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**Asia in 2025:
Great power rivalry, contested politics,
and global disorder**

viella



CENTRO STUDI PER I POPOLI EXTRA-EUROPEI “CESARE BONACOSSA” - UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

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The Journal of the Italian think tank on Asia founded by Giorgio Borsa in 1989

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BANGLADESH IN 2025: UNDER THE SHADOW OF «MONSOON REVOLUTION»*

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This article examines political developments in Bangladesh in 2025, a year dominated by the aftermath of the «Monsoon Revolution». The article analyses differences among political parties regarding the reforms and the timing of parliamentary elections. It investigates the increasing role of Islamist groups in Bangladesh's politics, noting their enhanced activism and strong social presence. Finally, this article analyses Bangladesh's relations with India, China, and Pakistan under the interim government. While the Yunus-led government has taken steps to reset ties with Pakistan and move closer to China, these foreign policy measures have widened the rift with India.

KEYWORDS – Counter-narrative; China and Pakistan; parliamentary elections; political reforms; Islamists; minorities; Mujibur Rahman.

1. Introduction

Throughout 2025, Bangladesh remained consumed by discussions on reform measures, debates over their implementation, and speculation about when national elections would be held. The interim government simultaneously worked to restore law and order – a challenge that had persisted since August 2024, when former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled the country following the successful student-led «Monsoon Revolution».

Hasina's departure was hailed as a «second liberation» by Muhammad Yunus, Chief Advisor to the country's Interim Government (*The Economist*, 2024, 6 August), and echoed by Mia Golam Parwar, Secretary General of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) [*The Business Standard* 2025, 26 March]. Upon assuming office, Yunus pledged comprehensive reforms across Bangladesh's political, economic, educational, and many other sectors. Unfolding the interim government's preference, in his first address to the nation on 25 August, Yunus said:

I welcome you all to the new Bangladesh, a product of the student revolution. I pay the deepest respect to all those who died in the student-

* I am thankful to Monzima Haque from Dhaka University for reading the first draft of this article and providing critical comments. I also acknowledge the peer reviewers for their comments.

people revolution against fascism in July and August... Fellow citizens, the Bangladesh that we got in exchange for the blood of millions of martyrs and the sacrifice of millions of mothers and sisters has been destroyed at the hands of fascism and autocracy... The education sector has been crippled, there has been looting in the banking and stock market sectors, and world records have been set in project expenditure. There has been unbridled money laundering, turning law enforcement agencies into puppets of a single party, snatching freedom of speech, snatching human rights – and this is just the tip of the iceberg. The fascist government has curtailed the constitutional powers and rights of the people to grab power. Misrule, corruption, injustice, oppression, and farce in the name of justice have endangered public security. People have been exposed to oppression and deprivation and discrimination. The voting rights of millions of people, including the new generation, have been snatched away over the years [Yunus 2024, 28 August].

Yunus added: «We want to build a country where the human rights of every citizen will be fully protected. We have only one goal: a liberal, democratic, and non-discriminatory Bangladesh where all communities live peacefully together. We are committed to ensuring that no form of discrimination can disrupt our dreams» [Yunus 2024, 28 August].

At that time, Yunus also expressed commitment to pursue sustainable and environmentally friendly development; find a «realistic» solution to the Rohingya's issue; ensure political unity; bring to justice security forces directly involved in killings, disappearances, or torture; and, prepare a white paper documenting corruption, money laundering, anti-public interest agreements, and project-related looting occurred during Hasina's long tenure [Tieri and Hossain 2024].

Hasina's departure also sparked a debate among a section of Bangladeshis over the role of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's Liberation War hero and the first head of state. During and after the student protests, numerous busts of Mujibur Rahman were vandalized. While protesters and opponents may have deep grievances against Mujib, his contribution to the country's liberation cannot be erased [Ranjan and Banerjee 2025, 4 September]. He played a significant role in forging an idea of the nation and in developing Bengali nationalism that stood against the Pakistani power elites and the military. Nevertheless, in the liberated country, as discussed below, Mujib used undemocratic means to achieve his political goals.

