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BANGLADESH IN TRANSITION

Domestic Contenders, External Players, and Future Scenarios

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Cover Photo: Crowd of protestors in Bangladesh, with the majority holding up placards or banners. Taken on July 16, 2024 by Rayhan Ahmed. '*Quota reform movement 2024 in Bangladesh*', Available at: <https://rb.gy/fdvy6f>

Image modified by: Siddharth Anil Nair, Researcher, SEARP, IPCS.

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Introduction

On 5 August 2024, then Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina was forced to flee¹ her country in the wake of powerful pan-nation protests. Student-led demonstrations,² initially sparked by the reinstatement of a judicially imposed quota system, escalated dramatically following the government's heavy-handed response. The arbitrary arrest and detention of student leaders, disproportionate use of force by security agencies, and over 300 civilian deaths, fuelled the unrest. This ultimately evolved into a nationwide movement demanding Hasina's resignation. The decisive 'March to Dhaka,' in which citizens from across the country converged on the capital, and the military's refusal to use force to quell the protest, finally led to Hasina's hasty resignation and departure.

On 8 August 2024, an interim caretaker government, with Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as its chief adviser, took charge.³ The 17-member, military-backed, interim government has been tasked with restoring peace in the country and eventually conducting free and fair elections. This government⁴ has several prominent members including economists, legal experts, and human rights activists, many of whom have been outspoken critics of Hasina.

This IPCS Special Report proceeds in three sections. The first section focuses on the primary contenders to power in Bangladesh, their historical relevance, and future political expectations. This segues into the next section, which evaluates the role and interests of external players. Reading sections 1 and 2 together can shed light on what a new Bangladeshi political leadership would mean for external stakeholders. The final section analyses the implications of political change within Bangladesh for specific external stakeholder interests.

¹ Yee, Isaac, and Ripon, Tanbirul Miraj. "Bangladesh Prime Minister Flees to India as Anti-Government Protesters Storm Her Residence." *CNN*, 6 August 2024. www.cnn.com/2024/08/05/asia/bangladesh-prime-minister-residence-stormed-intl/index.html.

² Ghazali, Mohammed, and Mishra, Samiran. "300 Killed, Sheikh Hasina under Fire: Violent Bangladesh Protests Explained." *NDTV.Com*, 5 August 2024. www.ndtv.com/world-news/bangladesh-protests-sheikh-hasina-awami-league-explained-what-led-to-bangladesh-protests-that-has-seen-over-300-killed-6265524.

³ Dieterich, Carole. "Yunus Forms Bangladesh's Interim Government Drawing from Civil Society." *Le Monde*, 9 August 2024. www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/08/09/yunus-forms-bangladesh-s-interim-government-drawing-from-civil-society_6712020_4.html.

⁴ "Bangladesh's new interim government: Know Who's Who". *The Hindu*, 9 August 2024. www.thehindu.com/news/international/bangladesh-unrest-know-whos-who-in-interim-government/article68505107.ece.

Power Contenders in Bangladesh

Sheikh Hasina held power in Bangladesh for 15 years. With her ouster, five prominent players now have an opportunity to shape and influence the course of Bangladeshi politics.

Awami League

The Awami League (AL) is Bangladesh's largest and oldest⁵ political party. Of the 53 years of Bangladesh's existence, AL has been in power for 24. Party identity has been centred around its role in Bangladesh's liberation and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legacy of secularism and democracy.

Despite these credentials, AL has been accused⁶ of clamping down on the opposition, rigging elections, and suppressing democratic freedoms. Recent events are a result of this long brewing discontent and the party now has to address popular distrust and a leadership vacuum. Cases against an exiled Hasina and her aides are stacking up,⁷ party offices are being torched,⁸ and party members detained,⁹ all of which have significantly weakened the party. Who will assume party leadership is unclear as many members of AL leadership, including second-in-command Obaidul Quader, have fled¹⁰ the country. Hasina's son, Sajeed Wazed, says he is open¹¹ to becoming the party's face, but reports suggest he is unpopular¹² among party members.

⁵ "Awami League at 75: Bangladesh's Oldest and Largest Political Party Celebrates Its Founding Anniversary." *The Business Standard*, 23 June 2024. www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/awami-league-75-bangladeshs-oldest-and-largest-political-party-celebrates-its-founding.

⁶ "Bangladesh: Violent Autocratic Crackdown Ahead of Elections." *Human Rights Watch*, 16 August 2024. www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/bangladesh-violent-autocratic-crackdown-ahead-elections.

⁷ "5 more murder cases filed against deposed PM Hasina, her aides in Bangladesh." *The Print*, 22 August 2024. theprint.in/world/5-more-murder-cases-filed-against-deposed-pm-hasina-her-aides-in-bangladesh/2234437/.

⁸ Sarkar, Shankhyaneel. "Awami League Offices Torched, Parliament Dissolved, Temples Damaged: Bangladesh Burns, Posing New Challenges for Interim Govt: Top Updates." *News18*, 5 August 2024. www.news18.com/world/awami-league-offices-torched-parliament-dissolved-temples-damaged-bangladesh-burns-posing-new-challenges-for-interim-govt-top-updates-8991405.html.

⁹ "Awami League leaders killed and detained: Is this the end of Sheikh Hasina's party?" *Firstpost*, 7 August 2024. www.firstpost.com/explainers/bangladesh-sheikh-hasina-ouster-awami-league-future-13802050.html.

¹⁰ Chowdhury, Zia. "The AL men who fled country before Hasina." *The Business Standard*, 5 August 2024. www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/al-men-who-fled-country-hasina-910356.

¹¹ Shakil, Marya, and Paul, Rohit. "Have Become Face of Awami League by Default': Sheikh Hasina's Son to NDTV." *NDTV.Com*, 9 August 2024. www.ndtv.com/india-news/have-become-face-of-awami-league-by-default-sheikh-hasinas-son-to-ndtv-6303373.

¹² Pieal, Jannatul Naym. "After Hasina's Departure, Bangladesh's Once-Ruling Awami League Stares at Political Bankruptcy." *The Diplomat*, 7 August 2024. thediplomat.com/2024/08/after-hasinas-departure-bangladeshs-ruling-awami-league-stares-at-political-bankruptcy/.

The ongoing crisis not only presents a political quandary for the AL but also challenges its legitimacy and authority. What role the party will play in Bangladeshi politics depends on the lessons it learns from this uprising. It will have to remodel and reorganise itself to address these questions and make itself politically viable. While Bangladesh's interim administration has refused¹³ to ban the AL and has encouraged it to contest future elections, the more these elections are delayed, the more time AL will buy itself to regroup, reorganise, and potentially stabilise.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has been a prominent political force in Bangladesh since its inception in 1978. Party President Khaleda Zia has served two terms as prime minister (1991-1996 and 2001-2006). BNP has faced leadership challenges in recent years, with Khaleda Zia being arrested¹⁴ and her son, Tarique Rahman (convicted in a bomb blast case) trying to lead¹⁵ the party from exile in London. Several other party members have found themselves in jail as a result of Hasina's clampdown on the opposition.¹⁶ The BNP boycotted¹⁷ the 2014 and 2024 elections claiming they were rigged by the ruling AL. Public support for the BNP has been weak, with the party performing poorly¹⁸ in the 2018 elections, which was conducted by a neutral caretaker government.

