



RESEARCH JOURNAL

Department of Political Science, The Assam Valley School
Winters' Semester, 2024-25, Volume 7

THINK TANK



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Department of Political Science

Winters' Semester, 2024-25, Volume 7



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Publisher: The Assam Valley School, P. O. Balipara, Assam-784101.

EDIT, EDICT



As I write this, our neighbouring country of Bangladesh is facing a watershed moment in its history, with the people taking it upon themselves to fight for government accountability and systematic change. The movement brings back to the forefront of our minds the reality of democracy and what we as people can accomplish if we set our minds to it in the face of injustices committed on us by individuals in big suits and cushy chairs. This short edition of ThinkTank, a special on Bangladesh, centres on the movement's spread across the country, the many perspectives on it, and the implications for the 21st century. I am overjoyed to introduce the seventh edition of ThinkTank, which looks deeper into a nation at a crossroads, with the hope of emerging stronger and brighter. Happy reading!

Atoti Zhimomi
Student Editor



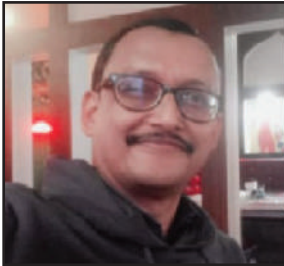
DEDICATION

In 2024, the country had to deal with one of the most heinous rape cases in its history: the Arbhaya or RG Kar Medical case. We at ThinkTank dedicate Volume 7 of our journal to Arbhaya as the country grieves the unjust death of a brilliant young doctor. We also stand in solidarity with her close family and friends, who must feel that the loss is unimaginable, and we hope that the perpetrators of one of the most heinous crimes in the nation will receive the justice they deserve. This edition of ThinkTank remembers the importance of justice and the ideals of democracy itself, which are enshrined in the ideas of equality, fraternity, and justice, as well as the unfortunate Arbhaya case and the lesson that it teaches, ensuring that the nation as a whole never makes the same mistake again in which a woman passes on after enduring the most heinous torture.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/rg-kar-case-medics-to-move-court-as-police-deny-them-permission-to-hold-protest/articleshow/116407923.cms>

The views expressed in the articles are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of The Assam Valley School.

THE RAGE AGAINST ENTITLEMENT



The reason for the students coming out in full strength against the reservation policy in Bangladesh validates why unjust entitlements cannot stand the test of time. The policy allowed reservations to a large chunk of the entitled clique based

on the contribution of the forefathers in the liberation struggle. Bangladesh is nearly three decades old, and the contribution of the freedom fighters had been duly acknowledged. The moot question is the need to extend this reservation to a large section thereby marginalizing meritocracy has been the triggering point. The ruling party as the inheritor of a legacy built up this unjust system and students against discrimination were left to vent out their anger on the streets. The way the protest manifested and the violence which followed raises serious questions on the legitimacy of a government which intended to rule by force.

The need for the ruling elite to listen to the masses and their genuine plea is paramount for governance and a defiant Sheikh Hasina ignoring the strictures of the Bangladesh Supreme Court indicated the perils of a government ruling by arrogance. The ruling establishment was dismantled with the protestors finally having their way. The interim government is a new entity with the mammoth task to restore order, economy and the value of inclusiveness with security for the minorities. Students at the helm of affairs have the power to change the political destiny as has been indicated by earlier events like the Velvet Revolution. The state of Bangladesh needs a clear direction, mature leadership, and political wisdom to be back on track towards growth and development.



Mr. Thajek Ali Hazanika
Teacher Editor



Tanveer Ahmed

Class XI, Science



THE QUOTA SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH AND THE CURRENT BACKLASH

[Tanveer critiques the discriminatory quota policy of Bangladesh with his insight and the chain of events that followed.]

Discrimination in Bangladesh has been a burning issue for many years, especially the quota system that was implemented to provide government jobs to specific groups. Launched in 1972, the system at the beginning reserved 30 percent of civil service jobs for the children and grandchildren of freedom fighters who participated in the 1971 Liberation War against Pakistan. Later, the quotas increased to 10% of women, 10% of underdeveloped districts, 5% of ethnic minorities, and 1% of disabled people, which is 56% of the government positions.

The justification for the quota system was to give chances to the neglected groups and to compensate for the struggles of freedom fighters. But as the number of direct descendants of freedom fighters reduced, there were fears that the system could be abused to offer political jobs. Opponents of the quota claimed that the system discriminated against some people and rewarded others based on their ethnicity despite the fact that the benefits of the quota extended to third generation ethnic descendants.

In 2018, Bangladesh saw large scale students' demonstrations for the abolition of the quota system in the government jobs. The government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League party finally scrapped the quotas in response to the protests. The students thought that they have accomplished



PROTESTS IN BANGLADESH

<https://www.google.com/>

[url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.indiatoday.in%2Fworld%2Fstory%2Fbangladesh-fresh-protests-dhaka-protesters-demand-increasing-age-limit-government-jobs-2609129-2024-10-01&psig=AOvVaw3rUFeWH-gQjhxqFwoTCJDmwMqI9IqDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE](https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/bangladesh-fresh-protests-dhaka-protesters-demand-increasing-age-limit-government-jobs-2609129-2024-10-01&psig=AOvVaw3rUFeWH-gQjhxqFwoTCJDmwMqI9IqDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE)

what they have set out to do, but this was not the case.

The High Court of Bangladesh on 5th June 2024 again restored the 30% quota for freedom fighters' descendants stating that its removal was 'unconstitutional, illegal and inoperative'. This decision



PROTESTS IN BANGLADESH

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/bangladesh-opposition-vows-continue-protests-despite-autocratic-crackdown-2023-11-29/>

with the demonstrators claiming that the quota infringes on the constitution on employment equity. The demonstrations were soon extended to universities across the country and students called for an urgent parliamentary action to repeal the quota system.

The current criticism over the quota system is, in fact, a manifestation of political struggle in Bangladesh. The

“...THE REALITY IS THAT BUSINESS AND POLITICAL FUNDING HAS ALWAYS WORKED HAND IN HAND.”

incumbent government of Bangladesh led by the Awami League party which has been in power for the last 15 years claims that it is only the rightful inheritor of the spirit of the Liberation War and the independence of Bangladesh. The main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has alleged that the government has been using quota system to favor its supporters.