The violence that erupted during the anti-Hasina protests in 2024 did not fully subside in 2025. Under the interim government, Bangladesh witnessed increased violence against minorities, particularly Hindus, who are symbolized and linked with India by some Bangladeshis. A significant shift has also occurred in Bangladesh's foreign policy during the post-Ha-

sina period. Unlike previous years, under the interim government, Dhaka's distance from New Delhi widened, closer ties with China were pursued, and some successful attempts have been made to reset relations with Pakistan.

Against this backdrop, some significant questions emerge: Has Bangladesh's political governance fundamentally changed? What characterizes the relationship between majority and minority communities in post-Hasina Bangladesh? How is Bangladesh recalibrating its bilateral ties with India and other countries, mainly China and Pakistan?

This article attempts to address these questions through three main arguments. First, it demonstrates that Bangladesh's politics shapes communal ties and social structures, and vice versa. Second, it observes that Islamist groups have become more politically and socially active than during Hasina's rule, contributing to rising conservatism and misogyny in Bangladesh. Finally, it argues that the interim government's attempt to reset ties with Pakistan, its further deepening of relations with China, and the widening political distance between New Delhi and Dhaka underline changed foreign policy preferences in post-Hasina times.

2. Political Differences on the Planned Reforms in Bangladesh

To advance reforms, the interim government established six commissions in October 2024. These commissions were tasked with proposing recommendations for reforming Bangladesh's constitution, electoral system, judiciary, public administration, police, and anti-corruption measures [*The Daily Star* 2025a, 16 January].

The nine-member Constitution Reform Commission, chaired by Professor Ali Riaz, submitted its report in January 2025. The commission recommended expanding fundamental rights to include food, clothing, shelter, education, internet access, and the right to vote [Constitution Reform Commission n.d.a & *The Daily Star* 2025b, 16 January]. It proposed replacing nationalism, socialism, and secularism with equality, human dignity, social justice, and pluralism as fundamental principles of state policy [Constitution Reform Commission n.d.a & *The Daily Star* 2025b, 16 January]. Additional recommendations included establishing a bicameral legislative system, limiting the President and Prime Minister to two terms, and allowing parliamentarians to vote against party positions on legislative matters [Constitution Reform Commission n.d.a & *The Daily Star* 2025b, 16 January].

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) offered recommendations addressing legal frameworks, organizational structure, complaint management, and investigation procedures for corruption-related matters. It advocated a comprehensive Corruption Prevention Strategy and outlined 11 specific programs to combat corruption [Anti-Corruption Commission Reform Commission 2025, 15 January].

The Public Administration Commission emphasized transparency, accountability, decentralization of governance, and effective local governance [Ranjan 2025, 15 January]. The Judiciary Commission called for a fully independent judiciary, while the Police Reform Commission proposed amendments and replacement of 22 existing laws to make police more people-friendly [Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh 2025, 17 January].

In November 2025, the interim government finalized a draft ordinance for establishing an Independent Police Commission to ensure accountability and improve public relations. However, Transparency International Bangladesh urged a comprehensive revision of the draft Police Commission Ordinance, 2025, arguing that the current version could undermine the proposed commission's autonomy and effectiveness [*The Daily Star* 2025, 5 November]. Ireland offered support by sharing its experience with police reform. During her visit to Dhaka, Baroness Nuala O'Loan, Northern Ireland's first police ombudsman, made this proposal when she met Muhammad Yunus on 5 November 2025 [*Dhaka Tribune* 2025, 5 November].

Following the six commissions' submissions, a seven-member Jatiya Oaikymoto (Consensus Commission) headed by Muhammad Yunus was established to review and adopt the recommendations [*The Business Standard* 2025, 13 February]. The Consensus Commission has worked to build consensus for implementing reforms. The Yunus-led interim government has also initiated reforms in power and electricity, railways, finance and management, banking, labor rights, information and communication technology, migration, and other sectors [Reforms 2025].

