation.

The Bangladeshi leader is credited for bringing stable growth to Bangladesh, but rising inflation — thanks in part to the global upheaval sparked by the war in Ukraine — has triggered labor unrest and dissatisfaction with the government.

Even though job opportunities have grown in some parts of the private sector, many people prefer government jobs because they are seen as more stable and lucrative. But there aren’t enough to go around — each year, some 400,000 graduates compete for around 3,000 jobs in the civil service exam.

“What is unfolding in Bangladesh is deeply unsettling for a generation that only asked for a fair opportunity in public service recruitment. That a peaceful protest against a state policy would slip into the peak of lawlessness shows the government’s lack of farsightedness and inefficient policy governance,” said Saad Hammadi, policy and advocacy manager at the Canada-based Balsillie School of International Affairs who has advocated for freedom of speech in the country.

“The internet shutdown makes matters worse. Local news sites are inaccessible, and people in the country are left incommunicado with the rest of the world all in the pretext of conducting sweeping operations by the state that have often resulted in serious human rights violations,” he added in an email.

Protest In Dhaka, Bangladesh

A scorched vehicle lies on its side in Dhaka after heated protests on Thursday.Mamunur Rashid / NurPhoto via Getty Images

Bangladesh has previously shut down internet services in areas affected by protests, using it as a measure to suppress dissent by opposition parties, according to Access Now, an internet watchdog.

CIVICUS, a nonprofit that tracks civic freedoms around the world, last year downgraded Bangladesh to “closed,” the worst rating that it could assign, along with China and Venezuela, following a crackdown on the country’s opposition members and supporters ahead of its national election.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has backed the protesting students and is expected to hold demonstrations to show their support. Hasina’s party has accused them of stoking the violence, raiding the BNP’s headquarters and arresting activists from the party’s student wing earlier this week.

The Awami League and the BNP have often accused each other of fueling political chaos and violence, most recently ahead of the country’s national election, which was marred by a crackdown on several opposition figures while Hasina’s government accused the party of attempting to disrupt the vote.

Hasina’s government had earlier halted the job quotas following mass student protests in 2018, but last month, Bangladesh’s High Court nullified that decision and reinstated the quotas after relatives of the 1971 veterans filed petitions, triggering the latest demonstrations.

The Supreme Court has suspended that ruling pending an appeal hearing, and said in a statement it will take up the issue on Sunday.

On Wednesday, Hasina urged protesters in a televised address to “wait with patience” for the court verdict. “I believe our students will get justice from the apex court. They will not be disappointed.” |

| 42 | DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — What began as peaceful protests by students in Bangladesh against a quota system for government jobs eventually turned into an uprising that forced Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign and flee the country by helicopter.

Now, opposition leaders and the country’s military are talking about appointing an interim government that is expected to organize new elections in what critics of Hasina say is a restoration of democracy.

The end to Hasina’s 15 years in power came after weeks of violent unrest during which nearly 300 people died, according to local media reports.

The government repeatedly tried to quell demonstrations they blamed on sabotage and opposition parties with bullets, curfews and internet outages, but these heavy-handed moves backfired, fueling outrage and further protests.

On Monday, protesters defied a military curfew to march into the capital’s center, following a weekend of violence left dozens of people dead. As troops pulled back and internet access was restored, tens of thousands of people began to celebrate in the streets, and thousands stormed the leader’s official residence.

Here’s what we know:

Who will lead the next government?

Image

Protesters celebrate beside a defaced portrait of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after news of her resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Monday, Aug. 5, 2024. (AP Photo/Fatima Tuj Johora)

Shortly after Hasina resigned, the country’s military chief said the army would seek the figurehead president’s guidance to appoint an interim government.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin announced late Monday after meeting with Gen. Waker-uz-Zamam and opposition politicians that Parliament would be dissolved as soon as possible, leading to fresh elections.

The next day, a key student leader said that the movement wanted Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus to head the interim government.

Nahid Islam said in a video posted on social media that student protest leaders had already talked with Yunus, who consented to take over considering the present situation of the country.

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AP PHOTOS: Bangladesh protesters erupt in joy and anger as longtime prime minister steps down

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Sheikh Hasina came back from tragedy to lead Bangladesh — until protests forced her to flee

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Nobel laureate Yunus will head Bangladesh’s interim government after unrest ousted Hasina

Yunus faced a number of corruption accusations and was put on trial during Hasina’s rule. He received the Nobel in 2006 after he pioneered microlending, and he said the corruption charges against him were motivated by vengeance.

Gen. Waker-uz-Zaman also promised to launch an investigation into the deadly crackdowns that fueled outrage against the government.

“Keep faith in the military, we will investigate all the killings and punish the responsible,” he said. “I have ordered that no army and police will indulge in any kind of firing.”

He asked for patience as a new government is formed.

“Now, the students’ duty is to stay calm and help us,” he added.

Image

Protesters celebrate after news of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Monday, Aug. 5, 2024. (AP Photo/Fatima Tuj Johora)

Image

Protesters celebrate at the Parliament House premise after news of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Monday, Aug. 5, 2024. (AP Photo/Fatima Tuj Johora)

Image

Protesters celebrate beside a defaced portrait of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after news of her resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Monday, Aug. 5, 2024. (AP Photo/Fatima Tuj Johora)

Image

Protesters shout slogans as they celebrate after getting the news of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Monday, Aug. 5, 2024. (AP Photo/Rajib Dhar)

How did the protests start?

The protests, which have drawn hundreds of thousands, began in July with students demonstrating against a controversial quota system that allocated government jobs.

It turned violent on July 15 as student protesters clashed with security officials and pro-government activists, prompting authorities to disperse tear gas, fire rubber bullets and to close schools and impose a curfew with a shoot-on-sight order. The internet and mobile data were also turned off.

The government says nearly 150 people died last month, while local media have reported that more than 200 were killed.

Why were they protesting?

At first, the demonstrations were against a quota system that set aside up to 30% of government jobs for family members of veterans who fought in Bangladesh’s 1971 war of independence against Pakistan.

Protesters said the system was discriminatory and benefited supporters of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League party, which led the independence movement.

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| 43 | Bangladesh’s embattled prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, fled the country on Aug. 5, 2024, after weeks of protests that have resulted in scores of deaths.

Her departure is a landmark moment, but one that has left the South Asian nation facing a power vacuum into which the army – for the time being, at least – has stepped.

To understand what led to the crisis and what could happen next, The Conversation turned to Tazreena Sajjad, an expert on Bangladeshi politics at American University’s School of International Service.