The protests have degenerated into violence with students confronting groups believed to be affiliated to the ruling party and more than 400 people have been injured. To

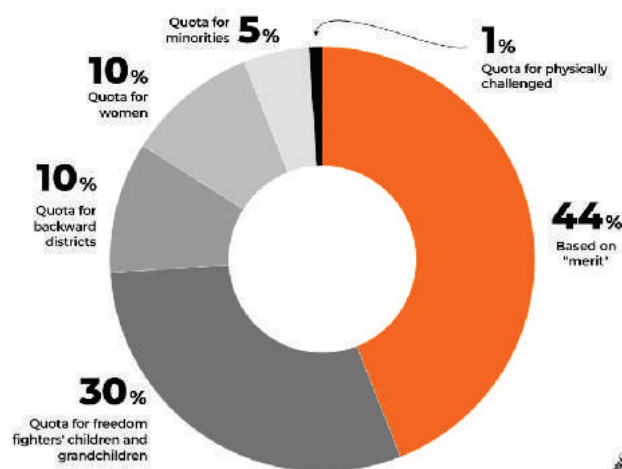


this, the government has resorted to switching off mobile communication networks and the internet in the country. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has requested the Supreme Court to reconsider the High Court’s ruling while the government has agreed to end the quota system but the students want the quota system to be removed through legislation.

Unemployment issue will be important as Bangladesh is in the process of graduating from the Least Developed Country by 2026. The quota system has been a subject of debate for many years and the recent protests show that the

Bangladesh's job quota system

Bangladesh's quota system reserves more than half of well-paid civil service posts for specific groups, including children of fighters in the country's 1971 war of independence from Pakistan, totalling hundreds of thousands of government jobs.



JOB QUOTA SYSTEM

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/7/18/who-are-the-protesters-demanding-an-end-to-job-quotas-in-bangladesh>

youth wants to be given a chance but at the same time needs the less privileged to be given a fair shot at employment. It will be crucial for Bangladesh to maintain its progress and stability in the future to develop a culture of more discussion and come up with a solution that will be fair to merit and at the same time, be fair to the past discriminations.

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Rokovor Nakhro
Class XI, Humanities

Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement

[The discriminatory reservation policy of Bangladesh is examined by Rokovor as he seeks to understand the root of unjust entitlement.]

INTRODUCTION:

The Anti-discrimination students' movement is a students' movement against the "Freedom Fighter Quota". It was founded on 1st July, 2024. The quota system in Bangladesh, established after the country gained independence in 1971, reserved government jobs for children of freedom fighters. Initially, 30% of jobs were set aside, but this was later increased to 56%, sparking controversy. Critics argued that the system perpetuated privilege over merit, allowed unqualified individuals to benefit from fake freedom fighter certificates, and neglected other marginalized groups. In 2018, massive student-led protests demanded reform or abolition of the quota system. In response, the government scrapped the quota for first- and second-class government jobs and introduced a new "Freedom Fighter's Children Quota" with a 30% reservation. It was represented in the parliament recently but was opposed by students resulting in the huge riots. The Anti-discrimination students' movement formed a coordination team consisting of 158 members consisting of 49 coordinators and 109 co-coordinators from various educational institutes based in Dhaka. Since its establishment, the organization has seen its driving forces. Among which are Nahid Islam, Rifat Rashid, Sarjis Alam, Hasnat Abdullah,



Asif Mahmud, Abu Bakr, Arif Sohel and several others. Its main objective is to transform systematic discrimination and governance. This group consists of student leaders and important student figures who are protesting nationwide against the job quota system. Students, colleges, universities and educational institutions all over Bangladesh are protesting and demanding a reform of the job quota system. According to them, the students has come under the attack of the from the government and its allies because much of the government jobs have been reserved for the grandchildren of the freedom fighters of Bangladesh. The decision of Bangladesh Prime minister Sheikh Hasina to reserve 30% government jobs for the grandchildren of the freedom fighters of Bangladesh amidst its acute economic conditions have caused the students to protest and topple her government of 15 years in a matter of just 2 months and forcing her to resign, abdicate her power and seek refuge in India. She fled to India on 5th August as a group of student protesters, public and political opponents marched on to her official residence demanding her resignation. The protesters have shut down schools, colleges and educational institutions in anger and protest. The protestors continuously organised four-point demands on 1st July in protest against the

quota of reservation of jobs. From July 2 to 6, students of various institutions held protests, human chains, highway blockades, etc. On July 7th, students called for the Bangla Blockade under the banner of anti-discrimination student movement, under which students staged demonstrations, marches, civil disobedience and blockades of highways and railways.

THE TRIGGERING POINT:

Abu Sayed, a student activist, one of the major organizers of the organizers was shot dead while participating in the protest by two policemen on 16th July without any sort of authorization or order from higher officials. He was a coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement and played a major role. On 16th July, the students held a



STUDENTS PROTESTING

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/anti-discrimination-student-movement-to-hold-resistance-week>

protest in front of the Begum Rokeya University where the protesters and the policemen had a huge clash and the police fired tear gas and baton-charged the protesters to discharge them. Most of the students left fearing their live but Abu stood firm with his arms outstretched in the face of the police in protest while the police shot in the opposite

direction but he was shot four times and died on the spot before he could be taken to a hospital. Abu Sayed left behind a great legacy and the poet Shahidullah Faraji wrote a poem after him called "Valiant Abu" referring to him as the hero of this generation. The name of Rangpur Park intersection was changed to "Shaheed Abu Sayed Chatwar" by the students in his honour.

STATE RESPONSE:

The protest has been sparked by long resentment over the quota system of the reservation of seats that saw 56% of the government jobs in positions reserved in Bangladesh for various groups including 30% for the descendants of the war fighters in the war of independence in Bangladesh in 1971. This quota system has proved an enormous barrier to highly coveted civil service positions for the country's large youth population, many of whom are unemployed. It had also become a subject of controversy due to how many of those quota jobs went to supporters of the ruling Awami League party. Under immense pressure from an earlier student mobilization over the issue, Hasina abolished the entire quota system in 2018. In the month of June this year, the country's high court ruled the move illegal, resulting in a round of fresh revolts around the country. The Bangladesh Chhatra League – the armed wing of the Awami League – began attacking students with tear gas and live bullets, with support from the police. The Rapid Action Battalion, a controversial paramilitary group with a history of extrajudicial killings, torture a n d e n f o r c e d



disappearances, was also deployed.