One year after the Monsoon Revolution, in an address to the nation on 5 August 2025, emphasizing reforms, Yunus stated:

We had three primary responsibilities: Reform, Justice, and Election... Among the recommendations submitted by the main commissions, we have already implemented many short-term and urgently needed reforms. These reforms will bring dynamism to the economic sector, the justice system, and public administration; transparency and accountability will increase significantly; corruption, irregularities, and harassment will be reduced... The July Charter will ensure smooth transfer of power in Bangladesh, the independence and capacity of accountable state institutions, the genuine realization of citizen rights, and proper management of national resources and capabilities. We must ensure that no future government can ever become fascist again. The state must be restructured in such a way that any sign of fascism, wherever it appears, can be immediately eradicated right there, so we never again have to wait 16 years, never again lose so many lives. We must never again require another mass uprising [BSS News 2025, 6 August].

Based on the reform commissions' reports, the Consensus Commission prepared a document known as the July Charter, named after the month when students' protests against Sheikh Hasina began. On 28 October 2025, the Consensus Commission submitted its recommendations to the interim government after three rounds of consultations with 30 political parties (Alamgir 2025, 5).

The interim government then held consultations with all political parties to secure signatures and acceptance of the July Charter. The charter addressed both non-constitutional reforms and proposed constitutional amendments. Signatories had to make a pledge to:

1. Ensure full implementation of the "July National Charter 2025," formulated through extensive consultation and adopted by consensus, reflecting the opportunities and aspirations gained through the sacrifices of thousands;
2. Make necessary constitutional amendments, additions, revisions, and rewrites, as well as amend, change, revise, or formulate new laws and regulations to implement the proposals contained in the July National Charter 2025 regarding governance systems including the constitution, judiciary, electoral system, public administration, police, and anti-corruption mechanisms;
3. Complete these constitutional and legal changes within two years of forming a government through national elections following the charter's adoption, ensuring the reforms' sustainability;
4. Ensure implementation of the charter's proposals within two years of its adoption;
5. Provide full legal and constitutional protection at every implementation stage;
6. Remain committed to implementing the charter and providing legal and constitutional protection; and
7. Give due constitutional recognition to the historical significance of the 2024 anti-discrimination and democratic movement and mass uprising [Kalerkantho 2025, 28 July].

In October 2025, 24 of 30 political parties participated in dialogues on the National July Charter and signed it. The National Citizen Party (NCP), Gonoforum, and four left parties – Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Basod), Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist), and Bangladesh Jasod Party – declined to sign [*The Daily Star* 2025, 17 October].

The left of the centre parties refused to endorse anything that might alter the constitution's four fundamental principles: democracy, socialism, secularism, and nationalism [Abbas 2025, 1 November]. The NCP sought

to ensure a legal foundation for the July Charter before signing and called for drafting and publicly releasing a Constitutional Reform Bill approved through referendum [Business in Bangladesh 2025, 30 October]. The NCP accused the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and BJI of blocking reforms to delay the February 2026 polls [IANS Live 2025, 5 November]. Hasnat Abdullah, the party's chief organizer (South), stated during a co-ordination meeting that people were «exasperated» by what he termed the BNP's «mafia politics» and «extortion politics» [*The Daily Star* 2025a, 6 November].

The BJI demanded that introducing a proportional representation (PR) system for national elections be subject to a referendum. Golam Porwar stated: «If the people support the PR system in the referendum, all parties must accept it. If the majority reject it, Jamaat-e-Islami will also accept the decision. But the PR system cannot be ignored without seeking the people's opinion» [*The Daily Star* 2025, 11 October]. Besides BJI, the NCP and other parties also advocated the PR system for forthcoming elections, while the BNP and others were reluctant to accept it, preferring to maintain the current first-past-the-post voting system [*The Daily Star* 2025, 11 October].

Amid these developments, the interim government expressed concern about growing divisions among political parties over the implementation of reforms. Following a Council of Advisors meeting, Law Advisor Asif Nazrul told media:

We are seeking a united opinion on the timing of the referendum, its content, and the order for implementing the July Charter, preferably within a week. If the political parties fail to provide a united stance, the government will proceed in its own way... It was observed at the meeting that despite long discussions within the Consensus Commission, there remain differing opinions on a few of the reform recommendations. The meeting also noted that disagreements have emerged among political parties over when the referendum should be held and what its subject should be [IANS Live 2025, 5 November].