What sparked the demonstrations in Bangladesh?

The protests stem from long-running resentment over a quota system that saw 56% of government positions in Bangladesh reserved for various groups, including 30% for the descendants of freedom fighters who fought in the 1971 War of Independence.

This quota system has proved an enormous barrier to highly coveted civil service positions for the country’s large youth population, many of whom are unemployed.

It had also become a subject of controversy due to how many of those quota jobs went to supporters of the ruling Awami League party.

Under immense pressure from an earlier student mobilization over the issue, Hasina abolished the entire quota system in 2018.

But in June 2024, the country’s high court ruled that move illegal, sparking a fresh round of protests across the country.

Then, in July, Bangladesh’s public universities saw a series of walkouts by faculty and students over new pension reforms that, if implemented, would involve salary deductions.

Initially, the protests were peaceful, but an incendiary speech by Hasina – in which she suggested that the students were “rajakaar,” a term used to identify pro-Pakistan collaborators during Bangladesh’s War of Independence – inflamed tensions.

The Bangladesh Chhatra League – the armed wing of the Awami League – began attacking students with tear gas and live bullets, with support from the police. The Rapid Action Battalion, a controversial paramilitary group with a history of extrajudicial killings, torture and enforced disappearances, was also deployed.

After a video of one of the first to be killed – a university student named Abu Sayeed – circulated online, more joined the protests, leading to a further violent crackdown by police and armed groups.

It is estimated that about 266 people, mostly students, were killed in the protests, including at least 32 children.

The government closed schools and universities, imposed a curfew and cut internet and telecommunications. Meanwhile, student leaders were arrested and coerced to withdraw their list of demands.

But this only led to the declaration of a total noncooperation movement and a massive uprising of protesters demanding Hasina’s immediate resignation.

As thousands of protesters gathered for a long march to Dhaka in defiance of the curfew, the prime minister resigned and left the country.

Is there a wider context to the political unrest?

Absolutely. While attention has focused largely on the quota protests, a litany of grievances had piled up against the government.

Under Hasina’s rule, Bangladesh has seen GDP growth – but this has not translated into economic well-being for many Bangladeshis. Lack of opportunities, high unemployment rates among youth and soaring inflation have been ongoing sources of tension.

Meanwhile, despite the Awami League espousing a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption, money laundering, bribery and nepotism scandals have dogged government ministers.

And since its landslide victory in 2008, the Awami League has eroded the country’s democracy. For example, in 2011 the government ended an arrangement that allowed a 90-day caretaker administration, consisting of technocrats, to organize elections and oversee transfers of power.

Suppression of dissent has also grown. The harassment and detention of activists, opposition figures and human rights defenders have become more frequent. Meanwhile, there has been criminalization of any criticism of the government, including satire and social media posts.

Why is the 1971 war still relevant to Bangladeshi politics?

The War of Independence remains central to Bangladesh’s identity and its politics.

Its seeds were sown decades earlier in the 1947 British partition of the Indian subcontinent. This resulted in the violent division of the state of Bengal, with the eastern part becoming East Pakistan.

After partition, West Pakistan tried to maintain political and economic dominance over East Pakistan, while at the same time attempting to cultivate a singular national identity – based on their common Muslim majority populations – despite separate cultures and linguistic heritages.

Policies to marginalize Bengali – the vernacular of 56% of then East Pakistanis – and “purify” East Pakistan from Hindu influence contributed to a backlash that saw widespread student protests and growing calls for independence.

In 1971, a West Pakistani military incursion aimed at snuffing out pro-independence sentiments resulted in a genocidal war with East Pakistan that lasted nine months and resulted in the deaths of 500,000 to 3 million Bangladeshis.

The circumstances of that war have shaped Bangladesh’s politics ever since. The parties that have dominated the country’s politics, including Hasina’s Awami League, frequently politicized their War of Independence credentials. Political leaders have also used 1971 as a means of legitimizing positions, shoring up support, or delegitimizing opposition parties.

Does Hasina’s exit mark the end of Bangladesh’s political dynasties?

The resignation of Hasina signals – at least for the time being – the end of Awami League rule in Bangladesh.

Countries in South Asia, including Bangladesh, have largely been shaped by political dynasties. So the rejection of the Awami League, and the fact that many are also rejecting other established political parties – the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamaat-i-Islami and the Jatiya Party – is extraordinary.

These established parties will no doubt try to regroup. While the Awami League may not be able to effectively organize in the near future given public sentiment, the others will make a concerted effort to participate in the promised forthcoming elections.

For the moment, there may be an opportunity for Bangladesh to have fresh voices and faces in politics, potentially emerging from the student movement.

What should we make of the military taking interim control?

Since Bangladesh’s independence, the army has played a huge role in shaping the political trajectory of the country.

From 1975 to 2011, Bangladesh experienced at least 29 military coups and counter-coups. It also experienced direct military rule from 1977 to 1981 and between 1981 and 1990.

Given the army’s frequent incursion into Bangladesh politics, it is not surprising that it has taken interim control of the country now.

For many Bangladeshis, this may represent some level of stability, given the political vacuum that has opened up and the uncertainty of the moment.

Student leaders, however, have made it clear they do not want military involvement in politics. Seemingly heeding this call, General Waker-uz-Zaman, the army chief of staff, has assured protesters that the army would meet their demands.

But it remains to be seen whether the military will keep its promises and hand over full authority to a civilian interim administration.

What could happen next?

It is too early to speculate what the future holds for Bangladesh – the situation is extremely fluid and unfolding by the minute.

The abrupt departure of Hasina has been a cause of relief and celebration among the millions of protesters who helped bring about an end to her rule.

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| 44 | 5 Key Reasons Behind Bangladesh Protest

In the latest development in Bangladesh protest, army of bangladesh has asked Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin to form interim government. PM Hasina has resigned and left the country. The student protests against the government stem from several key issues. Check the 5 main reasons in this article.

Vidhee Tripathi

By Vidhee Tripathi

Aug 6, 2024, 17:40 IST

Bangladesh Army chief Waker-Uz-Zaman announced plans to set up an interim government after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned.

Bangladesh Army chief Waker-Uz-Zaman announced plans to set up an interim government after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned.

What began as peaceful student protests in Bangladesh over a government job quota system turned violent this weekend. It has turned into a major challenge against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League party.