Despite these struggles, BNP has maintained¹⁹ its position as the main opposition party. Now, with Zia's release,²⁰ AL's depleting prospects, and a neutral interim government in place, the BNP's contention to

¹³ Sarkar, Shankhyaneel. 2024. "Bangladesh Interim Govt Says No Plans to Ban Hasina's Awami League, Protesters Told to Surrender Illegal Firearms." *News18*, 12 August 2024. www.news18.com/world/bangladesh-interim-govt-says-no-plans-to-ban-hasinawami-league-protesters-told-to-surrender-illegal-firearms-9013116.html.

¹⁴ "Bangladesh Ex-PM Khaleda Zia Jailed amid Clashes." *BBC News*, 8 February 2018. www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42987765.

¹⁵ Halder, Deep. "Tarique Rahman - Hasina's top rival, Bangladesh's 'fugitive dark prince' eyes BNP revival in exile." *The Print*, 26 September 2023. theprint.in/world/tarique-rahman-hasinawami-league-top-rival-bangladesh-fugitive-dark-prince-eyes-bnp-revival-in-exile/1776955/.

¹⁶ "Around 8,000 BNP leaders-activists arrested in 8 days." *Prothom Alo*, 5 November 2023. en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/pgw6p71sr.

¹⁷ Lawal, Shola. "Bans and boycotts: The troubled history of Bangladesh's elections." *Al Jazeera*, 5 January 2024. www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/5/bangladesh-elections-a-timeline-of-controversy.

¹⁸ Hasan, Mubashar and Ruud, Arild Engelsen. "What went wrong with the BNP, Bangladesh's main opposition party?" *Al Jazeera*, 9 March 2019. www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/3/9/what-went-wrong-with-the-bnp-bangladesh-main-opposition-party.

¹⁹ Pieal, Jannatul Naym. "After Hasina's Departure, Bangladesh's Once-Ruling Awami League Stares at Political Bankruptcy." *The Diplomat*, 7 August 2024. thediplomat.com/2024/08/after-hasinawami-league-departure-bangladesh-ruling-awami-league-stares-at-political-bankruptcy/.

power seems stronger than at any time in the recent past. The party has traditionally leaned away from the policies of its rival AL. For example, BNP's 'anti-India'²¹ politics distinguishes itself from AL's friendly²² relations with India. Domestically, too, BNP's 'Vision 2030'²³ has been proposed as an alternative to the "misrule and tyranny" inflicted on Bangladeshis in recent years. It promises constitutional amendments, legal changes, and systemic overhaul to change the current culture of Bangladeshi politics resulting from AL's uninterrupted rule.

These marked differences from AL politics might seem appealing to the public in view of the current anti-Hasina sentiment, though BNP workers' disjointed²⁴ on-ground actions could counteract its political viability. General public fatigue²⁵ with the major political parties and how the BNP addresses this will determine how they fare politically.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami

The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI), founded in 1975, is the most prominent Islamic political party in Bangladesh. It traces its roots to the Islamic revival movement led by Abu Ala Maududi, who established the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941. The Bangladeshi Jamaat supported West Pakistan and was opposed to the Bangladeshi war of liberation.²⁶ Later, as a political party in Bangladesh starting in 1975, it contested elections with the agenda of establishing an Islamic government in Bangladesh.²⁷

²⁰ "Bangladesh president orders release of jailed ex-PM Khaleda Zia." *The Economic Times*, 6 August 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/bangladesh-president-orders-release-of-jailed-ex-pm-khaleda-zia/articleshow/112303606.cms?from=mdr.

²¹ Liton, Shakhawat. "Has BNP forgotten its anti-India past?" *The Daily Star*, 3 June 2015. www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/has-bnp-forgotten-its-anti-india-past-90586.

²² Pasricha, Anjana. "Why India Welcomes Sheikh Hasina's Return to Power in Bangladesh." *Voice of America (VOA News)*, 10 January 2024. www.voanews.com/a/why-india-welcomes-sheikh-hasina-s-return-to-power-in-bangladesh/7434039.html.

²³ BNP, www.bnpsbd.org/vision-2030.

²⁴ Preetha, Sushmita S. "Time for a turnaround in Bangladesh." *Frontline*, 6 September 2024. frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/bangladesh-needs-pro-people-reforms-muhammad-yunus-interim-government-bnp-khaleda-zia-jamaat-e-islami/article68580126.ece.

²⁵ "Bangladesh yearns for new political force amidst uncertainty post-'Monsoon Revolution'." *Hindustan Times*, 30 August 2024. www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/bangladesh-yearns-for-new-political-force-amidst-uncertainty-post-monsoon-revolution-101724999382205.html.

²⁶ Siyech, Mohammed. "Understanding the Bangladesh Jamaat E-Islami's Return." *Observer Research Foundation*, 15 July 2023. www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/understanding-the-bangladesh-jamaat-e-islam-is-return#:~:text=Maududi%20was%20initially%20opposed%20to,opposition%20party%20in%20the%20nation.

²⁷ Ibid

The BJI has always found relevance in Bangladeshi politics. It hasn't however won enough seats²⁸ to form a government independently. It has either supported a party to form a government or worked with the opposition. It aligned with both AL and BNP to force President Mohammad Ershad to resign during the 1990 protests.²⁹ BJI supported the BNP in government formation in 1991 and 2001, when it won 18 and 17 seats, respectively.³⁰ In 1996, it allied with AL to demand PM Khaleda Zia's resignation³¹ and conduct elections under a neutral caretaker government.

The BJI has faced multiple setbacks since Sheikh Hasina came to power after AL's landslide victory in the ninth parliamentary elections in December 2008. The Hasina government set up the International Crimes Tribunal in 2009 to investigate abuses committed in 1971 and during military rule. By 2011, ten BJI leaders had been charged with war crimes, and five top BJI party leaders,³² including Abdul Quader Mollah, Motiur Rahman Nizami, and Mir Quasem Ali (BJI's top financier), were executed by 2016. In 2013, BJI's student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), led several mass protests that resulted in large-scale property damage and deaths.³³ In this background, Bangladesh's High Court, in its verdict on a petition that challenged BJI's registration, declared said registration illegal. In 2008, the country's Election Commission had made it mandatory for political parties to register if they wanted to participate in elections. This ruling debarred BJI from participating in parliamentary elections from 2014.³⁴

Notably, the ICS has played an important role in the party's revival through social media outreach³⁵ and by establishing a robust presence at universities. The large turnout at BJI's rally³⁶ in Dhaka in June 2023

²⁸ Results of Parliamentary Elections in 1991, 1996, 2001. www.bd.emb-japan.go.jp/ip/mailMagazine/pdf/02benkyokai140304.pdf; Inter-Parliamentary Union. archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2023_08.htm.

²⁹ Riaz, Ali and Sajjadur Rahman, M. (Eds.). 2016. Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315651019>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Political Developments and Political Violence." *Refworld*, 1 May 1998. www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/irbc/1998/en/95520.

³² "Bangladesh sentences to death six 1971 war crimes accused." *The Indian Express*, 22 November 2017. indianexpress.com/article/world/bangladesh-sentences-to-death-six-1971-war-crimes-accused-4949505/.