Following the interim government's appeal, the BJI and other parties, including the NCP, attempted to resolve their differences over the timing of the referendum and the implementation of the July Charter [IANS Live 2025, 5 November]. However, the BJI, NCP, and six parties under the Ganotantra Mancha – an alliance that joined the BNP in a simultaneous movement – maintained that resolving the crisis remained the responsibility of the interim government [IANS Live 2025, 5 November].

A referendum on 47 key proposals from the Consensus Commission was scheduled either for election day or earlier. The BJI and many others demanded a referendum before national elections [Ahmed 2025, 5 November]. The BNP argued that no referendum should precede national elections. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam declared: «We are in

agreement on this. No referendum will be allowed before the national election» [*The Daily Star* 2025b, 6 November]. He added: «A few political parties are trying to create instability with various demands. They are trying to disrupt and delay the election. The people will not accept this. We achieved independence through the shedding of much blood, freeing ourselves from the hands of fascists. We now have an opportunity to return to a democratic system. We cannot allow any conspiracy to destroy this opportunity» [*The Daily Star* 2025b, 6 November].

Accusing the Consensus Commission of bias, Fakhrul stated: «Now you're saying political parties should sit together and make decisions. Then what have you been doing all this time? You didn't do your job properly. We have always gone to the commission and given our opinions» [*The Daily Star* 2025b, 6 November].

Ultimately, the interim government decided that both elections and the referendum on reforms would occur simultaneously in February 2026, effectively ending all debate on the matter.

In the February 2026 elections, the BNP secured a landslide victory. BNP and its allies won 212 of 299 seats, while BJI and its partners won 77. In the concurrent referendum on reforms, 68.1% of Bangladeshis voted «Yes» and 31.9% voted «No» [*The Daily Star* 2026, 14 February]. The newly elected parliament would now determine the fate of reforms. In its manifesto, the BNP clearly stated: «The agreement reached and signed in the July National Charter on 17 October 2025 will be implemented with the highest priority» [BNP Manifesto 2026, 7].

3. Political Changes in 2025

Before examining the significant political changes of 2025, it is essential to understand Bangladesh's brief yet volatile political history. This historical context is necessary because much of the country's contemporary conflicts stem from competing narratives of the past. The Awami League carries Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legacy, while the BNP and Islamists have questioned his role in the post-Liberation years.

Many scholars argue that Pakistan's political foundation was laid by Muslim elites from Punjab and North India [Talbot 2001; Dhulipala 2015], with Mohammad Ali Jinnah acting as the «sole spokesman» to the demand for a separate country [Jalal 1994]. However, I have argued elsewhere that Pakistan was born in East Bengal as a separate administrative territory – Inot, in the technical sense, as a nation-state – through the efforts of Bengali Muslim peasants and the middle class [Ranjan 2019]. In August 1946, Bengal saw the «Great Calcutta Killing», followed by communal violence in Noakhali in November. Both were related to the Pakistan movement in colonial India. There was a brief political discussion about the possibility

of a United Bengal, but Bengal was ultimately divided between India and Pakistan in 1947.

To partition British India, a separate Boundary Commission (BC) for Punjab and Bengal was set up. Both BCs were headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe. The Bengal BC awarded 28,000 square miles to West Bengal, with a population of 21.19 million, of whom nearly 5.3 million (29%) were Muslims. East Bengal (Pakistan) received 49,000 square miles for a population of 39.11 million, of which 29.1% (11.4 million) were Hindus [Chatterji 1999, p. 213]. In the early years following partition, several Hindus and Muslims continued crossing the India-Pakistan border due to communal riots in their adopted homelands [Chatterji 2007, pp. 166-68]. Cross-border movement has continued even after the border became hard and securitized.

The religious bond between the East and West wings of Pakistan began to crumble soon after its formation. Differences over language and culture, combined with East Pakistan's serious economic grievances – particularly accusations that the West exploit its resources to benefit its power elites – mounted tensions between the two wings of the country. An immediate catalyst for Bangladesh's liberation was the West Pakistani power elites' denial of the premiership to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, even though his party won 160 of 300 National Assembly seats in the 1970 elections. The social, economic, political and military events that unfolded afterwards in East Pakistan, and the third India-Pakistan war, combinedly led to Bangladesh's liberation in 1971.

