

Bangladesh Crisis: Ramifications on India and South Asia

B.V. Muralidhar¹, Dr B. Nagarathnam Reddy², Dr K.S.Kannan³

¹*Prof Dept. of Political Science & Public Administration Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh*

²*SVCR Govt. Degree College, Palamaner Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh*

³*Department of School Education Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh*

ABSTRACT: This article examines the ongoing political crisis in Bangladesh and its significant ramifications for India and the South Asian region. With the political landscape in Bangladesh facing instability, particularly surrounding Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership, the internal political dynamics are impacting regional security, economic ties, and geopolitical alignments. The analysis explores the historical context of Indo-Bangladeshi relations, including the challenges posed by migration, border security, and shared economic interests. It also considers the external influences of global powers like China, Pakistan, and the U.S., which are reshaping Bangladesh's strategic position in South Asia.

India's role in addressing this crisis is critical, as instability in Bangladesh could affect India's regional security, trade, and efforts to counter extremism. The article further discusses the broader geopolitical implications for South Asia, highlighting the potential shifts in alliances, trade patterns, and regional power dynamics. It concludes by emphasizing India's need for a proactive, strategic approach to safeguard its interests while fostering stability and cooperation in the region.

Key words: Political crisis, Third world, Geopolitical instability, Terrorism, Economic ties, Praetorians, BIMSTEC and SAARC

INTRODUCTION

Since 1945, the military has taken the lead in many third world political affairs. There are other factors besides military ones that make it easier for the military to get involved in a new country's internal politics. It also has to do with a state's current socio political climate. The occurrence of issues such as political institution fragility, ongoing political instability, a regime's poor economic performance, growing authoritarianism, and disagreements on crucial polity issues, among others. Frequently encourage the military to get involved in politics. The praetorian soldiers are the common term used to describe the interventionist officers. The term praetorians are commonly used to describe a situation

in which a society's military exercises autonomous political power within it through the actual or threatened use of force.

After a protracted political and military struggle against Pakistan's military junta, Bangladesh attained independence on December 16, 1971. Following the liberal model of the West, independent Bangladesh chose parliamentary democracy and placed civilian authority over the military. However, the Awami League's civilian rule came to an abrupt end on August 15, 1975, when the military violently took control of the state. The military eventually took control of Bangladesh after a string of coups and countercoups, and they did so for the next fifteen years.

The political and economic crisis currently engulfing Bangladesh presents significant challenges, not only for the country itself but also for its neighbours, particularly India, and for the broader South Asian region. Over the past decade, Bangladesh has seen remarkable economic growth, positioning itself as a rising power in South Asia. However, recent developments, including the resignation of long-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the appointment of Nobel Laureate Professor Mohammad Yunus as Chief Advisor of the interim government, have thrown the country into a state of uncertainty. For India, these changes bring both risks and opportunities, as Bangladesh is not just a key political ally but also one of its largest economic partners in the region. The crisis in Bangladesh is likely to have far reaching consequences across multiple dimensions political, economic, security, and regional diplomacy.

1. Political Instability and its Impact:

The resignation of Sheikh Hasina has sent shockwaves through South Asia. Hasina, who has ruled Bangladesh for 15 years, was seen as a reliable partner for India, particularly in maintaining regional security and fostering bilateral ties. Her government was

instrumental in curbing extremist forces, facilitating trade, and countering terrorism. With her departure, these relationships are now in flux.

a) Protests and Public Unrest

Bangladesh is currently witnessing widespread protests, particularly over job quotas and authoritarian policies. The opposition, suppressed during Hasina's tenure, is now seeking to assert itself, leading to large-scale unrest. The appointment of Professor Yunus as Chief Advisor signals an attempt to calm tensions, but it remains unclear how effective this move will be. The army is poised to take on a more prominent role, raising concerns about the return of military-backed governance or the resurgence of radical Islamist forces.

b) Loss of a Trusted Ally

Hasina's departure represents a significant loss for India. She played a crucial role in strengthening Indo-Bangladeshi ties, particularly in the areas of security, counterterrorism, and regional cooperation. Under her leadership, Bangladesh provided critical support in controlling insurgent groups operating along the Indo-Bangladesh border, which was essential for maintaining peace in India's north-eastern states. Now, with the possibility of a new administration that may not share the same level of alignment with Indian interests, there is concern that anti-India militant groups could gain ground.