STUDENTS MOBILIZE:

After a video of one of the first to be killed – a university student named Abu Sayeed – circulated online, more joined the protests, leading to a further violent crackdown by police and armed groups. It is estimated that about 266 people, mostly students, were killed in the protests, including at least 32 children. The Anti-Discrimination student movement stated that it will



Last picture of Abu Sayed protesting with his arms stretched wide out in front of the police before being martyred.

https://tdsimages.thedailystar.net/sites/default/files/styles/big_202/public/images/2024/07/18/abu_sayed.jpg

hold a "March to Dhaka" recently on 5th August to raise its one-point demand that is the resignation of the resignation of the Sheikh Hasina-led government. The organization urged the students and people across the nation to participate in

the march. The coordinators have confirmed their march. The march was rescheduled, the protestors said that the march was rescheduled due to the deaths of numerous people and the current situation. Earlier on August 3, the organisers of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement announced a single-point demand for the resignation of Sheikh Hasina and her cabinet members. Nahid Islam, one of the key organisers, announced the demand at a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar. The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement's announcement came after Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina urged the agitating students to sit with her at Gono Bhaban to end the violence focused on the quota reform protests to which she replied, 'Doors of Gono Bhaban are open. I want to sit with the agitating students and listen to them. I want no conflict'. Sheik Hasina further assured that trials of each killing during the anti-quota protest would be held. She also announced her decision to cancel the proposal, universal pension scheme "Prottoy" for universities, and autonomous state-owned organisations.

MARTYRS' MARCH - IMPACT:

On the 4th September, Sarjis Alam, one of the main leading coordinators of the organization addressed the media at a press conference at Dhaka university saying that it will hold a 'Shahidi March' on 5th September. The march was organised to honour the martyrs of the uprising marking the one month of the fall of the autocratic Awami League regime led by Sheikh Hasina on 5th August. The coordinators present there along with Sarjis Alam requested family members of those who were

martyred in the student and public movements of July and August to participate in the march. Sheik Hasina resigned and fled the country on 5th August. She resigned as prime minister of Bangladesh following weeks of protests by the students and public against the government job quotas which surged into a movement eventually demanding her resignation. The Shahidi March, was a pivotal moment in the ongoing quota reform movement in Bangladesh. As protesters took to the streets, their demands for a fair and merit-based system echoed through the nation. The outcome of the march remains uncertain, but its potential consequences are far-reaching. The event may have increased awareness about the quota crisis, prompting the government to respond with tangible reforms or initiatives to address the concerns of the protesters. The march could also escalate protests nationwide, putting pressure on the government to act swiftly and decisively. Moreover, international attention may be drawn to the crisis, potentially leading to diplomatic efforts to resolve the issue and ensure

a peaceful and democratic solution. Further negotiations between the



One of the coordinators, Sarjis Alam on 4th September addressing the media about the "Shahidi March"

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/357224/anti-discrimination-student-movement-to-hold>

government and protesters may ensue, potentially resulting in a resolution or compromise that addresses the underlying issues driving the movement. Ultimately, the march's impact will likely be shaped by the government's response and the protesters' continued efforts to bring about meaningful change and ensure a brighter future for Bangladesh.

The Shahidi Mach began at the Dhaka University's Raju sculpture on Thursday in memory of the deceased souls in the protest. Participants in the March carried national Flags, banners and placards depicting the events occurred in the past two months. The march began at 3:30 pm, students from various colleges across the capital gathered to join in the event. The



march route included the Nilkhet, new Market, Kalabagan, Sangsad Bhaban, Farmgate, Kawran bazar and Shahbagh and concluded at the Central Shaheed Minar. From the Shahidi March, the coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADS) announced five-point demands. The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement has outlined a set of demands, including the immediate arrest and prosecution of those responsible for the genocide, provision of economic and legal support to the families

overthrown a fascist government, and if necessary, we will shed blood again to prevent its return. We will not tolerate irregularities, syndicates, or extortion. The blood of our martyrs will not be in vain.”

The central procession, joined by students from madrasas, schools, colleges, universities, and people from all walks of life, chanted slogans and displayed placards bearing images of the martyrs. Separate processions were also held on the Dhaka University campus,

a school student who joined the procession, said, “I skipped classes to participate in the Shahidi March program. This is our second freedom struggle. We achieved our first freedom, which gave us our land. Now, we’re fighting for our basic rights and needs. We’ve defeated Bangladeshi fascists, and if they return, our sacrifices will be in vain. Restoring democracy is essential. “Khalid Maruf, a madrasa student, joined the procession with friends, recalling, “During the movement, we were at Jatrabari Junctions. Some of my friends were severely injured by bullets, and some are still hospitalized.” He emphasized, “Under the previous government, we couldn’t express our demands or thoughts freely. We were labelled terrorists and fundamentalists. But now, we’ve achieved freedom through blood and sacrifice. This freedom must be preserved, and the martyrs of the 2024 mass uprising must be nationally recognized.”



Thousands of Bangladeshi students took on the streets of Dhaka on 5th September

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/357423/shahidi-march-anti-discrimination-students>

of the victims, identification and accountability of corrupt and fascist elements within the administrative sectors, and the establishment of a roadmap for state reform. Furthermore, the movement demands that the Prime Minister’s residence, “Ganabhaban”, be converted into a “July-Memorial Museum” to honor the victims.

Coordinator Sarjis Alam emphasized the movement’s commitment to democracy and justice, stating, “We have achieved our freedom through the sacrifice of blood. We have

demonstrating widespread support for the movement’s demands.

At 3:40 pm, the central procession of the Anti-Discrimination Students’ Movement commenced from the Anti-Terrorism Raju Monument premises at Dhaka University, led by coordinators Hasnat Abdullah, Sarjis Alam, Hasib Al Islam, Abu Baker Majumdar, and Abdul Hannan Masud. Mohammad Ali Hossen,

Those who arrived late and couldn’t join the central procession gathered at the Dhaka University campus and later marched to the Central Shaheed Minar, chanting slogans against corruption, crime, Indian aggression, and seeking justice for mass killings by the Hasina-led government.