³³ "South Asia: Incidents and Statements Involving Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS): 2013." *The South Asia Terrorism Portal*, 2013. www.satp.org/terrorist-incident-text/southasia/islami-chhatra-shibir-ics_Jul-2013.

³⁴ Pantha. "Bangladesh Court Disqualifies Jamaat-e-Islami Party from Elections." *Global Voices*, 6 August 2013. globalvoices.org/2013/08/06/bangladesh-court-disqualifies-jamaat-e-islami-party-from-elections/.

³⁵ Bhattacharjee, Kallol. "Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh: Return of the Islamists." *The Hindu*, 18 August 2024. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/jamaat-e-islami-bangladesh-return-of-the-islamists/article68537482.ece>.

³⁶ "Jamaat holds rally after 10 yrs, speculations rise in political arena." *Prothom Alo*, 11 June 2023. en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/politics/y1tm85xe1u.

before the 2024 general election shows that its support base is still intact. The Hasina government imposed a ban on the BJI under anti-terrorism legislation on 1 August 2024, which has since been lifted³⁷ by the interim government. With this ban being lifted, the BJI can contest elections in Bangladesh.

Students

Bangladesh is a young country with its youth (aged 15-29 years) constituting 27.96 per cent³⁸ of the population. Students have played a pivotal role³⁹ in Bangladesh's history. The most prominent were the 1971 Liberation War,⁴⁰ the November 1990 protest ('Street Victory')⁴¹ and the July 2024 protest ('Second Revolution').⁴² Students constituted the most decisive force in bringing down Sheikh Hasina's 15-year regime in 2024. Parties like BNP and BJI merely facilitated the movement's political environment and legitimacy.

Students have thus emerged as a key political centre in Bangladesh, prompting resignations from the prime minister as well as several top officials, within the deadline set by them. The army's support to the interim government instead of imposing military rule was a result of pressure⁴³ from the student leaders. The students' proposal to appoint Muhammad Yunus as head of the caretaker government was swiftly

³⁷ "Yunus-led Bangladesh's interim govt lifts ban on Jamaat-e-Islami Party." *The Indian Express*, 28 August 2024. indianexpress.com/article/world/yunus-led-bangladeshs-interim-govt-lifts-ban-jamaat-e-islami-party-9537937/.

³⁸ "Youths account for 28pc of population." *The Daily Star*, 9 April 2023. www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/youths-account-28pc-population-3293161.

³⁹ "Retelling Our History: Remembering the Contribution of Students and Teachers in the Emergence of Bangladesh." *South Asia Journal*, 22 April 2021. southasiajournal.net/retelling-our-history-remembering-the-contribution-of-students-and-teachers-in-the-emergence-of-bangladesh/.

⁴⁰ Biswas, Samata. "History's Key Role in Bangladesh Students' Deadly Protests." *The India Forum*, 30 July 2024. www.theindiaforum.in/history/historys-key-role-bangladesh-students-deadly-protests.

⁴¹ "The Fall of President Ershad." *Refworld*, 1 February 1991. www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/irbc/1991/en/21461.

⁴² "Bangladesh's Yunus Calls Student Protests 'Second Revolution', Promises Transition to Pluralist". *ABP News*, 17 August 2024. news.abplive.com/news/world/bangladesh-chief-adviser-muhammad-yunus-bats-for-social-businesses-financial-systems-global-south-summit-1710961.

⁴³ Banerjee, Shamik. "Bangladesh Student Leaders Reject Army Rule after Hasina's Exit, Demand 'Transfer Power to National Interim Govt.'" *Times Now*, 5 August 2024. www.timesnownews.com/world/asia/bangladesh-student-leaders-reject-army-rule-after-hasinas-exit-demand-transfer-power-to-national-interim-govt-article-112292660.

accepted by the army chief.⁴⁴ This caretaker government now includes student leaders who have been allocated important portfolios.⁴⁵

A discredited AL, weak BNP, restricted BJI—and popular discontent with the major political parties—have together created a conducive environment for a new student-led party⁴⁶ to emerge in Bangladesh. Muhammad Yunus' long-standing political ambitions, which first surfaced in 2007,⁴⁷ could fit well with a student-majority political party. At this time there are also rumours⁴⁸ of the formation of a new student-led political party.

Army

The army has historically been a key political player in Bangladesh. Their first tryst⁴⁹ with politics emerged with the assassination of Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. Soon after, General Ziaur Rahman, a popular figure from the Liberation War, assumed political control.⁵⁰ The army controlled the political landscape directly or indirectly⁵¹ till 2007, in the form of either military rule or military-backed

⁴⁴ “Student Protesters Back Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus as Interim Govt’s Chief Advise” *The Times of India*, 6 August. 2024. timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/student-protesters-back-nobel-laureate-muhammad-yunus-as-interim-govts-chief-adviser/articleshow/112302943.cms.

⁴⁵ “Bangladesh’s new interim government: know who’s who.” *The Hindu*, 9 August 2024. www.thehindu.com/news/international/bangladesh-unrest-know-whos-who-in-interim-government/article68505107.ece.

⁴⁶ “Bangladesh yearns for new political force amidst uncertainty post-‘Monsoon Revolution’.” *Hindustan Times*, 30 August 2024. www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/bangladesh-yearns-for-new-political-force-amidst-uncertainty-post-monsoon-revolution-101724999382205.html.

⁴⁷ Islam, Arafatul. “Why Is Bangladesh Cracking down on Nobel Laureate Yunus?” *Dw.Com*, 7 September 2023. www.dw.com/en/why-is-bangladesh-cracking-down-on-nobel-laureate-yunus/a-66744299.

⁴⁸ “Bangladesh student protesters plan new party to cement their revolution.” *The Times of India*, 16 August 2024. timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/bangladesh-student-protesters-plan-new-party-to-cement-their-revolution/articleshow/112564633.cms.

⁴⁹ Chauhan, Alind. From killing Mujib in 1975 to ‘taking responsibility’ in 2024: the role of the army in Bangladesh.” *The Indian Express*, 7 August 2024. indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/role-of-army-in-bangladesh-9496610/.

⁵⁰ Sahoo, Parshuram, and Visvhanathan Arun. 2023. “Civil-Military Relations in Bangladesh: From Dominant Military Control to Dominant Civilian Control.” *Journal of Polity & Society*. 15(2): 68.

⁵¹ Chauhan, Alind. “From killing Mujib in 1975 to ‘taking responsibility’ in 2024: the role of the army in Bangladesh.” *The Indian Express*, 7 August 2024. indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/role-of-army-in-bangladesh-9496610/.

governments.⁵² Their past experience of running the country took a toll on their public standing⁵³ and image. So, during Hasina's tenure, they took a backseat and supported the government.

The 2024 student-led protests gave the army another opportunity to step into the political arena. After several days of following government orders, the army refused to enforce a government-ordered lockdown, and decided to discontinue its support to the forceful suppression of the protests. As the protestors marched towards Dhaka, the army, while withdrawing support from the government, ensured Hasina a safe exit from the country. Army Chief General Waker Uz Zaman then announced the formation of an interim government.

