



Bangladesh Crisis 2024 – Its Impact on India

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ABSTRACT

Sheikh Hasina, the former prime minister of Bangladesh, was removed from office and from power on August 5th 2024, bringing an end to her leadership since January 2009. With what at first began as student protests turning into a significant crisis in Bangladesh, this event was perceived as a dramatic escalation. Following Sheikh Hasina's resignation and escape, the nation is in a state of chaos, and the Nobel laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus's new interim government is now tasked with trying to bring peace back and get ready for the upcoming set of elections. This article analyses the Bangladesh's crisis 2024 and its impact on India.

Key Words: Bangladesh Crisis, Sheikh Hasina, Reservation Policy in Bangladesh, Challenges

Introduction

Bangladesh became an independent nation in 1971 after being a part of Pakistan from 1947 to that year. This followed a protracted fight for independence from Pakistan. Despite being a part of the same nation, East Pakistan and West Pakistan were separated by great distances. Despite having a larger population, West Pakistan, which was located more than a thousand miles away, held the majority of political power in East Pakistan. Because of the political, economic, and cultural marginalisation of their region by the central government in Islamabad, Bengalis in East Pakistan felt cut off from their homeland. The turmoil in East Pakistan intensified over time. While the central government in Islamabad continued to focus on the development of West Pakistan, East Pakistan continued to be marginalised politically and live in poverty.

When the Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won the 1970 elections, they assumed power and became the government of Pakistan. The West Pakistani leadership was not prepared to cede control to the East Pakistani leadership. This prompted protests in Dhaka, to which the Pakistani military responded with a bloody crackdown and the wholesale murder of demonstrators. The Bangladesh Liberation War was thus triggered by this. Millions of people left their homes, resulting in a major refugee crisis in India. India moved quickly to address the situation and intervened under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Bangladesh declared its independence on December 16, 1971, and became a sovereign nation mostly as a result of India's assistance to the Bangladesh Liberation Forces. Another name for this is the 1971 India-Pakistan War. After fighting against West Pakistan's discrimination and winning a landslide victory in the 1970 elections, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the nation's first prime minister and was killed in 1975.

After a military coup in 1975 claimed the lives of Sheikh Hasina's father and most of her family, Sheikh Hasina entered politics. She was not in Bangladesh during the coup, and she lived in exile for a number of

years afterward. She didn't start leading her father's political party, the Awami League, until she returned home in 1981. She oversaw opposition campaigns against President Ziaur Rahman's military and autocratic regime, which aided in the party's rise to popularity. She became Bangladesh's first female Prime Minister when she served her first term as prime minister from 1996 to 2001. But a four-party coalition led by the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Party (Manju), and Islamic Oikyo Jote defeated her in the following elections. Supporters of the Awami League believed that Sheikh Hasina's arrest in January 2007 for extortion and corruption was a politically motivated move. She was sworn in as Bangladesh's prime minister again in January 2009 after winning elections in December 2008, and she was re-elected in 2014 and 2018.

Review of Literature

UNHR (2024) in its report "Preliminary Analysis of Recent Protests and Unrest in Bangladesh" stated that the nonviolent student protests in Bangladesh that began in mid-June 2024 were sparked by the restoration of a quota system for the distribution of civil service seats. However, security forces later used violence and gravely violated human rights throughout the demonstrations. It is thought that thousands of people were hurt and hundreds of people, including at least 32 children, died. Strong evidence suggests that the security forces' reaction to the incident involved the use of disproportionate and needless force, which calls for more independent investigation. Extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention and arrests, enforced disappearances, cruel and inhumane treatment, and stringent limitations on the enjoyment of the right to peaceful assembly and expression were among the alleged violations. After widespread demonstrations and turmoil, Bangladesh saw a swift and dramatic turn of events that culminated in the resignation of the government on August 5, 2024, and the appointment of a civilian Interim Government to supervise the holding of new elections.

Md Abu Bakkar Siddik (2024) in his article "Bangladesh protests: law enforcement and public health crisis" revealed that due to the activities of law enforcement authorities, there have been unfortunate and significant deaths as a result of the recent student protests in Bangladesh, which were started by the contentious reintroduction of the job quota system. The goal of this correspondence is to draw attention to the use of deadly force against students as well as the wider ramifications of this unrest for public health, as emphasized by the social media campaign #Save Bangladeshi Students. At least 300 deaths have been recorded as a result of the violent fights between student protestors and law enforcement, and numerous injuries have also occurred. According to reports, police and other security personnel used excessive force, which resulted in these fatalities, raising grave concerns about human rights.