The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement in Bangladesh has achieved a significant milestone by successfully challenging the entrenched quota system, which had long perpetuated inequality and discrimination in the country’s civil service sector, and forcing the former Prime Minister to resign, thereby paving the way for a new era of political reform and accountability. Through their relentless protests, sit-ins, and advocacy efforts, the movement has not only reduced the quota for freedom fighters’ children



from 30% to 5% but also brought attention to the plight of marginalized communities, including women, religious minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community, who have long been excluded from opportunities and resources. Furthermore, the movement's success has inspired a new generation of student activists to take up the mantle of social justice, fostering a culture of resistance and solidarity that will have far-reaching consequences for Bangladesh's future. Additionally, the movement's ability to bring together diverse groups and forge a united front against discrimination has demonstrated the power of collective action and the importance of intersectional solidarity in achieving meaningful social change. Overall, the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement has achieved a remarkable feat by challenging the status quo and pushing for a more inclusive and equitable society, and its impact will be felt for years to come.

The Anti-Discrimination Students Movement in Bangladesh has been a beacon of hope for a more equitable society. By challenging the entrenched quota system and forcing the former Prime Minister to resign, they have shown that collective action can bring about real change. Their achievements are a testament to the power of student activism and the importance of standing up against discrimination. Despite facing formidable obstacles, including the tragic loss of Abu Sayed, the movement has persevered and inspired a new generation of activists. However, the journey is far from over. Continued efforts are needed to address these issues. The movement must remain vigilant and committed to ensuring that their hard-won gains are not rolled back. Moreover, the movement's focus on discrimination and inequality must be broadened to encompass other marginalized groups. Only by addressing these intersecting forms of oppression can a truly just and inclusive society be built. Ultimately, the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement has shown that change is possible when people come together to demand it. Their courage and determination serve as a powerful reminder that a better future is within reach, but only if they continue to fight for it.

The Bangladeshi crisis of 2024 is a complex and multifaceted scenario that encompasses various dimensions, including political science, sovereignty, security, law, democracy, and human rights. The crisis reflects a deep-seated struggle for power and control between the government and the opposition, with the Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement emerging as a significant force,

demanding comprehensive reform and accountability, and challenging the existing political order. Issues of sovereignty are raised as the state's ability to maintain control and order is questioned, while external forces like Indian aggression add a layer of complexity to the situation, threatening the country's territorial integrity and independence. Security concerns are heightened by the government's use of excessive force against protesters, including the deployment of paramilitary groups like the Rapid Action Battalion, highlighting grave human rights and rule of law concerns, and underscoring the need for robust accountability mechanisms. Legal reforms are urgently needed to address issues of accountability, transparency, and justice, as the high court's quota system ruling and government actions raise serious questions about judicial independence, the integrity of the legal system, and the protection of fundamental rights. Furthermore, the crisis underscores a fundamental struggle for democratic rights and freedoms, including the right to protest, freedom of speech, and assembly, highlighting the need for a more inclusive, participatory, and representative democratic system that truly serves the interests of the Bangladeshi people, and ensures the protection of minority rights, social justice, and economic equality. Ultimately, resolving the crisis requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict, promotes dialogue and reconciliation, and strengthens democratic institutions and the rule of law.

TASK AT HAND FOR THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT:

The interim government assumed power due to a combination of factors, including a deepening political crisis, loss of legitimacy by the previous government, and opposition demands for reform. The previous government's handling of protests and crackdown on demonstrators led to widespread outrage, creating a power vacuum that the interim government filled. International pressure, constitutional provisions, and negotiations between political parties and civil society groups also contributed to the establishment of the interim government. Its primary objectives are to oversee reforms, ensure free and fair elections, restore stability, address human rights concerns, and facilitate a peaceful transfer of power to a democratically elected government, thereby resolving the ongoing crisis in Bangladesh. The interim government is currently focused on implementing reforms, ensuring free and fair elections, and addressing human



rights concerns. It has established a commission to investigate allegations of extrajudicial killings and human rights abuses, and has taken steps to increase accountability and transparency within the security forces. The government is also working to reform the quota system and address the demands of the Anti-Discrimination Students' Movement. Additionally, it is engaging in dialogue with political



Dr. Muhammad Yunus

<https://cdn.britannica.com/65/188765-050-7192754B/Muhammad-Yunus-2006.jpg?w=385>

parties and civil society groups to ensure a peaceful transfer of power and to establish a more inclusive and representative democratic system. The government is also taking measures to address the economic and social impacts of the crisis, including providing support to affected communities and promoting economic development. Overall, the interim government is working to stabilize the country, promote democracy and human rights, and ensure a sustainable transition to a democratically elected government.

Dr. Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and renowned

social entrepreneur, has been appointed to the advisory council of Bangladesh's interim government. In this capacity, Yunus is providing strategic guidance on key policy areas, including poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and economic development. Leveraging his expertise and experience in pioneering microfinance and social business models, Yunus is working closely with the interim government to develop inclusive and sustainable solutions that address the country's pressing social and economic challenges. His involvement in the advisory council underscores the government's commitment to harnessing the wisdom and expertise of civil society leaders to ensure a smooth transition to democracy and a brighter future for all Bangladeshis.

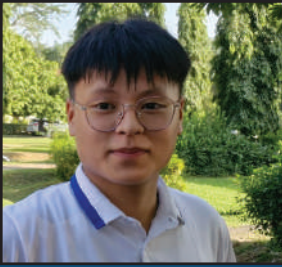
The future of the quota crisis in Bangladesh remains uncertain, with ongoing tensions between the government and protesters. While the government has announced plans to reform the quota system, protesters are demanding complete abolition of the system, citing its discriminatory nature and the fact that it perpetuates inequality. The situation remains volatile, with sporadic clashes between protesters and security forces, and a growing sense of frustration among the youth who feel that their futures are being held hostage by a system that denies them opportunities based on merit. To resolve the crisis, the government must engage in meaningful dialogue with protesters and address their concerns, rather than simply trying to suppress the movement. A potential solution could involve introducing a merit-based system with safeguards for

underrepresented groups, such as scholarships or targeted support programs. However, this would require a fundamental shift in the government's approach, from one that prioritizes political expediency to one that prioritizes social justice and equality. Ultimately, a peaceful resolution requires compromise, empathy, and a commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

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The Awami League Navigating the Political Landscape of Bangladesh

[The political landscape in Bangladesh is fast changing with the BNP back in power. Tsering examines the friction points and the relationship dynamics between the BNP and the Awami League]

Bangladesh, a nation with a rich history and vibrant culture, has a complex political landscape shaped by its colonial past, liberation struggle, and socio-economic challenges. The Awami League (AL), one of the oldest political parties in the country, has played a pivotal role in shaping modern Bangladesh. This article explores the Awami League's political journey, its opposition, and the dynamics that define the current political environment.