As per the local media, PM Hasina has already resigned from her post and has left the country in an army helicopter along with her sister after protesters announced a march to the capital, Dhaka, following a weekend of violence with many deaths. The military of the country has imposed an indefinite curfew and authorities have cut off internet access to control the unrest.

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Latest Developments in Bangladesh

Sheikh Hasina is currently in India. She will remain here till she gets a ppasage for political asylum in a third country. According to media sources Hasina is seeking asylum in United Kingdom.

Check the pointers below to know what is happening in Bangladesh Protest:

Mass Protests and Casualties:

At least 300 people have died in protests that began a month ago over the civil service job quota system favoring children of war veterans.

Supreme Court's Response:

The Supreme Court of Bangladesh finally scaled back the 30% reservation for descendants of freedom fighters to 5%, in order to subdue the protest, but it seemed not to be enough for the protesters to stop their violent protest.

Demands and Political Changes:

Protesters demanded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation. She stepped down and fled to Agartala, India, ending her 15-year rule.

Military's Role:

Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman announced the formation of an interim government and asked the president’s guidance for interim governance, till elections are conducted.

Escalation in Protests:

Protestors stormed the prime minister's residence, Ganabhaban, and set fire to a vehicle inside. They also stormed Parliament, looted furniture, and attacked buildings associated with Hasina's party and family.

Why are Students Protesting in Bangladesh?

Since the 1971 Liberation War, Bangladesh has set aside 30% of civil service and public sector jobs for the descendants of those who fought for independence from Pakistan.

This quota system was introduced in 1972 by Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sheikh Hasina's father. Students started a protest against the quota system in October 2018, forcing the Bangladesh government under Sheikh Haseena to abolish all quotas.

However, the High Court of Bangladesh overturned that decision in June 2024 and reinstated the quota system again after petitions from relatives of 1971 veterans. This meant that 56% of government jobs were reserved for specific groups, including children and grandchildren of freedom fighters, women, and people from disadvantaged areas. This sparked the recent protests, with students questioning why benefits were being extended to the third generation of freedom fighters and demanding a merit-based recruitment system.

Last month, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh reduced the controversial quota system for government job applicants. The court ruled that 93% of government jobs should be allocated based on merit, with only 7% reserved for the relatives of 1971 war veterans and other categories. Previously, 30% of such jobs were reserved for war veterans' relatives.

5 Key Reasons Behind Bangladesh Protest:

Check the key reasons that made the students of Bangladesh resort to violence:

30% quota system for civil service jobs for the descendants of the veterans of the Bangladesh freedom fight.

High Court’s decision to overturn Bangladesh government’s decision of abolishing the quota system.

High rate of unemployment in the nation has been acting as fuel to this protest. Nearly 32 million young people are out of work or education in a country with a population of 170 million.

Death of nearly 100 civilians during the clash between the students and the police.

Sheikh Hasina's comment on the protesters calling them 'Razakars,' a term used for collaborators with the Pakistani army during the 1971 War of Independence.

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What Happened When in Bangladesh Protest: Timeline

1972: Quota system introduced by Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, reserving 30% of jobs for descendants of freedom fighters.

October 2018: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina agrees to abolish all job reservations following student protests.

June 2024: High Court reinstates quotas, reserving 56% of jobs for specific groups, sparking new protests on student’s end.

July 2024: Supreme Court scales back the quota system, allocating 93% of government jobs based on merit and 7% for the relatives of 1971 war veterans and other categories.

August 05, 2024: Sheikh Haseena resigned from the post and fled the country.

August 05, 2024: Bangladesh army announces the formation of an interim government in the country.

August 06, 2024: Bangladesh Army Chief asks President to form interim government.

Will Army Rule Bangladesh?

The current chief of the army of Bangladesh has shown a supportive stance towards the students protesting against the system.

Bangladesh Army chief Waker-Uz-Zaman announced plans to set up an interim government after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned.

In his speech to the nation, the army chief urged for peace and promised that all deaths related to the current unrest would be investigated and those responsible would be punished. He assured the public that the military is dedicated to restoring order and finding a resolution by tonight.

"Trust the military. We will investigate all the killings and punish those responsible," he said. "I have ordered that no army or police personnel will engage in any kind of shooting."

He also urged students to remain calm and support the military's efforts.

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| 45 | The evening sky hung low over Dhaka, heavy with the weight of impending change. The city was cloaked in a sombre mood, the kind that precedes a storm. It was the final evening of now former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s 15-year reign, a regime marked by escalating oppression. The air was thick with tension. At Dhaka’s Mirpur-10 roundabout area, an elevated metro station in the national capital, a massive crowd had gathered, their thousands of voices united in a single cry for freedom.

Among them stood Ikramul Haque Shazid, an accounting student from Dhaka’s government-run Jagannath University. His face was set with determination, his heart beating in rhythm with the chants that echoed through the streets.

Read all the stories from Outlook's 1 September 2024 magazine issue 'Power, Blindfolded' here

The atmosphere was electric, charged with both hope and fear. As the crowd surged forward, their voices rose higher, challenging the regime. Then, a sharp crack pierced the evening air—a bullet fired into the throng. The world seemed to slow down as Shazid was struck. The bullet entered the back of his head, tore through his brain and exited through his eye. In an instant, the energy of the protest shifted from defiance to panic. Shazid crumpled to the ground, his blood mingling with the dust, as his life ebbed away and fellow protesters looked on in horror.

Artwork by Debashish Chakrabaty - null

In Bangladesh, Will The August Of Liberation Last?

BY Snigdhendu Bhattacharya

The chaos that followed was a blur—friends lifting Shazid’s limp body, a frantic rush to the hospital, blood-soaked hands and desperate prayers. In the harsh glare of the emergency room, faces were etched with worry. The doctors’ expressions were grim. The injuries were catastrophic and there was nothing more they could do. Shazid’s life hung by a thread and all that remained was the agonising wait.

The rapid infrastructure development and economic growth of Sheikh Hasina’s tenure, which had lifted millions out of poverty, were overshadowed by accusations of rampant corruption.

Meanwhile, across the nation, protests continued to intensify. The mounting pressure eventually forced Sheikh Hasina to concede. In the early hours of the following day, she fled the country, marking the end of her era. However, for Shazid, the victory was bittersweet since he was unconscious for ten days and suffering from brain damage. He passed away ten days later, on Wednesday, leaving his family devastated—not only by the loss of their loved one but also by the loss of their hope and support.