Hasnat, S · Martínez(2024) on their article "AR, What we know about the ouster of Bangladesh's leader" stated that Bangladesh's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, resigned on Monday amid rallies that started as student protests but developed into a larger movement demanding an end to her nation's increasingly autocratic rule. Late last month, Ms. Hasina used the police and paramilitary forces to suppress the students; this crackdown incited widespread public outrage against her. As more students and people joined the protests, the unrest turned more violent as they clashed with government officials and pro-government demonstrators. There have been over 300 fatalities. The resurgence of the protests over the weekend, coupled with a demand by Ms. Hasina's party for its own supporters to come to the streets, sent Bangladesh into an especially perilous period after a curfew and communication blackout relaxed. The army leader tendered his resignation on Monday and declared that a provisional administration will be established.

Stepansky J and Mahmud F(2024) in their article "Bangladesh quota protests live: students vow 'shutdown' as 19 killed" stated that in Dhaka, thousands of students brandishing clubs and rocks engaged in combat with armed police as the Bangladeshi government turned off some mobile internet services in an attempt to put an end to demonstrations over hiring quotas for the public service. Local media reported that at least 17 people lost their lives in Thursday's skirmishes at protests across Bangladesh, while the government shut

down mobile communications in the majority of the South Asian nation. Witnesses told the Reuters news agency that police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators who set fire to cars, police stations and other buildings in Dhaka. The junior minister of information technology, Zunaid Ahmed Palak, announced that due to “multiple rumours” and the “unstable situation created” on social media, mobile internet had been “temporarily suspended”.

The Economic Times (2024) in its article “Bangladesh Riots: Why are thousands of students protesting against PM Sheikh Hasina? Is Pakistan Army, ISI behind unrest?” stated that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned as a result of widespread anti-government rallies sparked by students' objections to the country's employment quota system. When the military implemented a curfew and banned internet access, around 100 individuals lost their lives in fighting. The tension was exacerbated by army figures endorsing the demonstrators.

Harun- Or-Rashid (2024) in his book “Understanding Fifty Years of Bangladesh Politics Struggles, Achievements, and Challenges” examines the Bangladesh's political landscape throughout the first 50 years after independence. It examines Bangladeshi politics as a special case to examine and comprehend the functions of political parties, the electoral commission, and the government during elections, the courts, the media, and other institutions. The two big splits that were apparent in the political arena between the Awami League and the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, on the one hand, and the Awami League and the Awami League, on the other, are cross-examined in this volume together with the bloody killing of the republic's founding father in 1975. It then takes a confrontational tack, delving into subjects like the parliament, election integrity, civil society, and politics after delving deeply into significant historical events and significant political changes that have subsequently influenced Bangladesh's entire society and politics.

Emran Ali (2024) in his book “Bangladesh on the Brink: The 2024 Quota Movement” analysis of one of the biggest political revolutions in modern Bangladeshi history. The book covers the far-reaching effects of the movement, examines the socio-political and economic conditions that gave rise to the statewide protests, and analyses the events as they transpired. The book also compares the 2024 quota campaign to the Arab Spring, the Occupy campaign, and the Hong Kong protests in order to place it in the larger framework of youth-led uprisings around the world. Through an examination of the commonalities in tactics, causes, and results, the book provides insightful information about the difficulties that movements opposing authoritarianism and social inequality encounter globally. In addition to providing suggestions for upcoming changes in government, education, and civil society involvement, the book includes reflections on the lessons discovered throughout the 2024 movement. It talks on the impact of digital tools on Bangladesh's political future and investigates the possibility of younger activism there.

Ali Riaz (2016) in his book “Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence” stated that Bangladesh is a paradoxical nation. This country, which has the eighth-highest population in the world, has garnered a lot of attention recently from the international media and western policymakers, usually for the wrong reasons: corruption, natural disasters brought on by its unstable geographic location, and unstable political conditions following multiple military takeovers after it gained independence from Pakistan in 1971. Islamist militancy, rising religious intolerance and institutional corruption have all highlighted the state's shortcomings and diminished its ability. However, the nation has shown that it has tremendous economic potential and has made progress in areas like female education, population management, and lower infant mortality. Here, Ali Riaz investigates the political processes that gave rise to these contradictory inclinations, keeping in mind the challenges posed by democratisation and the implications that have had and will continue to have throughout the larger South Asian region. Readers interested in Bangladesh and South Asia will find this thorough and distinctive summary of political and historical changes in the country since 1971 to be essential reading.

Crucial Insights on Bangladesh Crisis 2024

The Bangladesh Crisis has many causes, including the 30% reservation quota, claims of election tampering, dictatorial government, the effect of COVID-19 on the textile industry, taka depreciation, and a lack of jobs.

Background of Reservation Policy in Bangladesh

Original Notification (1972): On September 5, 1972, a system was developed that allocated 10% of posts in the semi-government and government to women and 30% to freedom fighters.