Historical Context:

The East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was founded in Dhaka, the capital of the Pakistani province of East Bengal, in 1949 by Bengali nationalists Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, Yar Mohammad Khan and Shamsul Huq, and joined later by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy who went on to become Prime Minister of Pakistan. It was established as the socialist Bengali alternative to the domination of the Muslim League in Pakistan and over centralisation of the government. The party quickly gained a massive popular support in East Bengal, later named East Pakistan, and eventually led the forces of Bengali nationalism in the struggle against West Pakistan's military and political establishment. The party under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, led the struggle for independence, first through massive populist and civil disobedience movements, such as the Six Point Movement and 1971 Non-Cooperation Movement, and then during the Bangladesh Liberation War.



The Awami League's Political Dominance:

Return to Power: The Awami League returned to power in 2009 under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's daughter. Since then, it has maintained a strong grip on power through successive elections.

Political Aims:

Economic Development: The party has focused on economic growth, infrastructure development, and social programs, which have contributed to significant improvements in various sectors.

Vision 2021 and Vision 2041

Main articles: Vision 2021, Bangladesh Vision 2041, and Smart Bangladesh.

Before the 2008 general elections in Bangladesh, the Awami League announced in its manifesto, its "Vision 2021" and "Digital Bangladesh" action plans to transform Bangladesh into a fast-developing middle-income country by 2021. The policy was criticized as a policy emblematic of technological optimism in the context of Bangladesh and the state repression of media, low internet penetration, inadequate electricity generation. Prior to the 2024 Bangladeshi general election, Awami League announced Smart Bangladesh initiative associated with the Bangladesh Vision

2041 framework in its manifesto, a national strategic plan aiming to further develop the socio-economic standings of Bangladesh by transforming the country into a technologically advanced and sustainable society with low income inequality and high standard of living.

Controversies and Criticism: Despite its achievements, the Awami League has faced criticism for authoritarian tendencies, suppression of dissent, and allegations of electoral fraud.

The Opposition Landscape:

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP): The main opposition party, founded in 1978 by Ziaur Rahman, has been a significant player in Bangladesh politics. The BNP has often accused the Awami League of undermining democracy and has faced its own challenges, including leadership crises and internal divisions.

Other Political Parties: Besides the BNP, several smaller parties and coalitions exist, including the Jatiya Party and various leftist groups. These parties often struggle to gain traction against the dominant Awami League and BNP.

The Role of Civil Society and Media:

Activism and Advocacy: Civil society organizations and activists play a crucial role in advocating for democratic rights and social justice. However, they often face repression from the state.

Media Landscape: The media in Bangladesh is vibrant but faces challenges, including censorship and threats to journalists. Social media has emerged as a platform for political discourse and activism.

Political Tensions and Challenges:

Electoral Politics: Elections in Bangladesh have often been marred by violence, allegations of rigging, and boycotts. The 2018 general elections were particularly contentious, with the opposition claiming widespread irregularities.

Human Rights Concerns: Both the Awami League and its opposition have faced accusations of human rights violations. The political climate is often characterized by a lack of freedom of expression and press censorship.



Recent Scenario in Bangladesh:

The 2024 quota reservation protests in Bangladesh represent a continuation of the contentious issue that erupted in 2023. The government's implementation of a quota system for government jobs, designed to provide greater access for marginalized groups, ignited widespread anger and protests.

This issue has become a major focal point in the lead-up to the 2024 general elections, with both the ruling party and the opposition utilizing it to gain voter support. The protests have exposed deep societal divisions, highlighting the ongoing struggle for equality and opportunity in Bangladesh.

The outcome of the protests remains uncertain, with potential for both compromise and continued conflict. The government's response to the protests will be crucial in determining the future of the quota system and its impact on Bangladesh's social and political landscape.

Conclusion:

The political landscape of Bangladesh is marked by a complex interplay between the Awami League and its opposition. As the country navigates its path forward, the need for dialogue, democratic reforms, and respect for human rights remains critical. Understanding this dynamic is essential for anyone interested in the future of Bangladesh.

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Shuhail Ali Ahmed

Class XII Humanities



Bangladesh: History and the Ongoing Crisis

[Shuhail delves deeper into Bangladesh's journey, from liberation struggles to recent political upheavals, and reflects its enduring fight for democracy and reform.]

“Rokto jokhon diyechi, rokto aro debo, yei desher manushke muhkto kore charbo, Inshallah.”, meaning, blood has been given whenever demanded and will be given more if needed, with God's will, people of this country will have their freedom. This speech was given by the Awami League leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in March 1971 in Dhaka, which triggered and uplifted the agitation for separation of West-Pakistan and East-Pakistan. 1947, Pakistan was divided into two territories, West Pakistan and East Pakistan. After independence while India was focused on self-growth and diplomacy, Pakistan was dealing with internal conflicts. For 9 years after independence, there was no election held in Pakistan and in 1956 when it was held, it was an indirect election, which led to an unstable government, which is an issue faced by Pakistan even today. Even though the East made more economic contribution and had more than half of the population (Bengali speakers), the West had all the political powers and at every instance tried to dominate the Eastern territory. The West was having a feast and the East was starving. Language played a very important role in this agitation. Even though the majority of the population spoke Bangla, Urdu was given more importance, maybe because the freedom fighter leaders and the founding fathers of Pakistan came from Urdu Background. Urdu was meant to be the language used by the elite class, People who supported urdu domination, created a link



AN IMAGE OF THE PROTESTS

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/decoding-the-bangladesh-crisis-through-the-lens-of-kautilya>

between urdu and Arabic language, linking urdu with Islam. After a roller coaster ride of political power, President Yahya Khan finally declared direct general election, which was to be held in 1970. World was in shock when the results were declared, as the place which faced discrimination, as the rights of the people of that place was taken away, the party from that places, Awami League came to power with 167 seats out of 313 seats. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's