In Narayanganj, the sixth largest city in Bangladesh, another life was claimed in the same struggle. Abul Hasan Shojon, a 25-year-old private sector worker, joined the protests in face of the dangers involved. During a violent clash on August 5, ruling party activists shot him. As he fought for his life in a hospital bed, he learned that Sheikh Hasina had fled. With his last breath, he managed a smile and whispered, “Alhamdulillah.” He died the next day, leaving behind a world that had changed and a life that had ended too soon.

The stories of Shazid and Shojon mirror the broader struggle of a nation. The mood in Dhaka has shifted since those dark days. The streets, once filled with the sounds of protest and cries of the wounded, are quieter now, but echoes remain. The city breathes differently—there’s a sense of relief, hope and deep sorrow. The memory of those who fell in the fight for freedom lingers, a poignant reminder of the cost of change. Bangladesh has entered a new era, but the scars of the past remain etched into the fabric of the nation’s consciousness.

Over the past month-and-a-half, Dhaka transformed from a bustling metropolis into a battleground, where the fight for freedom and justice played out in vivid and harrowing scenes. The city’s streets, once filled with the everyday hum of life, became the epicentre of a fierce struggle marked by extraordinary acts of resistance, profound loss and ultimately, a collective outpouring of celebration.

Narendra Modi with Sheikh Hasina in New Delhi on June 22, 2024 - Photo: AP

Multiple Tests Ahead For India's 'Strategic Patience' On Bangladesh

BY Seema Guha

The protests began in June 2024, starting as a small wave of discontent that quickly swelled into a nationwide mass uprising, shaking the very foundations of Sheikh Hasina’s regime. Initially, the atmosphere was a tense mix of fear and hope, with students gathering on university campuses to voice their concerns over the Supreme Court’s decision to reinstate a 56 per cent quota in civil service jobs. This decision reversed the government’s earlier reforms from 2018 and while the early protests were focused, they carried the weight of deep-seated frustrations.

In those initial days, the mood was one of cautious optimism. As night fell, protesters lit candles, their flickering flames casting a warm, hopeful glow over determined faces. The air was filled with the soft murmur of prayers and the steady rhythm of resistance chants, creating a poignant contrast between the peace they sought and the defiance they displayed.

The scars of the protests were visible throughout DHAKA—on the buildings, ON the people—but there was also a newfound energy and determination to shape a better future.

But this fragile hope was soon shattered. On July 15, the movement took a dark turn when the members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)—a pro-government student body founded by the country’s first president, the late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—armed with rods, sticks and revolvers, attacked students at Dhaka University. What had begun as a peaceful protest descended into chaos. The violence spread rapidly across the country, turning city streets into battlegrounds. The once-peaceful gatherings were now marked by the acrid smell of tear gas, the deafening crack of gunfire and the sight of protesters fleeing from charging police.

The following day, July 16, brought one of the most tragic and symbolic moments of the uprising. In Rangpur, at Begum Rokeya University, the police escalated their crackdown, firing tear gas and unleashing batons on crowds of students. Amid the chaos, protest coordinator Abu Sayed stood his ground, arms spread wide in a gesture of defiance. His bravery was met with brutality—police officers, positioned just 15 metres away, fired directly at him, killing him instantly. The video of his death spread like wildfire, becoming a powerful symbol of the state’s ruthlessness and igniting widespread outrage.

By July 18, the death toll had reached 48 and the violence showed no signs of abating. The government’s proposal for dialogue was rejected, as protesters, now mourning their dead, refused to negotiate under such dire circumstances. On July 19, the conflict reached a new peak with 86 protesters killed in a single day, marking the bloodiest chapter of the uprising. The streets, once filled with chants of hope, were now soaked in blood and the air hung heavy with grief and anger.

Even as the top court abolished most of the quotas on July 21, unrest continued to grow. What had begun as a student-led protest against specific grievances had now morphed into a broader movement fuelled by anger over government corruption and the regime’s heavy-handed response. The rapid infrastructure development and economic growth of Sheikh Hasina’s tenure, which had lifted millions out of poverty, were overshadowed by accusations of rampant corruption, particularly benefiting those close to her party, the Awami League. The public’s perception of this unchecked corruption only deepened their resolve to continue the fight.

In a desperate attempt to maintain control, Sheikh Hasina imposed a nationwide curfew, cut off internet access and labelled the protesters as “terrorists” bent on destabilising the nation. Yet, these measures did little to stem the tide of civil disobedience and the violence only escalated. Between July 16 and August 5—the day Sheikh Hasina ultimately stepped down and fled the country before the protesters reached her official palace—439 lives were lost.

The turning point came when news spread that Sheikh Hasina had fled the country. The atmosphere in Dhaka shifted from tension and fear to overwhelming jubilation. The streets, once filled with the sounds of protest and anguish, erupted in celebration. People danced, sang and embraced one another, their faces alight with the joy of victory. The oppressive weight that had hung over the city for so long was lifted, replaced by a collective sense of hope and renewal. The movement was about more than just toppling a regime—it was about reclaiming dignity and humanity in the face of oppression. Yet, even in this moment of triumph, there was a deep undercurrent of sorrow. The celebrations were tempered by the memories of those who had sacrificed their lives in the struggle.

In the days that followed, Dhaka began the process of rebuilding, both physically and emotionally. The scars of the protests were visible throughout the city—on the buildings, on the people—but there was also a newfound energy and determination to shape a better future. The nation now faces the challenge of rebuilding not only its political landscape but also the social fabric strained by years of oppression and conflict.

The departure of Hasina marked a pivotal moment for Bangladesh, ushering in 84-year-old Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus as the leader of an interim government. While the celebrations reflected a desire for change, significant challenges lie ahead. Yunus inherits a country where political institutions have been eroded by corruption and autocratic rule. His leadership is expected to bring much-needed reforms, including transparent governance and the protection of civil liberties.

Economically, the disruptions caused by recent protests have left the nation in need of recovery. Yunus’s expertise in poverty alleviation could guide the country towards inclusive economic policies that address the needs of the marginalised. Socially, the interim government must heal divisions and promote unity across the diverse population.

Yet, there are reasons for cautious optimism. The movement that brought down Hasina was driven by a new generation of Bangladeshis—young, educated and deeply connected to global currents of thought. They are demanding more from their leaders and are unwilling to accept the status quo. This emerging generation has the potential to drive meaningful change, pushing for reforms that could finally address deep-rooted issues of inequality, corruption and injustice. |

| 46 | Real reason why US is silent on Bangladesh chaos, attacks on Hindus

There have been hundreds of attacks against Hindus, the biggest minority group in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government. The country is in a state of chaos. However, the silence of the US, which presents itself as the champion of human rights, is deafening. What's behind this strategic silence?