Like the AL, the longer it takes to conduct fresh elections in Bangladesh, the more time there is for the army to gain a foothold.⁵⁴

Major External Players

Five external players and their interests are likely to be affected by the ongoing turmoil and change in leadership in Bangladesh.

India

India views Bangladesh as a relatively stable partner in a neighbourhood that features strained relations with China and Pakistan; volatility in Myanmar; economic turmoil in Sri Lanka; and political shifts in Nepal and the Maldives. Though the relationship isn't without its ups and downs, Dhaka is of great consequence to India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy. Over the past two decades—nearly congruous with Sheikh Hasina's 15-year tenure—the two countries have worked together to strengthen relations, with a focus on **border security, defence cooperation, trade, and infrastructure and connectivity.**

Border security

India's 4,096 km, porous land border with Bangladesh has a history of being fraught with security issues.⁵⁵ For a long time, Bangladesh was reluctant to address India's two main security concerns:

⁵² Brewster, David. "Bangladesh's new military-led government has a tough job ahead." *Lowy Institute*, 1 October 2019. www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/bangladesh-s-new-military-led-government-has-tough-job-ahead.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "Bangladesh unrest: Longer the interim govt stays in power, higher the risk of army's political involvement, says Kugelman" *The Economic Times*, 11 April 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/bangladesh-unrest-longer-the-interim-govt-stays-in-power-higher-the-risk-of-armys-political-involvement-says-kugelman/articleshow/112436498.cms?from=mdr.

⁵⁵ Rizve, Saqlain. "The Deadly Border between Bangladesh and India." *The Diplomat*, 23 February 2024. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/the-deadly-border-between-bangladesh-and-india/#:~:text=Bangladesh%20and%20India%20share%20a,Mizoram%2C%20Meghalaya%2C%20and%20Tripura>.

granting refuge⁵⁶ to insurgent groups from northeast India as well as transit⁵⁷ to Pakistan-linked militant organisations in Bangladesh, to carry out acts of terrorism and other subversive activities in India. When Hasina came to power in 2009, India and Bangladesh began actively cooperating⁵⁸ on those issues. This progress is now at risk with political uncertainty in Bangladesh and questions about how the new leadership will prioritise these issues. This crisis could see spillover effects for border security with a potential influx of refugees.⁵⁹

Defence cooperation

Defence hasn't been an important part of India-Bangladesh ties, though the two countries signed their first defence agreement in 1972. This has changed fairly recently, with regular prime minister-level visits, joint military training and exercises (both bilateral and multilateral), humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) drills,⁶⁰ and importantly, supply of military hardware from India. In 2019, India extended a USD 500 million defence line of credit to Bangladesh to procure military hardware.⁶¹

India's recent move to explore⁶² defence industrial cooperation with Bangladesh is aimed at strengthening the relationship. It has another potential advantage: helping India address⁶³ China's involvement⁶⁴ in supporting Bangladesh's modernisation drive.

⁵⁶ "Why Khaleda Zia's Return Could Be a Challenge for India." *The Economic Times*, 12 August 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/why-khaleda-zias-return-could-be-a-challenge-for-india/articleshow/112406665.cms?from=mdr.

⁵⁷ Bhattacharjee, Joyeeta. "India-Bangladesh Defence Cooperation: Coming of Age, At Last?" *Observer Research Foundation*, July 2018. www.orfonline.org/public/uploads/posts/pdf/20230821133954.pdf.

⁵⁸ "India and Bangladesh Border Guards Plan to Step up Coordination to Reduce Crimes." *Hindustan Times*, 10 March 2024. www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-and-bangladesh-border-guards-plan-to-step-up-coordination-to-reduce-crimes-101710010241339.html.

⁵⁹ Peri, Dinakar. "Military-to-Military Cooperation in Question as Political Crisis Continues in Bangladesh." *The Hindu*, 7 August 2024. www.thehindu.com/news/national/military-to-military-cooperation-in-question-as-political-crisis-continues-in-bangladesh/article68493918.ece.

⁶⁰ "Navies of India and Bangladesh Conduct Joint Exercise." *The Hindu*, 10 November 2023. www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/navies-of-india-and-bangladesh-conduct-joint-exercise/article67520882.ece.

⁶¹ Laskar, Rezaul H, and Singh, Rahul. "India Eyes Bangladesh as Market for Range of Military Hardware." *Hindustan Times*, 3 January 2023. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-eyes-bangladesh-as-market-for-range-of-military-hardware-101672753197985.html>

⁶² "India-Bangladesh Shared Vision for Future: Enhancing Connectivity, Commerce and Collaboration for Shared Prosperity" [www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl%2F37897%2FIndiaBangladesh Shared Vision for Future Enhancing Connectivity Commerce and Collaboration for Shared Prosperity](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl%2F37897%2FIndiaBangladesh+Shared+Vision+for+Future+Enhancing+Connectivity+Commerce+and+Collaboration+for+Shared+Prosperity).

If a new dispensation in Bangladesh is more pro-China, MoUs and defence cooperation agreements⁶⁵ signed by Hasina and Modi as well as joint military exercises such as Sampriti (armies) and Bongosagar (navies) could see temporary discontinuation, or be impacted in other ways.

Trade

Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is Bangladesh's second biggest partner in Asia after China. Their total bilateral trade amounted to USD 14.1 billion in the financial year 2023-24, with Bangladesh exporting USD 1.97 billion worth of goods to India. Since Bangladesh accounts for only 2.5 per cent of India's total merchandise exports, the situation in Bangladesh is expected to have a limited⁶⁶ impact on India's total trade volume. Both countries have actively worked towards a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)⁶⁷ and Special Economic Zones (SEZs),⁶⁸ though these efforts have seen several delays. Further delays can be expected given the political environment in Bangladesh.

Infrastructure and connectivity

Infrastructure and connectivity have played a crucial role in bilateral relations within the larger ambit of trade and people-to-people connectivity. Bangladesh and India partnered on several infrastructure and connectivity projects during Hasina's tenure.⁶⁹ These projects are important for India's Act East Policy

⁶³ Bose, Sohini. "Back on the Table': Decoding the New Delhi-Dhaka Defence Nexus." *Observer Research Foundation*, 18 July 2014. www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/back-on-the-table-decoding-the-new-delhi-dhaka-defence-nexus.

⁶⁴ Baruah, Sanjib. "India Mulls Military Supply to Step up Defence Ties with Bangladesh." *The Week*, 22 June 2024. www.theweek.in/news/india/2024/06/22/india-mulls-military-supply-to-step-up-defence-ties-with-bangladesh.html.

⁶⁵ "India Boosts Defense Ties with Bangladesh as It Tries to Become a Counterweight to China." *The Economic Times*, 22 June 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-boosts-defense-ties-with-bangladesh-as-it-tries-to-become-a-counterweight-to-china/articleshow/111189038.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

⁶⁶ "Bangladesh Crisis: How Is the Indian Economy Affected by the Political Turmoil?" *Financial Express*, 7 August 2024. www.financialexpress.com/policy/economy-bangladesh-crisis-how-is-the-indian-economy-affected-by-the-political-turmoil-3576580/.

⁶⁷ "India, Bangladesh Discuss Preparations to Start Talks for Free Trade Agreement." *The Hindu*, 1 October 2023. www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/india-bangladesh-discuss-preparations-to-start-talks-for-free-trade-agreement/article67368793.ece.