Pakistan Peoples' Party emerged as the opposition party with 86 seats. The elite class of Pakistan was not willing to accept a Bengali as the Prime Minister. Yahya Khan under the Influence of Zulfikar Bhutto declared the election null and void and appointed. Awami League formed Mukti Bahini, which was the military used against Pakistani soldiers for the freedom of Bangladesh. Mukti Bahini was trained by the Indian Army and specialized in Guerilla Warfare. President Yahya Khan launched "Operation Searchlight" to eliminate the power concentrated by the Awami League and Mukti Bahini. Rahman was arrested and Pakistani soldiers went hard on members of the Awami League. In fear of torture and arrest people of East Pakistan migrated to bordering states of India, which created a refugee and illegal immigration issue in West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam. And this is when India stepped in. On 31st March 1971 Indira Gandhi in her speech in Parliament declared official help towards Mukti Bahini for the independence of Bangladesh. Pakistan was backed by the US and so was India, by the USSR, as both the power houses wanted to prove their dominance during the Civil War. 3rd December 1971, Pakistan Air Force launched

be it per capita income. Bangladesh is the industrial base for textile and has made significant contributions to World GDP.

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“A COUNTRY LIKE BANGLADESH HAS A LOT TO GIVE TO THE WORLD IN ALL ASPECTS BUT IT MUST BE UNDER VIRTUOUS HANDS.”



MEN RUN PAST BURNING VEHICLE IN DHAKA

<https://www.etvbharat.com/en/opinion/bangladesh-crisis-challenge-regional-communal-peace-enn24081702668>

an aerial strike on Indian Military Air Base located in Srinagar, Pathankot, Amritsar, Agra and Jodhpur. India got, what it wanted, an opportunity to attack back. India launched a full fledged attack on Pakistan. By 6th December 1971, India recognized Bangladesh as an independent country and the world saw a new country on the map. Today's Bangladesh is way ahead than Pakistan, be it economy or



The last few months has been a roller coaster ride for Bangladesh, as recently it has been dealing with internal conflicts. Sheikh Hasina had been criticized for her dictatorial way of administration by the west for a long time as Hasina had strong influence over all the administrative organs of Bangladesh and also international support. US had accused the 2024 general election of Bangladesh to be undemocratic as it was conducted in the absence of any opposition party. Be it the Judiciary, Police or Army, all were puppets under Sheikh Hasina. The event got triggered by the 'students' protest', who were protesting against the reservation quota for the descendants of freedom fighters who fought in the 1971 war. This quota system was introduced by the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The verified population of the decedents is 0.13 percent and the reservation which was given to them was 30% which is completely illogical. It is believed by many that former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (daughter of Rahman) had been using this system as a loophole to entertain her supporters in the government and bureaucracy. Students were demanding reservation on the basis of economic status and backward class. Hasina had used the Police, Army, Special Force to suppress the movement. The student wing of Awami League, who were more like goons than students, were provided with arms to crack down on the protest. The internet saw videos coming from Bangladesh in which people are being killed in the open. but when people speak, the government bows. On 21st of July, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh changed the reservation system of the Appellate Batch. The quota was reduced to 7%, which included 5% for the descendants, 1% for the ethnic minorities and 1% for the disabled and transgender. But the protest was not over yet, the problem was not solved yet. The students wanted to continue with the movement as a pro-democracy movement until Sheikh Hasina resigned. Earlier people used to think there is no alternative, "Hasina noi, te vikalp ke", now

the people of Bangladesh have realized that “Vikalp ami”, meaning I am the alternative. This student movement had shown leadership and unity. And it had raised hope among people that it would not be influenced by political parties. Bangladesh crises has proved that no matter how powerful or well-connected a leader is he or she is doomed in two ways. Either people hang him from a lamppost or the Dictator is lucky enough to flee the country. Hasina did the latter. 5th August will be a historic day for Bangladesh as on this day Hasina fled her country after ruling for 15 years. After her departure the protestors took control of her official residence and also vandalized her father Rahman’s Statue, who was the founding father of Bangladesh. Bangladesh Army immediately occupied the vacuum and announced the formation of an interim government. But where there is celebration in one side, there is also a concern regarding getting Bangladesh back on track. As now there is section of society who are attacking houses, minority groups, public institution and vandalism. Student protesters are accusing the Chhatra league for doing all this and has given assurance that there will be to attack against minorities. Sheikh Hasina’s son is trying to use religion to polarize people. The interim government must be given chance to regroup and focus. The interim government at first must release the innocent student protestors who were detained by Hasina.

The army in rule in absence of Hasina had appointed Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as the head of the interim government back in August. What Bangladesh has gone through in the past few months is not only a political revolution but also ideological, economic and social. It would not be wrong to say that Bangladesh will surely face difficulties in getting the nation back to track, but the world must support and encourage the work done by the interim government. A country like Bangladesh has a lot to give the world in all aspects but it must be under virtuous hands.

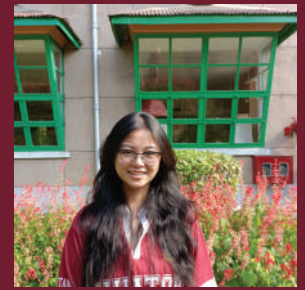
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Atoti Zhimomi

Class XII Humanities



ANALYZING THE CHANGING POLITICAL CONTOURS OF BANGLADESH

[The fast changing political landscape of Bangladesh and its ramifications for India is examined by Atoti as she delves into the political dynamics after the lull of the student led agitation]

What started as a rage against unjust entitlement and students against discrimination has now assumed a different shape and political meaning. The interim government headed by Professor Muhammad Yunus, a seasoned economist and Nobel Laureate was expected to lead and be at the helm of affairs tasked with the gigantic responsibility of rebuilding Bangladesh. There is still a tremendous amount of turmoil, targeted violence against minorities and the deposed functionaries of the Awami League among others. It will be prudent to analyze a few striking changes and its implications.