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Following former Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina's resignation and exit, attacks on Hindu homes, temples, and shops across the country led thousands of Hindu community members to protest in Dhaka.

Following former Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina's resignation and exit, attacks on Hindu homes, temples, and shops across the country led thousands of Hindu community members to protest on the streets of central Dhaka. (Image: PTI)

Yudhajit Shankar Das

Yudhajit Shankar Das

New Delhi,UPDATED: Aug 29, 2024 19:27 IST

This silence is deafening. The US, the tutor of rights and democracy across the world, has been completely mum on the attacks on minorities in Bangladesh. The latest display of this gag was the dropping of the mention of Bangladesh and atrocities against Hindus from the readout on the Modi-Biden talks. Why is the US avoiding being critical of the situation in Bangladesh under the military-backed caretaker government led by Muhammad Yunus?

Experts see India and the US, two strategic allies, not being on the same page on Bangladesh, and suggest that India needs to keep that in mind going ahead.

In fact, when it comes to India's interests in Bangladesh, the US has been in the opposite camp. It tried to prevent the liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971, and then sided with political parties that were pro-Pakistan.

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It has always backed the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), during whose rule anti-India forces found Bangladesh a safe haven. The US worked over the years to undermine the Awami League rule under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"The US sought to prevent the birth of Bangladesh. But even today, it is not on the same page with India regarding Bangladesh. It has welcomed the recent regime change there and been silent on ongoing human-rights abuses, including attacks on minorities, arbitrary arrests, forced resignations and physical assaults on political detainees," says geostrategist Brahma Chellaney.

On August 26, American President Joe Biden called up Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had returned from a visit to war-torn Ukraine. The crisis in Ukraine and Bangladesh were among the issues discussed by them.

The Indian readout mentioned that PM Modi and Biden expressed their shared concern over the "situation in Bangladesh", but the White House readout was mum on the issue and focused only on the Ukraine-Russia war.

"They (PM Modi and Biden) emphasised the restoration of law and order and ensuring safety and security of the minorities, particularly Hindus, in Bangladesh," according to the statement by India's Ministry of External Affairs on the Modi-Biden talks.

Though countries often highlight issues that are important to them, experts have noticed the strategic silence of the US on the post-Hasina chaos in Bangladesh.

"When Biden called Modi last evening, they discussed Bangladesh and shared concerns about the situation there, as the Indian readout pointed out. But the White House readout, tellingly, does not disclose the Bangladesh-related discussion," says Chellaney.

The days of anarchy following Sheikh Hasina fleeing Bangladesh saw hundreds of targeted attacks on minorities, especially Hindus. PM Modi, while congratulating Yunus for taking over as the head of the caretaker government, spoke about ensuring the safety of Hindus in Bangladesh.

Yunus himself has admitted to the targeting of minorities and visited Dhaka's historic Dhakeshwari temple to reassure the country's Hindu community.

Indicating that the law-and-order situation in Bangladesh is far from normal, students have fought pitched battles with members of Bangladesh Ansar Bahini, a paramilitary force, and forced dozens of officials and teachers to resign.

HOW THE US SYSTEMATICALLY WEAKENED SHEIKH HASINA

What could be the reason for the US's silence on the crisis in Bangladesh and the attacks on Hindus there? For one, it has pounced on every opportunity to point fingers at India over rights.

"The US systematically weakened Sheikh Hasina over the last decade," says Shafquat Rabbee, a Bangladeshi-American political analyst and faculty member at Dallas University.

"US official statements, reports from US-domiciled Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, and various US-aligned media and NGOs around the world gradually downgraded Hasina from a role model of female empowerment to one of the world's rare female despots," Rabbee tells IndiaToday.In.

"This [US effort] gradually reduced Hasina's overseas footprint and allies. Europe, for example, was more tolerant of Hasina's excesses earlier on due to her secular credentials, but that was made unsustainable due to US activism," explains Rabbee.

Rabbee, who has an extensive network in Bangladesh, says the US embassy in Dhaka regularly held sessions with the civil society, diaspora opinion makers, social media influencers "to keep hopes for a democratic rejuvenation alive".

"Once Hasina constrained all her domestic political opponents, keeping the desire for democracy alive via such engagement was the long-term strategy US utilised to systematically weaken Hasina's standing in Bangladeshi society and abroad," adds Rabbee.

The most debilitating blow to Hasina were the US sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in 2021. The sanctions crippled the deadly force and enthused Hasina's critics.

"The US put Hasina's most potent tool for oppression, the RAB under sanctions, which emboldened the civil society in Bangladesh. Statistically speaking, extrajudicial killings and disappearances went down significantly after those sanctions. After all, it was coercion that sustained Hasina's regime and towards the end she needed even more of that, which was already blunted by US activism," says Rabbee.

Hasina became the dictator that she began her political career fighting against. People were suffocated and the anti-quota protests of 2024 became the outlet of the massive outpouring of popular anger against her.

"Obviously, Hasina's own continuous misdeeds only amplified the success of the fairly inexpensive American approaches," adds Rabbee.

By weakening Hasina, the US might have been creating ground for a favourable government at the right time.

It should also be remembered that Muhammad Yunus was viewed as part of the 'One-Eleven' depoliticisation process, which is seen to be an American plan for regime change in Bangladesh.

‘One-Eleven’ refers to the process initiated on January 11, 2007, by which a military-backed caretaker government assumed charge in Bangladesh on the eve of the general election. For two years, it tried to work on what is referred to as the ‘Minus-Two formula’ to get rid of the top two political players -- Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia of the BNP.

After the violent nationwide protests, it is Yunus who is at the helm of the caretaker government.

The wife of a high-ranking adviser to the caretaker government also works with the US embassy in Dhaka.

WHY US ISN'T READY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE POST-HASINA CHAOS?

Shafquat Rabbee explains how several people from the American network made it to the caretaker government in Bangladesh.

"Hasina effectively silenced and brought into her patronage network, the entire civil society, the media and bureaucrats except for only a few who were independent and are still vocal. When the students toppled her government, there were not very many known people with the acceptability to even face the students in person, let alone be proposed by them for an adviser's job," says Rabbee.

The 15-year-long authoritarian rule silenced most of Hasina's credible critics.

"Therefore, the names that were left and acceptable to the student revolutionaries had an outsized representation from outside the Hasina patronage network that the Americans dominated," he adds.