⁶⁸ "Indian Special Economic Zone in Bangladesh Faces Delays, Uncertainty" *Maritime Gateway*, 9 May 2024. www.maritimegateway.com/indian-special-economic-zone-in-bangladesh-faces-delays-uncertainty/#:~:text=The%20proposed%20Indian%20Special%20Economic,boost%20industrialization%20and%20create%20jobs.

⁶⁹ Kachari, Dev. "India's Major Infrastructure Stakes in Bangladesh after Sheikh Hasina's Ouster." *The Economic Times*, 20 August 2024. infra.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/ports-shipping/indias-major-infrastructure-stakes-in-bangladesh-after-sheikh-hasinas-ouster/112651355.

and the development of its northeastern states. Since 2016, India has provided USD 8 billion⁷⁰ in credit for the development of road, rail, shipping, and port infrastructure in Bangladesh. To enhance bilateral connectivity, several rail links projects⁷¹ have been inaugurated, bus routes⁷² opened, and port access⁷³ provided.

As a fallout of ongoing political instability in Bangladesh, India has reportedly⁷⁴ put on hold its plan to further extend the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFP) carrying diesel to Bangladesh. This will hinder energy connectivity between the two countries.

Myanmar

Despite historically amicable diplomatic relations and cultural overlap, Myanmar and Bangladesh haven't been able to unlock the true potential of their relations.⁷⁵ Two issues—border security and the Rohingya—have been critical bones of contention between them. Both issues are expected to be affected by the ongoing crisis.

Border security

Myanmar shares a 207 km, largely porous, land border with Bangladesh where drug smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal migration are prominent concerns.⁷⁶ These have become more serious since Myanmar's civil war began. Control over Myanmar's border areas fluctuates to match the constant tussle

⁷⁰ "Bangladesh Crisis: How Is the Indian Economy Affected by the Political Turmoil?" *Financial Express*, 7 August 2024. www.financialexpress.com/policy/economy-bangladesh-crisis-how-is-the-indian-economy-affected-by-the-political-turmoil-3576580/.

⁷¹ Siddiqui, Huma. "Key Connectivity and Energy Projects Strengthen India-Bangladesh Relations." *Financial Express*, 1 November 2023. www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-key-connectivity-and-energy-projects-strengthen-india-bangladesh-relations-3294096/.

⁷² "India-Bangladesh Connectivity: New Train to Operate between Rajshahi-Kolkata Soon, Bus Service to Chittagong." *Financial Express*, 23 June 2024. www.financialexpress.com/business/railways-india-bangladesh-train-bus-connectivity-new-train-to-operate-from-rajshahi-kolkata-bus-service-to-chittagong-3532370/.

⁷³ Sakib, SM Najmus. "Bangladesh Allows India to Access Its Major Ports to Transport Goods to Its Own Territory." *Anadolu Ajansı*, 26 April 2023. www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/bangladesh-allows-india-to-access-its-major-ports-to-transport-goods-to-its-own-territory/2881528.

⁷⁴ "India Halts Diesel Pipeline Extension Project Citing Political Crisis in Bangladesh." *The Business Standard*, 2 September 2024. www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/india-halts-diesel-pipeline-extension-project-citing-political-crisis-bangladesh-931276.

⁷⁵ Banerjee, Sreeparna. "The Rohingya Crisis and Its Impact on Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations." *Observer Research Foundation*, 4 December 2023. www.orfonline.org/research/the-rohingya-crisis-and-its-impact-on-bangladesh-myanmar-relations.

⁷⁶ Akhter, Samina. "Can 'border Guard' Diplomacy Strengthen Ties between Myanmar-Bangladesh?" *Modern Diplomacy*, 27 November 2022. moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/11/27/can-border-guard-diplomacy-strengthen-ties-between-myanmar-bangladesh/.

between the junta and the Ethnic Armed Organisations.⁷⁷ The escalating civil war has often spilled over⁷⁸ into Bangladesh, with artillery as well as fleeing soldiers, including Myanmar Border Guards, crossing the border. Due to this, a major share of patrolling responsibilities falls to the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). If unrest within Bangladesh leads to a sidelining⁷⁹ of this particularly sensitive border, such as by reassigning BGB platoons to maintain order in other parts of the country, it could lead to problems. For example, people fleeing the violence of Myanmar's civil war might find easier passage into Bangladesh, exacerbating the refugee issue.

Rohingya crisis

Bangladesh has taken in⁸⁰ over a million Rohingya refugees—the most in the world—since their exodus in 2017⁸¹ following genocidal⁸² atrocities by Myanmar's military. Over the years, accommodating the refugees has strained Bangladesh's resources and has even seen a rise in anti-refugee sentiment⁸³ among Bangladeshis. As a result, Bangladesh has intensified⁸⁴ its call for Rohingya repatriation to Myanmar. The repatriation issue, however, has caused tensions between both countries, with each blaming⁸⁵ the other for failures⁸⁶ such as delays and stalled procedures.

⁷⁷ Bhattacharjee, Kallol. "Myanmar's International Borders in Control of Rebel Groups: Leading Myanmar Commentator." *The Hindu*, 14 April 2024. www.thehindu.com/news/international/myanmars-international-borders-in-control-of-rebel-groups-leading-myanmar-commentator/article68062366.ece.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "229 BGB Platoons Deployed across Bangladesh", *Dhaka Tribune*, 18 July 2024. www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/352462/229-bgb-platoons-deployed-across-bangladesh.

⁸⁰ "Rohingya." *Human Rights Watch*, www.hrw.org/tag/rohingya.

⁸¹ "Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained" *UNRefugees*, 22 August 2024. www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/.

⁸² "Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar." *OHCHR*, 12 September 2018. www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf.

⁸³ Ansar, Anas, and Khaled, Abu Faisal. "From Solidarity to Resistance: Host Communities' Evolving Response to the Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh" *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, 9 July 2021. jhumanitarianaction.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41018-021-00104-9.

⁸⁴ Hatdash, Katie. "Why Is Bangladesh Encouraging Rohingya Refugees to Start a 'going Home' Campaign?" *The Diplomat*, 16 June 2022. thediplomat.com/2022/06/why-is-bangladesh-encouraging-rohingya-refugees-to-start-a-going-home-campaign/.

⁸⁵ Hossain, Md. Touhid. "Myanmar Must Stop Unjustifiable Campaign against Bangladesh on Rohingya Repatriation." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 24 November 2019. mofa.gov.bd/site/press_release/35672d18-eb9c-43dd-bc4a-bbb1c6fb084a.

⁸⁶ Zaw, Htet Naing. "Myanmar Blames Bangladesh for Rohingya Repatriation Failure." *The Irrawaddy*, 18 November 2019. www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-blames-bangladesh-rohingya-repatriation-failure.html.

Despite strong statements⁸⁷ from Sheikh Hasina and her government, the Rohingya repatriation issue remained unresolved. New leadership opens up the possibility of overcoming this impasse.⁸⁸ Adding credibility to this hope is the interim government's commitment⁸⁹ to support the Rohingya, clarifying the country's unchanged stance on the matter.