2. Economic Implications:

Bangladesh has become one of India's most important economic partners in the region, with bilateral trade between the two countries reaching \$13 billion in FY 2023-24. Bangladesh has emerged as India's largest trading partner in South Asia, and India is the second-largest trading partner of Bangladesh in Asia, after China. Disruption in Trade Flows: Bangladesh's political turmoil has already begun to affect its economy. The country's garment sector, which accounts for 85% of its exports and employs over four million workers, is particularly vulnerable. The ongoing unrest has led to disruptions in supply chains, which are affecting both production schedules and export flows. Given that Bangladesh is a key player in the global garment trade, holding a 7.9% share of global clothing exports, this disruption is likely to have ripple effects across international markets. For India, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity. If Bangladesh's garment sector continues to face

disruptions, Indian textile hubs like Tiruppur stand to gain a significant portion of redirected orders, potentially bringing an additional \$300-\$400 million in monthly business.

a) Impact on Indian Investments

Indian businesses with investments in Bangladesh are also at risk. Around 25% of Bangladesh's textile manufacturing units are owned by Indian companies, and these firms may be forced to reconsider their operations if the political instability worsens. Delays in payments, disruptions in trade, and the devaluation of the Bangladeshi Taka could lead to significant losses for Indian investors. Furthermore, the ongoing negotiations around a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and Bangladesh, which could boost trade by up to 297% for Bangladesh and 172% for India, are now in jeopardy.

b) Infrastructure and Connectivity Projects

India has been a major contributor to infrastructure development in Bangladesh, providing \$8 billion in credit since 2016 for projects such as the Akhaura Agartala rail link and the Khulna-Mongla Port rail line. These projects are essential for enhancing connectivity between India's northeastern states and the rest of the country, as well as for facilitating trade with Southeast Asia. However, the current unrest threatens these crucial connections, potentially delaying the completion of ongoing projects and disrupting trade routes.

3. Security Concerns:

One of the most pressing concerns for India is the potential for increased security risks along its border with Bangladesh. The porous 4,096 km border between the two countries has been a conduit for smuggling and illegal immigration, issues that have been managed, though not eliminated, under Hasina's rule.

a) Threat of Extremism

The political vacuum in Bangladesh could allow radical Islamist groups to regain influence. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which has historically been less friendly to India, and its ally Jamaat-e-Islami, which has ties to extremist elements, may seize this opportunity to push their agenda. For India, this raises the spectre of increased militant activity, not only within Bangladesh but also across its borders. During Hasina's tenure, Bangladesh acted as

a bulwark against extremist forces like Pakistan's ISI networks, which sought to destabilize India. With the current political uncertainty, there is a risk that these networks may attempt to re-establish themselves.

b) Border Security and Migration

The instability in Bangladesh could lead to a fresh wave of illegal immigration into India. Over the past decade, economic improvements in Bangladesh had helped reduce the flow of undocumented migrants. However, if the country's economic situation worsens, India may face increased pressure on its borders, particularly in the northeastern states. The Indian government will need to enhance its border security measures to prevent an influx of refugees and potential extremists.

4. Regional Geopolitics - A New Power Struggle:

The turmoil in Bangladesh also has significant implications for regional geopolitics. China and the U.S., both of which have strategic interests in Bangladesh, are likely to play a role in shaping the country's future.

a) China's Expanding Influence

China has long sought to expand its influence in South Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and Bangladesh is a key part of that strategy. With the political instability in Bangladesh, China may seize the opportunity to offer lucrative deals to the new regime, much like it has done in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. For India, this represents a serious geopolitical challenge. As China increases its economic and political foothold in Bangladesh, India will need to counterbalance this influence to maintain its strategic position in the region.

b) Western Involvement and Strategic Partnerships

India must also contend with Western criticism of its support for Sheikh Hasina, who has faced allegations of authoritarianism. As the situation in Bangladesh unfolds, India will need to strike a delicate balance between supporting democratic forces and maintaining stability in its bilateral relations. At the same time, India will need to collaborate with international partners, including the U.S., the UK, and the European Union, to ensure that the situation in Bangladesh does not lead to further destabilization in South Asia.