After having worked to undermine the Hasina administration, and seeing a government that has people aligned to its interests, the US would think twice before being critical of the new set-up in Bangladesh.

The Biden administration was on August 12 questioned as to what steps it was taking to stop the atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh, given that two Democrat lawmakers had written to President Biden on the issue.

Neither did this elicit strong condemnation from the US, nor a promise to act.

"Look, we're going to certainly continue to monitor the situation. I don't have anything else to add, to say beyond that, but when it comes to any type of human rights issues here, the President has always been very consistent in speaking loud and clear in public and also privately, and he'll continue to do that," said White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

It is obvious that having spoken and worked against the Awami League government, the US would not readily admit to the post-Hasina crisis in Bangladesh.

Be it Afghanistan or Iraq, the US has, throughout the 20th century, tried to establish democracy and left those countries in a shambles.

Even the 2018 anti-quota agitation against then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is seen to have had an American imprint.

Nurul Haq Nur came out of nowhere to become the vice president of Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) despite the Awami League's students' organisation, the Chhatra League, dominating campus politics.

Nur played a key role in the 2018 quote reforms agitation, which forced the Hasina government to withdraw the reservation in government jobs.

"Nur was close to American embassy officials in Dhaka, and was believed to have been propped up by the US," a former Indian diplomat to Bangladesh told IndiaToday.In.

US INTERESTS DO NOT ALIGN WITH INDIA'S IN SOUTH ASIA

Being next door, Bangladesh is very important for India strategically and for security reasons. Any disturbance there is going to impact India, whereas the US, located 13,000 km away, is immune to any crisis in Dhaka.

Bangladesh is one among the countries where India and the US aren't on the same page.

"Shared interests in the Indo-Pacific or US support for Indian engagement with Ukraine cannot obscure the fact that, in India's own neighbourhood extending from Myanmar to the Pakistan-Afghanistan belt, American interests do not align with core Indian interests," says expert Chellaney.

Security expert Faran Jeffery says Bangladesh remained in the Indian sphere for all these years because Pakistan alone wasn't capable of overturning the situation. "But everything changed the moment Uncle Sam casually walked into the picture," he says.

Jeffery says we shouldn't underestimate the importance of US interests in the region and not overestimate its own position.

INDIA NEEDS TO BE CAREFUL GOING AHEAD, WARNS EXPERT

How the US is capable of engineering changes in India's neighbourhood has already been talked about.

US assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu visited Dhaka in mid-May and met politicians and civil society leaders. It was in June that Bangladesh was in the throes of unprecedented protests against the ruling party.

It was the same Lu who was blamed by Imran Khan for trying to topple his government.

"We got a message from America — oh, not America, I mean a foreign country I can't name," Khan said in a live televised address in March 2022.

Reports also name Donald Lu as the person who influenced the internal politics in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

What is also being talked about is how a CNN correspondent has fed the narrative of India being behind the recent floods in Bangladesh. The Indian government has already trashed those allegations with hard facts.

"India hopes to be a superpower, but India doesn't even have an equivalent of CNN. The moment the CNN crew landed in Bangladesh, the Indian narrative was in trouble," says Jeffery, the head of international think tank ITCT.

The security expert warns that India would be in a difficult situation, both internally and externally, if the US decides to treat it as a "non-aligned transactional partner instead of a reliable strategic ally".

"Bangladesh is the biggest reality check for India. But there could be more reality checks down the road. India should tread carefully," he warns.

While the role of the US in the regime change in Bangladesh, like in other countries of the region, is very shady, there are enough hints of how it acted. Against this backdrop, it isn't difficult to understand why the US is mum on the post-Hasina chaos in Bangladesh and the attacks on Hindus there. |

| 47 | Probe ordered into attacks on Hindus, says Bangladesh govt adviser. ‘Indians welcome to investigate’

Not differentiating anyone as a minority or a majority, but seeing them as citizen of Bangladesh, says Nahid Islam. 'Will ensure equal rights and equal dignity for all.'

Ananya Bhardwaj

03 September, 2024 05:46 pm IST

Student leader and adviser to Bangladesh interim government Nahid Islam claimed that India had focused more on strengthening its relationship with the Awami League than with the people or Bangladesh | Ananya Bhardwaj | ThePrint

Student leader and adviser to Bangladesh interim government Nahid Islam claimed that India had focused more on strengthening its relationship with the Awami League than with the people or Bangladesh | Ananya Bhardwaj | ThePrint

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Dhaka: As the interim government charts out a roadmap for the future of Bangladesh, one of its priorities is ensuring justice to those killed, including the Hindu minorities, in the recent turmoil, student leader Nahid Islam told ThePrint.

Talking about the attacks, in which at least 11 Hindus were killed and 15 temples vandalised across the country, Islam said that orders have been given for a proper investigation into the incidents that took place.

He said that if someone from India wants to come and investigate, they are welcome.

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| 48 | For several weeks in July, Bangladesh was wracked by its most serious episode of civil unrest in decades. What began as student protests against a controversial job quota system escalated into a nationwide crisis that has tapped into a deeper vein of discontent about the state of the economy, official corruption, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's heavy-handed crackdown. As of July 29, at least 150 people have died in the violence and 9,000 have been arrested.

The government’s response, which included a curfew and an internet blackout, has exposed a wider set of grievances and engendered another round of student demands, which the government seems completely disinclined to meet. There are now questions about the longer-term economic fallout of the unrest and whether political trust between the government and some segments of the population can be restored.

What triggered the protests?

The initial spark for the unrest was a High Court decision on a quota system for awarding government jobs. The system, created in 1972, the year after Bangladesh won its independence from Pakistan, allocated 30 per cent of government positions to the descendants of “freedom fighters,” or those who fought on the side of liberation. Prime Minister Hasina is personally tied to the quota system: her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was the country’s founding leader.

That system remained in place until 2018, when widespread protests prompted the courts to abolish it. But on June 5 of this year, the High Court reversed that decision, clearing the way for the system’s reinstatement. Opposition parties and other critics have argued that such quotas unfairly benefit the descendants of pro-government supporters and are aimed at fostering loyalty within the bureaucracy and perpetuating the power of the ruling Awami League. The discontent is fuelled by a broader perception that there are limited opportunities for merit-based public sector jobs and a belief that some Bangladeshis game the system by obtaining fraudulent freedom fighter credentials.