Pakistan

Bangladesh-Pakistan relations have fluctuated under different political dispensations in Dhaka. The BNP era saw stronger ties with Pakistan, which included President Musharraf's visit in which he expressed regret⁹⁰ for the "excesses" Pakistan committed during Bangladesh's liberation struggle in 1971. In contrast, AL distanced itself from Pakistan and leaned towards India. To maintain its nationalist identity, which is the core of the party's platform, AL frequently resorted to anti-Pakistan rhetoric. For example, Hasina referred to the protestors as 'razakars',⁹¹ which was used to denote West Pakistan loyalists during Bangladesh's liberation struggle, and is considered derogatory in Bangladesh.

AL's leanings explain why Pakistan would be interested in a change of government in Bangladesh. Reports⁹² even suggest that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) may have supported efforts to topple Sheikh Hasina's government. These claims have found resonance based on alleged ties⁹³ between the ISI and the BJI, whose student wing played a pivotal role in the recent student-led protests.

⁸⁷ Habib, Haroon. "End Violence, Sheikh Hasina Tells Myanmar." *The Hindu*, 12 September 2017. www.thehindu.com/news/international/end-violence-sheikh-hasina-tells-myanmar/article19671872.ece.

⁸⁸ Kugelman, Michael. "Can Muhammad Yunus Support Rohingya Refugees?" *Foreign Policy*, 12 September 2024. foreignpolicy.com/2024/09/11/bangladesh-rohingya-resettlement-muhammad-yunus-ungal/.

⁸⁹ "Bangladesh's Yunus Promises Support to Rohingya in First Policy Speech." *Al Jazeera*, 18 August 2024. www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/18/bangladeshs-yunus-promises-support-to-rohingya-in-first-policy-speech.

⁹⁰ "President Regrets '71 War Excesses: Trade Accords to Be Signed Today." *Dawn*, 29 July 2002. www.dawn.com/news/50327/president-regrets-71-war-excesses-trade-accords-to-be-signed-today.

⁹¹ Hussain, Abid. "Who Were the Razakars and Why Are They Central to Bangladesh Protests?" *Al Jazeera*, 22 July 2024. www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/22/who-were-the-razakars-and-why-are-they-central-to-bangladesh-protests.

⁹² "China, ISI behind Alleged Student-Led Protests in Bangladesh, as Pakistan Wants Anti-India Govt: Intelligence Report." *Organiser*, 6 August 2024. organiser.org/2024/08/06/250503/bharat/china-isi-behind-alleged-student-led-protests-in-bangladesh-as-pakistan-wants-anti-india-govt-intelligence-report/.

⁹³ Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy. "The Revival of ISI-Backed Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh Does Not Bode Well for India." *The Economic Times*, 7 August 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/the-revival-of-isi-backed-jamaat-e-islami-in-bangladesh-does-not-bode-well-for-india/articleshow/112327115.cms?from=mdr.

Pakistan is in fact already seeing a warming of relations, even if it is premature to read any of this as a definite strengthening of the relationship. In a recent meeting⁹⁴ with a Pakistani envoy, the Bangladesh interim government's IT minister expressed a desire to resolve lingering issues from the 1971 War, strengthen ties between the two countries, and promote democracy in South Asia.

China

Defence and economic cooperation is at the centre of the Bangladesh-China relationship. They elevated⁹⁵ ties to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership in July 2024. Bilateral trade, China's investment in projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and Bangladesh's debt repayment capabilities are at stake amid the ongoing political uncertainty in Dhaka.

Defence cooperation

China is Bangladesh's largest defence supplier, providing 73.6 per cent⁹⁶ of total defence supplies. China signed a defence cooperation agreement with Bangladesh in 2002,⁹⁷ and cooperation has progressed to the two armies holding their first joint military exercise in May 2024.⁹⁸ In 2023, Bangladesh inaugurated a USD 1.21 billion submarine base in Cox's Bazar with "considerable assistance"⁹⁹ from Beijing. Two submarines bought by Bangladesh from China are docked here. The dock is still under construction. Once completed, it is expected to dock six submarines and eight warships simultaneously.¹⁰⁰ Chinese tanks, frigates, and fighter jets all feature in Bangladesh's armed forces.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Mithu, Ariful Islam. "Bangladesh Ready to Resolve '1971 Issues with Pakistan': Minister." *Hindustan Times*, 5 September 2024. www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/bangladesh-ready-to-resolve-1971-issues-with-pak-minister-101725476736655.html.

⁹⁵ "Xi Meets Bangladeshi PM, Bilateral Ties Elevated." *Beijing Review*, 11 July 2024, www.bireview.com/World/202407/t20240711_800371475.html.

⁹⁶ Yasmin, L. 2023. "Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh's rising geopolitical agency and China's regional and global ambitions." *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 12(1). 91.

⁹⁷ Bhattacharjee, Joyeeta. "China–Bangladesh Strategic Linkages." *Observer Research Foundation*, 4 December 2023. www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/china-bangladesh-strategic-linkages.

⁹⁸ Rizve, Saqlain. "China-Bangladesh Military Exercises Signal Shifting Geopolitical Landscape." *The Diplomat*, 14 May 2024. thediplomat.com/2024/05/china-bangladesh-military-exercises-signal-shifting-geopolitical-landscape/.

⁹⁹ Slow, Maria. "Bangladesh's China-Backed Naval Dock Heightens Power Play in India's Backyard." *South China Morning Post*, 12 May 2024. www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3262317/bangladeshs-china-backed-naval-dock-heightens-power-play-indias-backyard.

¹⁰⁰ P. Funairole, Matthew, et al. "Submarine Diplomacy." *CSIS*, 17 November 2023. features.csis.org/snapshots/china-submarine-diplomacy/.

¹⁰¹ Katoch, P.C. "Chinese Missile Repair Base in Bangladesh." *SP's MAI*, 28 February 2022. www.spsmai.com/experts-speak/?id=1135&q=Chinese-Missile-Repair-Base-in-Bangladesh.

Economic cooperation

China has been Bangladesh's largest trading partner consecutively for the past 13 years,¹⁰² with bilateral trade at USD 24 billion. This is heavily tilted in China's favour. China has invested USD 1.4 billion¹⁰³ in Bangladesh since Dhaka joined BRI in 2015. China has also seen through the completion of important projects¹⁰⁴ in Bangladesh like the Dasherbandi Sewage Treatment Plant, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel, and Padma Multipurpose Bridge.

In 2018, China acquired a 25 per cent stake in Bangladesh's largest stock exchange.¹⁰⁵ Beijing is also a major source¹⁰⁶ of raw materials for Bangladesh's garment industry—this industry accounts for more than 80 per cent of the country's export revenue. As its third biggest bilateral creditor, China is also important for Bangladesh's macro-economic stability. At the end of 2023, Dhaka owed more than USD 5 billion in outstanding loans to Beijing. Dhaka pays USD 251 million in interest to Beijing per year.¹⁰⁷

China is clearly important to Bangladesh's growth: it is Dhaka's biggest trading partner, a significant investor, and crucial for the country's macroeconomic stability. Keeping this in mind, whoever comes to power in Bangladesh is unlikely to disrupt the relationship, particularly as domestic political volatility will already impact economic stability.

