



India's Options in Post-Hasina Bangladesh

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Summary

On 5 August 2024, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled the country in the face of severe protests and violence. Her exit from Bangladesh hampers India's bilateral ties with the country and may also have an impact on regional political architecture. To deal with the political challenge in Bangladesh, India must wait before deciding on the nature of its engagement with Dhaka.

The abrupt exit of Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from the country on 5 August 2024 has raised concerns in New Delhi over its present and future relations with Dhaka. India is also worried about the consequences of the unrest in Bangladesh on the subcontinent's political architecture. [C Raja Mohan rightly observed](#) that the political shift in Bangladesh could "rattle the geopolitics of [Indian] subcontinent".

In the politically challenging situation in Bangladesh, India may take five measures to maintain its interests. First, diplomacy is not always about making statements and taking one side or the other. Staying mute, making general statements or selective mutism are also effective ways to deal with severe political crises. Bangladesh's unrest is one of those situations where mutism or selective mutism is required. In democracy, the opposition parties are also part of the political institution and the state's structure. Hence, an [all-party meeting](#) on the Bangladesh crisis was the first correct step taken by the Indian government. Engaging all political parties on the issue will help them to understand the situation's sensitivity and prevent them from making any statement detrimental to India's larger interest. Also, realising their juxtaposing role, several of India's mainstream media, YouTube influencers and social media users should weigh the effect of their opinions on the Bangladesh situation before making them public.

Second, India must accept the uncomfortable truth that despite close bilateral ties with Bangladesh under Hasina, strong 'anti-India' sentiment prevailed among a large section of Bangladesh's population. Such sentiment rode on the perception that New Delhi helped Hasina to remain in power. Soon after the January 2024 elections, the ['India Out' campaign](#) was initiated by Hasina's opponents, calling on the people to boycott Indian goods. Hasina managed various forms of ['anti-India' sentiments](#) during her rule. Her opponents, such as workers from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Islamists, have linked Bangladesh's Hindu minority to India. In the past, they carried out [systemic violence against the Hindus](#) in the country. Even during the current unrest, many Hindu temples were targeted by the protestors. In addition to temples, the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre in Dhaka was [damaged during the violence](#). At the same time, the house of popular Hindu musician, Rahul Ananda, in Dhaka was looted and set on fire [by the mob](#). The violence occurred despite appeals made by Shafiqur Rahman, President of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Tarique Rahman, acting chairman of the BNP and the student leaders to maintain communal harmony in the country. Even the head of the interim government, Muhammad Yunus, has [threatened](#)

[to resign](#) if attacks against the minorities are not stopped. There are also disturbing reports saying that many Bangladeshis, mainly Hindus, are trying to cross into the [Indian side of the border](#). To deal with such existing sentiments, a changed Indian policy towards Bangladesh must have enough space to engage with the different important political actors and civil society leaders.

Third, during Hasina's tenure as the country's prime minister, India and Bangladesh inked important agreements, such as the Land Boundary Agreement 2011, to resolve their bilateral disputes. Some of these agreements have been severely criticised by a section of the Bangladeshi population, terming them as "favouring" only India. The opposition has repeatedly accused Hasina of "[selling the country to India](#)". Her relations with India could be a reason for her choosing to land in New Delhi after her resignation. Interestingly, Hasina's son, [Sajeeb Wajed Joy](#), told the news agency, *Reuters*, that his mother "never officially resigned [from the country's prime minister position]. She didn't get the time". Although nothing is absolute in politics, the reality is that Hasina is least likely to return to office. [Joy also said](#) that his mother "was going to retire after this term [2024- 2029] anyway".

Meanwhile, Yunus took the oath on 8 August 2024. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent a [congratulatory message](#) to Yunus and the Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka, Pranay Verma, attended [his swearing-in ceremony](#). Modi's message and Verma's attendance show that India is ready to engage with the interim government. However, it is unclear how long the interim government will be in power. Also, how effective and decisive will Yunus be in the interim government? Hence, India should wait until a clear political picture emerges in Dhaka.

Fourth, a few cases in the world's history show a political hardliner or ideologically right-wing group using protest as an opportunity to grab political power. In this situation, the Islamists and the BNP may attain political significance. The head of the BNP and political opponent of Hasina, Khaleda Zia, has been released from her [house arrest](#). Due to New Delhi's closeness to Hasina, the power elites opposing the old regime may create hurdles for India to pursue some of its economic and political goals. If it happens, New Delhi must wait and watch before imagining any conclusion. India must realise that due to its geographical spread, political position in the region, significance in Bangladesh's economy and presence in the everyday life of many Bangladeshis, anyone in charge of the affairs in Dhaka cannot afford to maintain distance from New Delhi for a long time. He/she will eventually have to engage with India.

Finally, India is paying a political price for highly depending on Hasina. Due to India's closeness to Hasina, any new government in Dhaka would prefer other foreign capitals over New Delhi. Regional and extra-regional countries may use the situation in Bangladesh as a given opportunity to spread their wings in South Asia. To meet such a challenge, India should bide its time and keep its diplomatic options open to engage with the new government without any baggage and with a fresh mind. New Delhi should [exercise caution](#) and wait and watch before taking any step. Many political developments are yet to unfold.

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