CONTROVERSIAL ELECTIONS:

A very hard anti-India posturing became evident after the dust of the student agitation had settled down. The BNP has been very vocal that the Awami League continued to remain in power during elections said to be far from being fair and transparent only with the help of India. This allegation is sans serious proof labelled against India by the BNP. The election history of Bangladesh does little to assure whether there ever existed any semblance of a free and fair poll. Elections have seen the Awami League and the BNP get power over the years but the conduct of elections has been questionable. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman attempted to impose a one party system. After overseeing the breakaway of Bangladesh from Pakistan, the ruling Awami League, chaired by independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, conducted the country's first-ever elections on March 7, 1973. But, despite being the favourites to win, the Awami League engineered the kidnapping of opposition leaders and, in some constituencies, stuffed ballot papers. The party then won 293 of the 300 seats in Parliament in a landslide that almost eliminated other political parties in the house, including Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Bashani, which won one parliamentary seat each. Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in 1975. Those polls marked the beginning of autocratic rule. From

1979 to the 1980's elections were a sham with a one party rule. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's successor General Ziaur Rahman introduced a multi-party system and his party the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) won an overwhelming majority in 1979 and the Awami League was reduced to be the opposition with allegations of unfair means being used. After the assassination of Ziaur Rahman, his successor Abdus Sattar held elections in November 1981 and the BNP emerged winners with 65 percent votes.

1982 saw the rise of General Ershad seizing the reins of power and the Parliamentary and Presidential elections in 1986 saw the leader's Jatiya party win amidst boycott by the opposition. Another sham election in 1988 saw vociferous protests by the opposition parties- the Awami League led by Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Mujibur Rahman and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Khalida Zia, widow of Ziaur Rahman coming together to take on the military might of General Ershad leading to a popular uprising and forcing General Ershad to resign. The 1991 elections for an interim government saw a tight contest between the Awami League and the BNP with the latter securing 140 and the former bagging 88 parliamentary seats. 1994 parliamentary by elections saw the Awami League and the BNP simmer down on allegations. The 1996 elections saw only 21 percent registered voters voting with intense pressure on the BNP to step down. The BNP won the elections but Khalida Zia could last for only 12 days as the opposition launched a vigorous campaign including strikes which paralyzed the nation. Fresh elections held on June 12, 1996 saw a large voter turnout and the Awami League of Sheikh Hasina winning the election securing 146 parliamentary seats and the BNP getting 116 seats. The 2001 elections saw power changing with the BNP clinching 193 seats with 40 percent national votes and the Awami League securing 62 seats



with almost the same percentage of votes. This election was regarded as a fair one although many discerning observers pointed out minority rights violations which were alleged to have been rampant. Elections that should have taken place



THIS MOVE BY SHEIKH HASINA WAS A CLEAR SIGN THAT SHE INTENDED TO SILENCE THE OPPOSITION AND CONSOLIDATE HER UNDISPUTED POWER.

in 2006 never happened because the outgoing BNP and the main opposition, Awami League disagreed on a candidate to head the necessary caretaker government. At the end of October, the country's president, Iajuddin Ahmed declared himself leader of the caretaker government and announced that elections would take place in January 2007. A bitter row over fake names being included on the list of candidates led to riots and violence in the country – thousands of protesters blockaded the country's transport system and the country descended into a political crisis lasting until 2008. The military stepped in when Ahmed declared a national emergency and the Awami League withdrew from the elections in protest. Elections held in 2008 saw a Grand Alliance with both the Awami League and the BNP in the fray. This election saw a high voter turnout of 80 percent with the Awami League securing a landslide victory with 230 seats and the BNP reduced to 30 seats. The army handed over power to the Awami League in January 2009. Following the political crisis of 2006 – 2008, the Awami League decided to abolish the requirement for a caretaker government to oversee elections in 2011. Hasina, the Prime Minister, was highly critical

of the previous military-led caretaker government which had delayed elections for two years and which, she pointed out, was unelected. A parliamentary vote on the amendment to remove the caretaker provision was passed by 291 to one after it was boycotted by the main opposition BNP. A crackdown on the opposition followed. Prior to the elections that were held on January 5, 2014, BNP leader Zia was put under house arrest and there were widespread reports of violence towards other opposition members. Opposition parties, including the BNP, boycotted the vote and Hasina's Awami League won in a landslide, clinching 234 seats in parliament. This move by Sheikh Hasina was a clear sign that she intended to silence the opposition and consolidate her undisputed power.

In 2018, electronic voting was introduced in Bangladesh. The BNP and other opposition parties accused the ruling Awami



SHEIKH HASINA

<https://www.etvbharat.com/en/opinion/bangladesh-crisis-challenge-regional-communal-peace-enn24081702668>

League of rigging the general elections on December 30, 2018. Reports of violence against opposition BNP members and supporters, as well as voter suppression, marred the polls again. The government also shut down mobile internet in the lead-up to election day, claiming it wanted to stop the spread of fake news around the vote. Hasina's Awami League, after merging with the Jatiya Party to form the Grand Alliance, won in another landslide. The Grand Alliance took



more than 90 percent of parliament seats. Kamal Hossain who led the Jatiya Oikya Front – BNP alliance following a ban on Zia for corruption convictions, won just seven seats. Hossain criticized the elections and called for them to be held again, with no success. The 2024 elections in January saw the Sheikh Hasina led Awami League win the election which saw a very poor voter turnout and a non-existent opposition. Observers pointed out that only parties or parties seen as no threats to the ruling Awami League were only allowed to contest. Disgruntled elements and highhanded functioning of the Awami League winning 233 seats meant Sheikh Hasina now had a free run to operate and sideline the opposition. The mandate secured by the Awami League was used to rule out any opposition or dissent against the ruling regime. The BNP accused the Awami League of adopting unfair means including force, intimidation, silencing critics and opposition, incarceration of critics on trumped up charges. **The new interim government and the Election Commission of Bangladesh is now setting up an investigation to probe the electoral malpractices alleged to have been used by the Awami League.**

BANGLADESH SHIFTS TOWARDS CHINA:

China has heavy investments. China is Bangladesh's largest trading partner, second largest source of foreign aid, and third largest source of foreign direct investment. However, the Awami League government has always maintained a diplomatic balance in its relationship with India and China, unlike the BNP which is pro-China. Thus, it is not surprising that while the BNP has been vehemently critical of India for its support of Sheikh Hasina's government, it has been silent about China's support of the same regime. Indeed, in the pre-poll scenario, the Chinese President Xi Jinping had vouched that China would stand by PM Hasina in resisting outside pressures. Post-election, Beijing reiterated its support to the Awami League, during an interaction between the Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh, Yao Wen and the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud. However, the BNP does not have a history of harmony with India, and one of its sternest critiques of the Awami League has been that it had made "Bangladesh a satellite of India." Nonetheless, Bangladesh's dependence on India cannot be denied. The Chinese String of Pearls strategy to

engulf the entire region appears to be making headway here. India has responded with Necklace of Diamonds.