¹⁰² "China-Bangladesh Ties: Trade and Investment Dominate Bangladesh PM's Visit; Cooperation Deepens as Bilateral Ties Strengthen." *CGTN*, 10 July 2024. news.cgtn.com/news/2024-07-10/VHJhbnNjcmldDc5NzQ5/index.html.

¹⁰³ Xie, Kawala. "China and Bangladesh Vow to Fight External Interference and Boost Cooperation." *South China Morning Post*, 10 July 2024. www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3269975/china-and-bangladesh-pledge-fight-external-interference-and-boost-economic-cooperation.

¹⁰⁴ Wen, Yao. "China, Bangladesh Always Cooperate toward a Better Future." *China Daily*, 9 July 2024. epaper.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202407/09/WS668c736da3106431fe82cfaa.html.

¹⁰⁵ Deepak, B. R. "Hasina's Ouster in Bangladesh, and China." *The Sunday Guardian*, 18 August 2024. sundayguardianlive.com/opinion/hasinas-ouster-in-bangladesh-and-china.

¹⁰⁶ "India Boosts Defence Ties with Bangladesh in Bid to Become China Counterweight." *South China Morning Post*, 22 June 2024. www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3267664/india-boosts-defence-ties-bangladesh-it-tries-become-counterweight-china.

¹⁰⁷ Xie, Kawala. "Creditor China 'closely Monitors' Conditions in Debt-Heavy Bangladesh." *South China Morning Post*, 6 August 2024. www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3273456/creditor-china-closely-monitors-conditions-post-hasina-debt-heavy-bangladesh.

U.S.

Economic and **security cooperation** are the two most prominent aspects of the US-Bangladesh relationship. Despite occasional challenges, these areas of engagement have deepened over time, reflecting a mutual recognition of shared interests.

The US has grown to be Bangladesh's third largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching USD 10 billion in 2022, tilted in Bangladesh's favour.¹⁰⁸ The US is an important market for Bangladesh's garment industry. Over the years, this relationship has witnessed certain obstacles. The US suspended Bangladesh's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) status in 2013 due to labour rights concerns.¹⁰⁹ While Bangladesh has made attempts to improve workplace safety and labour norms, GSP reinstatement is still pending.

On the political front, the US has been critical of the Sheikh Hasina government on the grounds of human rights violations and crackdowns on members of the opposition. Bangladesh not being invited to the Summit of Democracy hosted by the US in 2021 also soured the relationship temporarily.¹¹⁰ Notably, these differences haven't hindered bilateral trade and security linkages.

After refuting Hasina's allegations of its role in her ouster,¹¹¹ the US acknowledged the Bangladesh Army's tactfulness in handling the protests and its enabling of an interim government empowered by the citizens.¹¹² Through these steps, the US is laying the foundations of a relationship with the interim government in Bangladesh. The interim government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has been received positively by the US, reflecting a clear intent to engage with Bangladesh's evolving political landscape.

¹⁰⁸ "United States (USA) and Bangladesh (BGD) trade relations." *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, n.d. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/usa/partner/bgd>.

¹⁰⁹ "Bangladesh to Request the US for Restoring GSP Privilege." *Dhaka Tribune*, 25 September 2022. www.dhakatribune.com/business/277310/bangladesh-to-request-the-us-for-restoring-gsp.

¹¹⁰ "Bangladesh left out of the US democracy summit again." *The Daily Star*, 15 February 2023. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/bangladesh-left-out-us-democracy-summit-again-3247916>.

¹¹¹ Singh, Kanishka and Pitas, Costas. "US Says it had no role in ousting of Bangladesh's Hasina". *Reuters*, 13 August 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-says-it-had-no-role-ousting-bangladeshs-hasina-2024-08-13/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20had%20no%20role%20in%20ousting,Monday%2C%20calling%20allegations%20of%20U.S.%20interference%20%22simply%20false.%22>.

¹¹² "U.S. Senate Majority Leader Urges Path to Swift Elections After Bangladesh PM Flees," *U.S. News*, August 5 2024. <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2024-08-05/us-senate-majority-leader-urges-path-to-swift-elections-after-bangladesh-pm-flees>.

The annual US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue, which began in 2012, has continued uninterrupted.¹¹³ During the ninth round of talks in 2023, the two countries discussed views on the Indo-Pacific, (then) upcoming Bangladesh elections, and the Rohingya issue.¹¹⁴ Bangladesh and the US have cooperated on law enforcement and security issues, including counterterrorism, through joint military drills and security training, as noted in their 9th bilateral security dialogue.¹¹⁵ Bangladesh's Indo-Pacific Outlook envisions “a free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive Indo-Pacific”—converging with the US' own outlook.¹¹⁶ Through these linkages and convergence on the Indo-Pacific, the US negotiates its own relationship with Bangladesh as well as the latter's proximity to China.

Overall, Bangladesh-US relations continue to be shaped by a balance of economic and security interests. While political and human rights concerns remain points of friction, both countries have demonstrated a commitment to advancing their partnership, particularly in areas where their strategic interests converge. Continued engagement through formal dialogue and security cooperation underscores the resilience of this bilateral relationship, even amid broader domestic political shifts within Bangladesh. As long as the US seeks to strengthen its presence in Asia and counterbalance China's influence, Bangladesh's strategic significance will remain intact.

Domestic Dynamics and External Stakeholder Interests

Border security

- With escalating violence in Myanmar and rising atrocities,¹¹⁷ a fresh influx of refugee-seekers over the border into Bangladesh can be expected. As BGB platoons are reassigned¹¹⁸ to maintain law and order in other parts of the country, this inflow of refugees could be harder to monitor

¹¹³ Politi, James and Reed, John. “Bangladesh-US Partnership Dialogue: Indo-Pacific, polls, Rohingya issues focused.” *The Financial Express*, 4 May 2024. <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/bangladesh-us-partnership-dialogue-indo-pacific-polls-rohingya-issues-focused>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Mahmud, Kawsar Uddin. “Growing U.S.-Bangladesh Security Cooperation: The 9th Security Dialogue.” *South Asian Voices*, 03 November 2023. <https://southasianvoices.org/us-bangladesh-security-cooperation/>.

¹¹⁶ “Indo-Pacific Outlook of Bangladesh” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh*, 2023. https://mofa.gov.bd/site/press_release/d8d7189a-7695-4ff5-9e2b-903fe0070ec9.

¹¹⁷ “UN Fears Repeat of 2017 Atrocities against Rohingyas.” *The Irrawaddy*, 24 August 2024. www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/un-fears-repeat-of-2017-atrocities-against-rohingyas.html.

¹¹⁸ “229 BGB Platoons Deployed across the Country: News Flash.” *BSS*, 18 July 2024. www.bssnews.net/news-flash/200752.

- The India-Bangladesh border is on high alert¹¹⁹ because of concerns about an influx of refugees from Bangladesh. If this were to happen, coupled with the refugee crisis from Myanmar, it could cause stress on the Indian states with international borders in this area
- Ongoing political instability in Bangladesh could indicate a return¹²⁰ of the BNP and rise of the ultra-conservative¹²¹ BJI. These developments as well as both parties' pro-Pakistan stance could be a cause for concern in India. They also raise the possibility of a potential revival¹²² of extremist and insurgent groups along the India-Bangladesh border.