Post-Assassination Freeze: These allotments were set aside till 1996 in the wake of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's killing in August 1975.

Extension to Descendants: Benefits of the liberation fighters' quota were extended to their children when Hasina became prime minister in 1996, and then to their grandkids in 2011.

Developments Post-2001: After the Awami League lost office in 2001, the quota system's implementation slowed down. However, once Hasina came back to power in 2009, it resumed.

2018 Withdrawal of Quota: The Hasina government eliminated the freedom-fighter and other quotas in 2018, a decision that was contested in court.

The government's decision was deemed arbitrary by the High Court, which upheld the belief that liberation fighters and their descendants were still viewed as retrogressive.

Supreme Court Decision: On July 21, a short reduction in the reserve only served to temporarily defuse tensions before they erupted again, this time more violently.

Security Response: More than 100 people died as a result of the government's severe crackdown in just two days, and almost 300 people died in two months.

Agitation by Students: Students staged protests against the contentious government job quota system in July, in response to a High Court ruling that reinstated 30% of the quota for those descended from liberation fighters.

Demand to Strike down Reservation Quota: Approximately 32 million youth in Bangladesh, a country of 170 million people, lack employment or education. Students who were enraged demanded that the 30% reservation cap for the families of liberation fighters be removed.

Political Discontent: It has been claimed that Hasina's government routinely silences critics and dissent. During her protracted rule, she arrested opposition leaders and cracked down on free speech and protest. Hasina's administration, according to critics, weakened democratic institutions and procedures. During her term, there were accusations of violence and election tampering.

Human Rights Violations: Under Hasina's administration, there have been multiple allegations of human rights abuses, such as enforced disappearances and unlawful killings.

Media Censorship: The Hasina government has been under fire for limiting journalistic freedom. Government-critical journalists and media organisations frequently experienced intimidation, lawsuits, or closures.

Economic Factors: Despite its growth, Bangladesh's economy still has problems with inequality, unemployment, and inflation. The disturbance was fueled by youth unhappiness, namely with reference to employment opportunities and economic prospects.

Violent Protest: On July 16, clashes between student protestors and pro-government activists and security personnel turned the demonstration violent. A curfew with a shoot-on-sight directive resulted from this. They also switched off cell data and the internet.

Demand for Resignation: Students demand Sheikh Hasina's resignation despite a decreased quota. The nationwide unrest was sparked by the protest's rapid escalation.

Action by Judiciary: The contentious quota system was curtailed by the Bangladeshi Apex Court in order to quell the demonstration. 93% of the employment will be distributed on the basis of merit after the Supreme Court lowered the quota from 30% to 5%.

Further Degrading of Situation: The former Prime Minister fanned the flames by calling the students who were protesting "terrorists" and advising the public to "suppress them with a firm hand". As a result, the students demanded that Hasina and her Cabinet quit.

Resignation and Coup: The now-former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina left the nation on August 5, 2024, after resigning. Millions of people rejoiced in the streets as thousands of demonstrators rushed her home.

General Waker-Uz-Zaman, the head of Bangladesh's army, declared on television that Sheikh Hasina had resigned and that the armed forces would establish the interim government.

How does the Bangladesh Crisis Affect India?

India May Have Lost a Trusted ally:

There's no denying that relations between Bangladesh and India have only gotten better under Sheikh Hasina's administration. India may have lost a reliable ally with her resignation as prime minister of Bangladesh and the political unrest in our region.

Both countries collaborated with one another on a number of fronts, chief among them being the war against terrorism. Her leadership promoted bilateral ties between the two nations, enabling them to collaborate on security-related matters.

Trade demonstrates the interconnection even in the economic sphere. Under her leadership, Bangladesh rose to prominence as India's top trading partner, with USD 13 billion in trade with Bangladesh. For most tariff lines, duty-free entry was made possible by the SAFTA agreement.

Western Criticism:

Sheikh Hasina was forced to step down and depart for India when protests broke out in Bangladesh and how they played out. India finds itself in a challenging diplomatic position as it attempts to strike a balance with major world powers in its ties with Bangladesh.

India's continued support of Sheikh Hasina with Western partners, particularly the US, which has criticised her increasingly dictatorial regime, has led to growing strains. Because of allegations that Hasina's government has curtailed democratic freedoms and violated human rights, the West has been closely watching her government.

Danger of Anti-Indian Feeling in the Bangladeshi Population: India and Bangladesh have collaborated extensively throughout Sheikh Hasina's leadership. Additionally, her unpopularity in Bangladesh increases the possibility of anti-Indian sentiment given that she sought sanctuary in India. The broader public frequently misunderstands the intricacy of bilateral relationships and is prone to quickly associating a single leader with the entire country.

Particularly on sensitive issues like trade and security, the incoming administration may not be as cordial with India. The outcomes might exacerbate relations between Bangladesh and India and imperil the advancements made over the previous ten years.