Bangladesh protest July 2024

Cultural activists and members of civil society clash with police during a march for victims who were killed during the recent nationwide student protests over quotas in government jobs, in Dhaka on July 30, 2024. | Photo: Munir Uz Zaman/AFP via Getty Images

On July 21, perhaps in part to quell the growing unrest, Bangladesh’s Supreme Court ruled that only five per cent of government jobs should be allocated for freedom fighters’ descendants. The protesters, however, were not placated. On July 22, Students Against Discrimination, the student group behind the protests, announced a 48-hour suspension of their demonstrations (which it subsequently extended another 48 hours) to allow the government to meet a new set of demands. These included a personal apology by Hasina for the protesters’ deaths; the arrest or resignation of law enforcement agents or government or university officials implicated in the crackdown; and compensation for the victims and their families.

On July 30, after Hasina ignored the students’ ultimatum, the students re-started their protests against the "mass killings, arrests, attacks, and disappearances of students and people.”

How did the government respond?

Hasina has labelled the protesters "Razakar" — collaborators with the enemy during the independence war — and has refused to engage with the movement’s leaders. Her party, the ruling Awami League, views these protests as agitation led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition party.

Although the recent demonstrations began non-violently, things escalated after protesters were attacked by the Bangladesh Chhatra League, the ruling party's student wing, with sticks and steel pipes. By July 18, the government had deployed police and paramilitary forces across Dhaka to shut down campuses and disperse the protests. The government gave police shoot-on-sight orders for anyone violating the curfew, and subsequently shut down the internet and mobile data services, only partially restoring them in Dhaka and Chittagong on July 24.

In the past, the Bangladeshi government has been accused of using similar internet shutdowns to suppress dissent, particularly during opposition-led protests. On July 30, the ruling Awami League-led coalition banned Jamaat-e-Islami, another opposition party, blaming it for inciting protests.

What are the broader frustrations fuelling these protests?

For years, Bangladesh’s economic story was a positive one. When it gained independence in 1971, Bangladesh was one of the world’s poorest countries. But around the year 2000, it began growing at an annual average rate of six per cent, reaching the important milestone of lower-middle income status in 2015. This growth has been primarily driven by the readymade garments industry, which employs 4.2 million workers.

Nevertheless, several underlying issues have fuelled economic anxiety and frustration, such as inequality, youth unemployment, and high inflation. As of 2023, 40 per cent of youth aged 15–29 were classified as ‘NEET’ (not in employment, education, or training), with estimates that about 18 million young people are out of work. Economic hardships have been compounded by rising food inflation, which has reached 10 per cent, and increases in other living expenses.

By mid-2023, more than 37 million of the country’s 172 million people faced moderate to severe food insecurity, and utility costs soared as the government raised electricity and gas prices three times within a single year. Reports of corruption among high-ranking officials and mismanagement have also eroded public trust, with the wealthiest 10 per cent of the population controlling 41 per cent of the nation’s income, while the bottom 10 per cent receive only 1.3 per cent.

What are the economic and foreign policy implications?

The ongoing unrest has exacerbated the economic strains bearing down on Bangladesh. Workers in the informal sector, which accounts for 85 per cent of the country’s workforce, are especially vulnerable to the effects of lockdowns and curfews. Additionally, lower-income and middle-class households have been severely impacted as prices of some essentials nearly doubled, increasing the financial strain on already struggling families.

The economic damage of the government’s response also extended beyond individual households. On July 22, Bangladesh’s business leaders urged Hasina to lift the curfew and restore internet services, which, according to the president of the Dhaka-based Foreign Investors’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has cost the Bangladeshi economy US$10 billion. Supply chain disruptions have reduced the availability of goods, leading to price hikes and increased inflationary pressures. The readymade garment sector, which accounts for more than 80 per cent of Bangladesh’s US$50 billion in export earnings, has been hit hard, and factories have remained closed since July 20, resulting in daily losses of nearly US$150 million. The internet blackout also severely impacted e-commerce and Facebook-based businesses, with daily revenue losses estimated at US$5 million.

The need to recover losses and repair damaged public infrastructure, combined with reduced export earnings, will put pressure on Bangladesh’s dwindling foreign exchange reserves. These economic pressures will complicate Hasina’s ongoing negotiations with the IMF and other countries for loans, especially given that S&P Global, an American financial analytics company, recently downgraded Bangladesh’s long-term sovereign rating from ‘BB-’ to ‘B+’ — indicating a high credit risk — due to the ongoing protests. On July 31, the EU, which is Bangladesh’s main trading partner, announced that it was delaying negotiations with Dhaka on a new economic pact that would have enhanced trade and other economic relations.

There have also been consequences for Bangladesh’s foreign relations. For years, Hasina has been accused of authoritarianism and human rights violations, which her government denies. In January, the Awami League won a fourth consecutive term, following a controversial election marred by a BNP boycott, violent protests, a crackdown on dissent, and low voter turnout. As a result, Hasina’s government came under heightened international scrutiny at the time by the U.S., U.K., the United Nations, and others.

In response to the recent violence, several nations, including Canada, Germany, and the U.S., have issued travel warnings for Bangladesh, and more than 4,500 Indians left due to safety concerns. Canada's Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly and Defence Minister Bill Blair took to X to express concern about the violence, urging peace, condemning the attacks on protesters, and stressing the need for democratic freedoms and the rule of law.

Possible longer-term consequences

The recent crackdown could provoke a wider backlash against the government, spur an exodus of educated Bangladeshis, and loosen Hasina’s grip on power as trust between the state and citizens erodes.

While student protests have focused on the Awami League’s favouritism towards war veterans' families, broader public discontent stems from the stifling political climate, a weakening economy, and the government's failure to address critical issues such as job scarcity and inflation. In recent months, there has been a surge in Bangladeshis seeking asylum in Canada, with projections of more than 5,000 asylum claims in Quebec alone and 22,000 in Canada as a whole by the end of 2024.

The crisis in Bangladesh will place Western nations in an awkward position. But despite their concerns about human rights violations and democratic backsliding, Bangladesh's geopolitical importance and economic potential mean that Canada and other Western governments will likely take a cautious approach in their criticisms, balancing advocacy while maintaining crucial diplomatic and economic ties with a key South Asian partner.

• Edited by Erin Williams, Senior Program Manager; Vina Nadjibulla, Vice-President Research & Strategy; Ted Fraser, Senior Editor. |

| 49 | Anti-quota protests

Riots in Bangladesh were caused by anti-quota protests123. These protests began as student demonstrations against the government's job quota system, which reserves public jobs for the families of veterans of the country's independence war in 19713. The protests escalated into violent unrest, with clashes between police and university students4. Rising unemployment in the country has contributed to the tensions1. |

| 50 | Communal violence rocks Bangladesh: Here’s what has happened so far

Violence erupted after an alleged blasphemy incident at a Durga Puja pavilion in Cumilla, bordering Chandpur and about 100 km from Dhaka, leading to the deployment of paramilitary forces in more than half of administrative districts.