5. The Road Ahead:

India's approach to the crisis in Bangladesh will need to be multi-faceted, involving a combination of diplomacy, security measures, and economic adjustments.

a) Building New Alliances

India must engage with a broader spectrum of political actors in Bangladesh, beyond its traditional alliance with Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. By cultivating relationships with opposition parties and civil society groups, India can ensure that its interests are protected, regardless of which political faction comes to power.

b) Strengthening Border Security

Given the potential for increased migration and militant activity, India must bolster its security infrastructure along the border. This includes enhancing surveillance, building physical barriers where necessary, and increasing cooperation with Bangladeshi security forces to prevent cross-border infiltration.

c) Economic Diversification

India should also explore ways to diversify its economic ties with Bangladesh. In addition to trade, India could invest in sectors such as digital infrastructure and e-commerce, which are less vulnerable to political instability. Moreover, India should evaluate the feasibility of continuing negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement with Bangladesh, while also considering alternative markets in South Asia.

d) Regional Collaboration

India's leadership in regional forums such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will be crucial in managing the fallout from the crisis. By working with its neighbours and international partners, India can help stabilize Bangladesh's economy and prevent extremist elements from gaining a foothold.

ANALYSIS

The unfolding crisis in Bangladesh presents a complex set of challenges for India and the broader South Asian region. Politically, India faces the loss of a trusted ally in Sheikh Hasina, which could destabilize the region and complicate efforts to maintain security and counter extremism. Economically, disruptions in

Bangladesh's vital industries, such as textiles, have the potential to affect both regional trade and global markets, posing risks and opportunities for India. Security concerns, including border management and the possible resurgence of militant groups, necessitate a vigilant approach from Indian authorities. Geopolitically, the involvement of global powers like China and the U.S. adds another layer of complexity, with India needing to balance its interests in a rapidly shifting landscape. China's strategic investments could deepen its influence in Bangladesh, further challenging India's regional dominance. India must, therefore, take proactive steps to foster new alliances, diversify its economic ties, and strengthen its diplomatic and security measures to mitigate these risks. The situation offers India an opportunity to showcase its leadership in regional cooperation and crisis management, particularly through platforms like BIMSTEC and SAARC. By playing a constructive role in stabilizing Bangladesh, India can protect its own strategic interests and contribute to broader regional peace and development. The next phase of Indo-Bangladeshi relations will be crucial in shaping the political and economic landscape of South Asia, and India must remain engaged, adaptable, and forward-thinking in its response.

- [8] <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/bangladesh-s-political-upheaval-and-its-impact-on-india>
- [9] <https://thewire.in/south-asia/bangladesh-crisis-indias-silence-so-far-implications-and-view-from-dhaka>
- [10] Discussion in International Webinar, on 'Bangladesh Crisis: Ramifications on India and South Asia' Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Sri Venkateswara University, and SVCR Govt. Degree College, Palamaner, held on 19th September, 2024.

REFERENCES

- [1] CUTS International Report (2014), "India-Bangladesh Trade Potentiality: An Assessment of Trade Facilitation Issues", Jaipur: MS Printer.
- [2] Government of India, Annual Report (2014-15), Ministry of external Affairs, New Delhi
- [3] Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of India, Annual Report (1976-77),
- [4] Ministry of external Affairs, New Delhi Foreign Affairs Record, (February 1972), Vol. XVIII No.
- [5] IDSA Task Force Report (September 2011), "India-Bangladesh Relations: Towards Convergence", New Delhi
- [6] <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/turmoil-in-bangladesh-and-its-impact-on-india-bangladesh-trade-ties/articleshow/112797853.cms?from=mdr>
- [7] <https://www.indiatoday.in/global/story/how-bangladeshs-economic-crisis-impacts-regional-geopolitics-and-indias-interests-2594467-2024-09-05>