Challenges to Border Security:

With a length of 4096.7 kilometers, India and Bangladesh have the longest border in the area. On the Indian side of this border, it is protected by the Border Security Force (BSF). But one must remember that the border is permeable. This implies that it will be simpler for outsiders to enter our region.

A committee has been established by the Indian government to oversee and keep an eye on any developments in the border region. Maintaining open lines of contact with their counterparts in Bangladesh is going to be the committee's main objective in order to ensure the safety of Indian nationals as well as members of minority communities living in Bangladesh. The Secretary of the Land Ports Authority of India, the ADG, BSF, and Eastern Command, an IG from BSF Frontier HQ South Bengal, an IG from BSF Frontier HQ Tripura, a Member (Planning & Development), and the ADG, BSF, Eastern Command will lead this committee.

Challenges to Internal Security:

The potential for tensions in India's northeastern regions in the event of Bangladeshi infiltration is arguably the country's greatest worry in relation to the current crisis. Furthermore, it is important to remember that there have always been a number of issues in border regions that pose a threat to our internal security, such as radicalism, militancy, illegal immigration (particularly the Rohingya issue), and smuggling. A less pro-Indian government may increase the influence of radical groups hostile to the nation, which would burden border security even more. Given the current situation and the political unrest, it's critical that the border region remains well-maintained and observed.

Threat of China and Regional Geopolitics:

Bangladesh was able to rule both China and India under Sheikh Hasina. It would be hard to say with certainty if the opposition parties and the current interim administration would adopt the same course of action at this point. China has always taken advantage of each neighbouring country's period of weakness and used it to its advantage. The political turmoil in Bangladesh might provide China another chance to increase its influence in South Asia. Beijing might suggest profitable deals to the incoming administration in an attempt to capitalise on this circumstance.

This narrative has already been told in relation to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. India must surely exercise caution. To counter this, India will have to adopt a strategic posture with two goals in mind: first, to prevent extremist forces from spreading and ensure Bangladesh's economic stability; and second, to monitor any opening that China might exploit for its own benefit.

Minority Question:

Concerns regarding the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh, who are reportedly subjected to violence by the state, are humanitarian in nature. The Bangladesh National Hindu Grand Alliance claims that after Sheikh Hasina's government fell on August 5, there have been threats and acts of violence directed towards the minority group in 278 different sites throughout 48 districts. This is what the group called an "assault on the Hindu religion." Leader of the interim government and Bangladesh's Chief Advisor, Muhammad Yunus, reached out to the Hindu community while they were in trouble, telling them to "exercise patience" and vowing to punish those who hurt the minority members.

Challenge of Transboundary River Water Management:

The management of the shared river flows between Bangladesh and India has long been a source of contention. Between the two countries run 54 rivers that are essential to the lives of millions of people in each. Many significant rivers, most notably the Teesta River, remain controversial even after significant treaties governing water-sharing arrangements, such as the Ganga Waters Treaty (1996) and the Kushiya River Treaty (2022), were signed. The Teesta River is essential to agriculture in the northern region of Bangladesh as well as irrigation and water supply in West Bengal.

Uncertainties for Indian Investments in Bangladesh:

The political turmoil in Bangladesh might seriously jeopardise Indian businesses and investors. Trade disruptions or payments delays might negatively impact the stability and profitability of Indian firms operating in Bangladesh, particularly in the textile sector where approximately 25% of units are owned by Indian enterprises. Because of the current unrest, a few of these manufacturers might choose to go back to India. The negotiations for a potential free trade agreement (FTA) were set to begin in October 2023 and could significantly boost bilateral trade. Yet the ongoing upheaval casts doubt on the future of these negotiations and poses a risk to the integrity of existing trade routes.

Concerns over Infrastructure and Connectivity:

The strengthening of relations between Bangladesh and India has depended heavily on improved infrastructure and linkages. Since 2016, India has lent USD 8 billion for various road, rail, and port projects, including the Akhaura-Agartala rail link and the Khulna-Mongla Port train line. These programs are crucial for increasing trade and opening up access to Northeastern India. However, the current political unrest in Bangladesh has the potential to sever these vital ties, impeding progress and jeopardising agreements. Such interruptions could have a major effect on India's regional trade and economic cooperation, as well as its geopolitical interests in the area.

Way Forward

There is little question that India is having a difficult time addressing the many issues that the current Bangladeshi situation has brought to light. Whatever the case, India must promptly acknowledge and adjust to the changing circumstances that keep arising in the region. As stated by C. Raja Mohan, "To transcend the partition pathologies in building relations with a changing Bangladesh, India will need enormous strategic patience, faith in the logic of geography, belief in the centrality of commerce, and strong political commitment."

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