By: Express Web Desk

New DelhiUpdated: October 18, 2021 20:05 IST

Newsguard

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Communal violence rocks Bangladesh: Here’s what has happened so far

Dhaka: Police clash with Muslim devotees during a protest in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. (AP)

At least six people were killed and hundreds injured in communal violence and mayhem that took place during the Durga Puja celebrations in Bangladesh last week. Several incidents of attacks on places of worship of minority communities by unidentified Muslim men were reported from across the country.

According to PTI, the violence had erupted after an alleged blasphemy incident at a Durga Puja pavilion in Cumilla, bordering Chandpur and about 100 km from Dhaka, leading to the deployment of paramilitary forces in more than half of administrative districts.

[oovvuu-embed id="78cbcd6e-676c-45be-a929-576e46555380"]

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina promised to bring to justice the culprits behind the violence, saying anyone involved in the attacks on Hindu temples and Durga Puja venues will not be spared.

Here's what has happened so far

The alleged incident of blasphemy

Tensions in the country escalated on Wednesday after widely circulated footage on social media alleged an incident of blasphemy during the Durga Puja celebrations in the eastern district of Cumilla.

Incidents of vandalism were reported from Hindu temples in Chandpur’s Hajiganj, Chattogram’s Banshkhali and Cox’s Bazar’s Pekua, a report by bdnews24.com.

Footwear of protestors lie strewn on a road after clashes with police during a protest in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. (AP)

The Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported that at one stage, the situation went out of control and riots started spreading to a number of Durga Puja venues.

The local administration and the police came under attack as they tried to maintain law and order, it said.

More attacks and protests

On Thursday (October 14), an ISKCON temple was vandalised and a devotee was killed by a mob in an attempt to stir up communal tensions across the country.

As reported by The Indian Express, the attack on the ISKCON temple in Noakhali shocked the Hindu community there, leading to protests on the streets.

Sources said the possible involvement of Islamic extremist groups in Bangladesh trying to stir up trouble and cause communal conflict between the two communities is being investigated.

Smoke from teargas rise after police clashed with Muslim devotees during a protest in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Friday, Oct. 15, 2021. (AP)

According to PTI, sporadic attacks and vandalism were also reported on Friday, with authorities issuing prohibitory orders in the Noakhali district, banning public gatherings from dawn to dusk. The Associated Press also reported that thousands of people clashed with police in Dhaka after the main Friday prayers.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Sajjad Hossain said several people were injured as police used lathicharge and tear gas to disperse the crowd. The protesters shouted anti-India slogans and accused Hasina of “being close with New Delhi”.

On Saturday, nearly 10,000 demonstrators again gathered outside the main mosque in the captial. According to DW, many were seen with banners of Islamist political parties as the crowd chanted, “Down with the enemies of the Islam” and “Hang the culprits”.

Local Media reports on Sunday again reported of Hindu temples and shops being vandalised in Feni, about 157 km from Dhaka. According to the Dhaka Tribune newspaper, the clashes broke out after an attack on demonstrators who were protesting against the attacks on Durga Puja venues in several places in Bangladesh.

The attacks also prompted the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council to announce a sit-in and hunger strike from October 23 in protest.

Bangladesh news, Bangladesh temple attack, Bangladesh durga puja temple attack, Bangladesh durga puja temple attack, Bangladesh hindus temple news, indian express world newsSeveral incidents of attacks on places of worship of minority communities by unidentified Muslim men were reported from across the country. (Twitter/UnityCouncilBD)

Milan Kanti Dutta, president of the forum, said that they would launch a tougher movement if the government did not pay heed to their demand.

Several houses of Hindus in Bangladesh were also set on fire late on Sunday in a village in Rangpur district's Pirgonj upazila, about 255 kms Dhaka, the bdnews24.com reported.

'Will hunt them down'

Promising strict action, Bangladesh Prime Minister Shiek Hasina said that the incidents will be thoroughly investigated and "nobody will be spared".

While speaking at an event of the Hindu community Dhaka, Hasina said, “The incidents in Comilla are being thoroughly investigated. Nobody will be spared. It doesn’t matter which religion they belong to. They will be hunted down and punished."

She also said she hopes that India would take steps against any reaction at home, as it could have a fallout in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (File photo)

“We expect that nothing happens there (in India) which could influence any situation in Bangladesh, affecting our Hindu community here…," she said.

Hasina also reassured representatives of the Hindu community — who form about 10% of Bangladesh’s 169 million population — that they were taking all precautions to ensure there was no violence during immersion of idols of Goddess Durga.

Rise in attack against minorities

As many as 3,679 attacks on the minority Hindu community took place between January 2013 and September this year in Bangladesh, the bdnews24.com reported quoting prominent rights group in Bangladesh Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). The attacks included vandalism of and setting fire to 559 houses and 442 shops and businesses of the Hindu community, it said.

Riot police stand guard during a protest in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Saturday, Oct. 16, 2021. (AP)

At least 1,678 cases of vandalism and arson attacks on Hindu temples, idols and places of worship were also reported in the same period, the group alleged. While 11 citizens from the Hindu community have died in these incidents, another 862 were injured, the report said.

Two women from the minority were community were also raped in 2014 and another four were sexually assaulted, it said, adding that at least 10 Hindu families were evicted from their homes and land in 2016, 2017 and 2020.

Caution in India

In India, the West Bengal government on Monday alerted its district administrations, particularly those bordering Bangladesh, against the misuse of social media and circulation of fake news related to the recent spate of attacks during Durga puja in the neighbouring country.

According to PTI, the government urged them to take measures to maintain law and order.

Protest againsts violence in Bangladesh outside the Academy of Fine Arts in Kolkata.

Meanwhile, following reports of vandalism at an ISKCON temple in Bangladesh and the killing of an ashram devotee, vice-president of ISKCON, Kolkata, Radharaman Das wrote to the United Nations, requesting the world body to send a delegation to the neighbouring country to look into the matter.

He also wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to hold talks with his Bangladesh counterpart to end the ongoing ‘violence’ on Hindu minorities.

Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb also expressed concern over the vandalism of temples, but also expressed confidence that the government led by Sheikh Hasina will take action against the culprits. |