FLAG OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE

<https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/op-ed/1wqcm53qs1>

A MUTUAL DEPENDENCE:

India and Bangladesh share a geographically contiguous territory and there is, thus, an organic mutual dependence between the two countries with the need to share common resources. India ranks among Bangladesh's top 10 sources of FDI; is its third-largest contributor of bilateral foreign assistance from non-aid group countries; and is its second-largest trading partner. A glance at the commodity list of Indian exports to Bangladesh, reveals daily necessities such as; fish, meat, dairy products, vegetables, fruits, beverages, cereals, oilseeds, sugar, soap, paper, silk, wool, cotton, and furniture among other essentials. The proximity and shared cultural-linguistic ties between West Bengal in India and Bangladesh and the affordability of medical care in India have facilitated their travel and treatment. India is also a primary destination of medical tourism, almost 54 percent of such visitors are Bangladeshis. The proximity and shared cultural-linguistic ties between West Bengal in India and Bangladesh and the affordability of medical care in India have facilitated their travel and treatment. As Bangladesh's reliance on India is tied to its well-being, the anti-India campaign does not hold any empirical value apart from being a political agenda of the Opposition.

THREAT PERCEPTIONS:

Anti- India rhetoric appears to be getting vociferous





LT GEN NK NIAZI SIGNING THE INSTRUMENT OF SURRENDER UNDER THE GAZE OF LT GEN JS AURORA, MARKING THE END OF THE INDO-PAK WAR OF 1971, AKA, THE BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR

<https://scroll.in/article/946832/bangladesh-liberation-war-recalling-december-15-1971-the-day-before-pakistan-surrendered>

with the new interim dispensation turning a deaf ear. India Out campaign is one sinister move beginning to unfold in Bangladesh. BNP has been vocal in its support of the 'India Out' campaign, which it terms as an organic protest stemming from the Bangladeshi populace. Its Senior Joint Secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi stated that for the last 16 years, the Awami League government has been returning illegitimately to power, not through the votes of Bangladesh's citizens but with India's help and support. Rizvi was seen throwing his Kashmiri shawl from India on the street, followed by calls to the Bangladeshi women to forsake Indian sarees. This move orchestrated by Bangladesh, incited by India's unfriendly neighbours will severely impact the economy of Bangladesh. India's Neighbour's First policy might need a revisit.

SLEEPER CELLS AND ANTI-INDIAN ELEMENTS:

With a new regime in Bangladesh having a soft corner for anti-India elements separatist groups and sleeper cells may tend to display their ugly heads. The recent arrests of around eight members of the ABT (Ansarullah Bangla Team) by the Special Task Force in West Bengal and Assam has serious security threat implications as such divisive forces have an agenda to stir unrest, violence, radicalize

and even attempt to cut off the chicken neck corridor linking North East with the rest of India. Interrogation by security forces have revealed this alarming input. There are other affiliated nefarious groups as well like the Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). While the Sheikh Hasina led Awami League was very strict against such elements, the current Bangladeshi ruling dispensation appears to be soft towards such elements. India will need to have an appropriate security response as infiltration across the border is likely to be attempted and will need to be intervened.

PERSECUTION OF MINORITIES:

The aftermath of persecution against minorities with disturbing visuals of temples and other places of minority worship and faith being systematically ransacked, razed to the ground and vilified indicates the rise of the sheer might of majoritarianism and intolerance removing any possibility of the existence of pluralism. Destruction of property, lives of people, persecution, forced conversion are tactics adopted which does not augur well for the minorities living in that country. The arrest of minority spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das for allegedly raising a saffron flag above Bangladesh's national flag in Chittagong on October 25. His



arrest on November 25 sparked protests, culminating in violent clashes between his followers and law enforcement. The bail application of this leader was rejected by a lower court when reports last came in. It is clearly indicative of a vindictive style of anti-minority politics which is now the new normal in Bangladesh.

A SHIP FROM PAKISTAN IN BANGLADESH:

A cargo vessel from Karachi docked at Chittagong in November 2024, marking the first-ever direct maritime contact between Pakistan and Bangladesh since the Liberation War of 1971 but stirring up ripples of worry in the Indian security establishment. Such direct maritime links between India's eastern and western neighbours have the potential to create instability in the northeastern states because of their proximity to Bangladesh's southeastern coast. The new regime in Bangladesh, after the Sheikh Hasina dispensation was overthrown, welcomed the direct sea link and hoped for a spike in the volume of trade with Pakistan. The trade volume had fallen below \$800 million in 2023. Chittagong and Mongla are the two major ports in Bangladesh and both have been out of bounds for Pakistan for over five decades.... Trade between the two countries used to take place through transshipment at Singapore or Colombo," the expert said. "Now that Pakistani vessels will directly come to Chittagong, you cannot rule out the possibility of contraband being shipped to Bangladesh and ending up with insurgent groups in India," he added, recounting the 2004 arms haul in Chittagong that still is the biggest confiscation of illegal weapons in South Asia.

In an operation by Pakistan spy agency ISI, about 1,500 Chinese munitions, worth an estimated \$4.5-to-7 million, had reached Chittagong in trawlers through the sea route. Most of these consignments were, however, confiscated before they could reach their intended recipients — the banned militant outfit ULFA in Assam. The Indian establishment has been cautious about the sea channels connecting the Chittagong and Mongla ports since then and used its relationship with Hasina to keep the Chinese away from the two ports. "Last year, India scored a strategic win over China by securing the operating rights to a terminal at Mongla port.... But now, Pakistan has gained access to Chittagong port. The sea channels to the two ports will now

allow Pakistani vessels. The development will surely have an impact on the region's geopolitics as Myanmar is also so close to Chittagong," said a source in India's security establishment. The opening of the direct maritime link is being seen as an attempt by the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus to cosy up to Pakistan. India's western neighbour was a pariah in Bangladesh during the tenure of Hasina, who fled the country on August 5 in the face of a wave of protests.

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