Regional outlook

- Due to dwindling funds¹²³ and saturated physical spaces, Bangladesh's call for Rohingya repatriation will likely continue regardless of who is in power, keeping this bone of contention alive between Bangladesh and Myanmar
- Rising anti-India sentiment¹²⁴ in Bangladesh, if coupled with a potential shift in favour towards Pakistan depending on who comes to power in Dhaka, will have political and security consequences for India. Pakistan's high commissioner to Bangladesh called on¹²⁵ the BNP party secretary recently to discuss bilateral issues and was assured of a "level playing field" in the country, for example
- During Hasina's reign, Bangladesh managed to strike a balance between Indian and Chinese interests. India's over-reliance on its friendship with Hasina has, however, backfired, leading to a setback for nearly two decades of Indian foreign policy. The possibility of a pro-China government

¹¹⁹ Nath, Bharti Mishra. "What Sheikh Hasina's Exit, Bangladesh Crisis Mean for India Ties." *NDTV*, 5 August 2024. www.ndtv.com/india-news/sheikh-hasinas-15-year-reign-ends-impact-on-india-bangladesh-ties-6269822.

¹²⁰ "Why Khaleda Zia's Return Could Be a Challenge for India." *The Economic Times*, 12 August 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/why-khaleda-zias-return-could-be-a-challenge-for-india/articleshow/112406665.cms?from=mdr.

¹²¹ "'Jamaat-e-Islami Threat Not Just to Bangladesh but Entire West': Turkish Journalist" *The Times of India*, 23 November 2023. timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/jamaat-e-islami-threat-not-just-to-bangladesh-but-entire-west-turkish-journalist/articleshow/105437118.cms.

¹²² Pant, Harsh V. "Bangladesh's New Reality Doesn't Bode Well for India's Security." *Observer Research Foundation*, 10 August 2024. www.orfonline.org/research/bangladesh-s-new-reality-doesn-t-bode-well-for-india-s-security.

¹²³ Jamshed, Kazi Mohammad. "Who Will Bear the Financial Burden of Supporting the Rohingyas in Bangladesh?" *The Diplomat*, 30 October 2021. thediplomat.com/2021/10/who-will-bear-the-financial-burden-of-supporting-the-rohingyas-in-bangladesh/.

¹²⁴ Seli, Yeshi. "Amid Anti-India Sentiment in Bangladesh, Pakistan Tries to Fish in Troubled Waters." *The New Indian Express*, 24 August 2024. www.newindianexpress.com/world/2024/Aug/24/amid-anti-india-sentiment-in-bangladesh-pakistan-tries-to-fish-in-troubled-waters.

¹²⁵ "BNP Discusses Bilateral Issues, Regional Ties with Pak Envoy." *The Financial Express*, 24 August 2024. thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/politics/bnp-discusses-bilateral-issues-regional-ties-with-pak-envoy.

in Bangladesh has set a new stage for external actors, including India and China, to safeguard their interests and establish a new relationship with the interim government

- India's support to Hasina and AL and its alleged¹²⁶ meddling in the 2024 Bangladesh elections has deepened anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh. If Hasina is allowed to prolong her stay in India, despite mounting demand for her extradition, this sentiment could be further aggravated. Though the interim government is yet to make a formal request for her extradition, a lot will depend on India's decision to refuse or accept their request, if it is made
- China's diplomatic strategy with Bangladesh, which involves keeping channels of communication with all power centres open,¹²⁷ has worked well. There is no discernible anti-China sentiment within the country and Beijing is in a comfortable position regardless of who comes to power.

Trade and economy

- Bangladesh's political situation could lead to a decline in appetite for imports. The Indian textiles and garment industry, which constitutes 24 per cent of India's total merchandise exports to Bangladesh, is expected to be adversely affected as a result.¹²⁸ Indian cotton exports to Bangladesh, which is 35 per cent of India's global export of cotton, could also see dysfunctionalities¹²⁹ in the supply chain, such as production delay and transportation challenges. It could force job cuts in the sector and create unrest among farmers in India
- In the same vein, India could also benefit. Supply chain disruptions in Bangladesh could lead to a potential trade diversion¹³⁰ that would benefit India's textile and apparel manufacturing industry. Gains of an additional USD 300-400 million¹³¹ per month are anticipated¹³² if 10-11 per cent of

¹²⁶ Petersen, Hannah Ellis. "A Myopic Policy": India's Backing of Ousted Bangladesh Leader Sheikh Hasina Leaves It in a Bind." *The Guardian*, 3 September 2024. www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/sep/03/a-myopic-policy-indias-backing-of-ousted-bangladesh-leader-sheikh-hasina-leaves-it-in-a-bind.

¹²⁷ "China Will Keep in Touch with All Bangladesh Parties." *Daily Industry*, 14 July 2024. <https://dailyindustry.news/china-will-keep-in-touch-with-all-bangladesh-parties/>.

¹²⁸ Rai, Durgesh. "Turmoil in Bangladesh and Its Impact on India-Bangladesh Trade Ties." *The Economic Times*, 27 August 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/turmoil-in-bangladesh-and-its-impact-on-india-bangladesh-trade-ties/articleshow/112797853.cms?from=mdr.

¹²⁹ Palit, Amitendu. "Bangladesh Crisis: Implications for India-Bangladesh Economic Ties." *ISAS*, 13 August 2024. www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/bangladesh-crisis-implications-for-india-bangladesh-economic-ties/.

¹³⁰ Suneja, Kirtika. "Bangladesh Crisis: India's Garment Export Orders Likely to Increase 10-20%." *The Economic Times*, 8 August 2024. economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/bangladesh-crisis-indias-garment-export-orders-likely-to-increase-10-20/articleshow/112355692.cms?from=mdr.

¹³¹ "Bangladesh Crisis: \$300-400 MN per Month Opportunity for India's Textile Sector." *Businessworld*, 27 August 2024. businessworld.in/article/bangladesh-crisis-300-400-mn-per-month-opportunity-for-india%E2%80%99s-textile-sector-530918.

¹³² Singla, Devanshu. "Bangladesh Crisis: How the Political Turmoil Could Benefit India's Textile Industry." *Outlook Business*, 13 August 2024. www.outlookbusiness.com/news/bangladesh-crisis-how-the-political-turmoil-could-benefit-indias-textile-industry.

Bangladesh's export orders are moved to Indian textile hubs like Tiruppur. These gains will translate if India is able to address existing issues in manufacturing such as outdated labour laws and higher logistic costs due to poor infrastructure

- Disruptions to ongoing infrastructure and connectivity projects¹³³ between India and Bangladesh could temporarily halt India's development plans for states in its northeast. Any adverse impact on the progress of the Agartala-Akhaura cross-border rail link and India's access to Chittagong and Mongla ports could temporarily halt the transport of goods.

¹³³ Venkatesh, Mahua. "With Sheikh Hasina's Fall, What Happens to the Ongoing India-Assisted Infra Projects in Bangladesh?" *The Secretariat*, 6 August 2024. thesecretariat.in/article/with-sheikh-hasina-s-fall-what-happens-to-the-ongoing-india-assisted-infra-projects-in-bangladesh.



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