

Precarious Bangladesh and Indian Indifference

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Summary

Bangladesh is facing political instability, with ongoing governance issues and violent unrest following the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Recent violence, including the destruction of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's house, reflects the growing tensions. Hasina's activism from exile in India has further fueled divisions. India's disapproval is clear in its distancing from the interim government, but both countries would benefit from engaging with each other. Finding common ground based on mutual interests is crucial for regional stability and to prevent external actors from exploiting the situation.

The demolition of 32 Dhanmondi, Dhaka, which had housed Bangladesh's first prime minister, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on 5 February 2025, signalled the seething deep-rooted anger in large sections of Bangladeshis against Mujibur's daughter and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and all that she represents. Several of the houses of the Awami League members and Hasina's relatives were attacked and razed down too in this latest phase of fierce outbursts. It was this growing public anger that led to Hasina fleeing to India on 5 August 2024. Ever since the students' uprising against Hasina's government, mobocracy has found greater space in the Bangladeshi political landscape.

Ostensibly the latest outburst was caused by the announcement of Hasina's online address to the Awami League youth members. For the enraged public, the ouster of Hasina has not been enough – they want to obliterate all that stands associated with Awami League. The interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, which took over in early August 2024, has been trying to hold a divided polity together, but Bangladesh looks precariously poised.

The question over reforms and elections has become a point of disagreement amongst the various stakeholders. The Bangladesh Nationalist Political party is all set to fill the parliament and it would rather have the Awami League [as the opposition](#) rather than its erstwhile partner, Bangladesh Jamaat Party, which has gathered remarkable momentum in the last few months. Jamaat's electoral space has been narrow, and despite its attempts to invigorate its image, its popular appeal has limits in the face of its hardline reputation and intransigent position about the Liberation War.

The Liberation War continues to consume Bangladesh. Over the past 53 years, the two main political parties have been leveraging the historical milestone to substantiate their legitimacy. However, the single most Awami League fixation on building a political narrative largely around Mujibur Rahman, overlooking the contribution of other actors, including the Mujibnagar government that coordinated the war efforts has caused great consternation, especially among the present generation. It will be a limited understanding to suggest that the youth are denigrating all symbols of the Liberation War that stood for secularism and pluralism and are falling back on only Islamic symbolism. They wish to re-examine the one-

sided Awami League's narrative. The apparent ongoing domination of political narrative by Islamic political parties and groups has raised more questions than answers. The popularity of Yunus seems on the wane and the initial public support for change has now been replaced with impatience with the spiralling price rise of essential goods, return of road blockades culture and rampant anti-social incidents.

According to the last census, the total population of Bangladesh stands at [169.8 million and 27.96 per cent](#) between 15 and 29 years. Understandably, this group will dominate the political narrative in the years ahead. This group not only has significant numbers that could not cast their vote in the last three elections, given the [inherent boycott and rigging](#), but has also been witnesses to the excesses by the ruling class. They have not only been instrumental in the uprising that not only dramatically changed the political landscape but are also in the forefront of setting forth the agenda of the nation. Bangladesh needs drastic reforms to make sure it does not walk that path again, but whether the interim government or an elected government is best suited for the task has to be an internally inclusive decision. The anti-Hasina mood has invariably evoked anti-India rants too, given their historical proximity. Even in the recent demolitions, chants surrounding Hasina and India found reverberations across many parts of Bangladesh. The Indian foreign ministry has [condemned the attacks](#) as it has done several times in the last six months. However, what does it portend for the future of bilateral ties?

For India, this extra-constitutional Interim government never really held any promise and, apart from the initial contact, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has avoided any occasion to meet Yunus. The Indian foreign secretary visit to Dhaka in December 2024 did offer some bilateral hope but Hasina's political opportunism while in exile has muddied the sentiments further. Several Awami League leaders, having fled Bangladesh, continue to exert influence through several campaigns of disinformation and deliberate guile.

The current situation perhaps needs another approach. India and Bangladesh will have to work together as there is no alternative. They have more in common than any other two neighbours in the South Asian region. Understandably, India is unlikely to extradite Hasina but allowing her to be politically active while in exile clearly adds to the Bangladeshi angst. While India and Bangladesh have differences, ignoring them will only create further space for external players. Embracing Bangladesh's new realities and engaging the youth and stakeholders is key for India. Meanwhile, Bangladesh must move beyond retributive politics to ensure stability. Disengagement can never be an option for India and Bangladesh.

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