The liberated country was headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, four years after liberation, in 1975, Mujibur Rahman was assassinated along with 18 members of his extended family. The assassination was carried out by disgruntled elements of the country's Army. After Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh endured two decades of military rule before returning to democracy in 1991. Following democracy's restoration, Khaleda Zia served as prime minister from 1991 to 1996. Sheikh Hasina won the national elections in 1996 and served as Prime Minister from 1996 to 2001. Khaleda Zia returned to power in 2001 and remained in office until 2006. In 2006, a Caretaker Government was set up to conduct elections, but it seized power and ruled the country from 2006 to 2008. Sheikh Hasina won the national elections in 2008 and served as prime minister from 2009 to 2024.

4. «Second Liberation»

In 2024, Sheikh Hasina's «authoritarian» rule in Bangladesh ended when student-led protests forced her to resign and flee to India. Once celebrated as a beacon of hope for Bangladesh's democracy, Hasina became increasingly authoritarian during her last tenure [Das 2025]. Human rights organizations accused her government of stifling civic rights, cracking down

on freedom of expression, engaging in extrajudicial killings, conducting enforced disappearances, and employing various forms of torture against political dissenters and critics [Amnesty International 2024].

Her government also faced accusations of manipulating election results, and torturing opposition workers and leaders to achieve desired outcomes. For example, in the January 2024 elections, opposition groups, international media, and several countries accused Hasina of using unfair means to secure victory. During the election process, approximately 25,000 opposition leaders and supporters were reportedly arrested, with some tortured and denied medical treatment [Mishra 2024, 24 January]. Hasina was accused of manipulating voter turnout figures. Then Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh, Kazi Habibul Awal, initially reported 28% voter turnout, but within an hour, this figure was revised to 40%. Many considered the 28% figure was «inflated» [Riaz 2024, 18 January].

Twenty-six, mainly smaller ones, out of 44 registered political parties contested the 2024 national elections. The BNP, a major AL opponent, boycotted the elections. The AL won 222 of 300 parliamentary seats, independent candidates secured 63 seats, and the Jatiya Party won 11 seats.

Protests began shortly after the election results were declared. An «India Out» campaign emerged on social media, as New Delhi was perceived as the primary force behind Hasina's consecutive election victories. Although the BNP never officially endorsed the «India Out» campaign, it received support from some of its members and workers of other opposition parties. On the contrary, many influential Islamist parties remained silent on the campaign. In fact, Bangladesh Islami Front, a conservative group, rejected such initiatives [Saimum 2024, 6 June].

Hasina was embroiled in political turmoil months later when students protested the High Court's decision on job quotas. Under the Quota system, 30% of the seats were reserved for children and grandchildren of liberation fighters, 10% for districts, 10% for women, 5% for ethnic minorities, and 1% for physically challenged persons – totalling 56% and leaving 44% for merit-based selection [*The Daily Star* 2024, 22 July].

Earlier, in 2018, following protests, Hasina's government issued a circular abolishing the quota system for 9th-13th grade (Class I and Class II) government jobs. With 20 grades in total, the quota system applied to grades 13-20 [*The Daily Star* 2024, 22 July]. However, students had demanded reform and revision of the quota system, not its complete abolition. The government's decision was challenged in the High Court by seven children of Bangladesh's freedom fighters. After hearings, the High Court declared the circular illegal on 5 June 2024 and reinstated the 56% quota. The High Court's decision triggered nationwide protests, with students from private universities, colleges, and even some schools participating. The Supreme Court's refusal to issue a stay order on the High Court's decision intensified the protests [*The Daily Star* 2024, 22 July].

Amid the student protests, during a 14 July news conference, when asked about the demonstrations, Hasina responded: «If the grandchildren of freedom fighters don't receive [quota] benefits, who will? The grandchildren of Razakars?» [Mahmud 2024, 5 August]. Her response ignited protests, with marchers at Dhaka University chanting: «Who are you? I am Razakar» [Mahmud 2024, 5 August].

Protests turned violent mainly after the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the Awami League's student wing, and police attacked protesters in Dhaka [Mahmud 2024, 5 August]. Due to nationwide unrest, the Hasina government requested early Supreme Court hearings on the quota system. Consequently, on 21 July 2024, the seven-member Appellate Division bench, led by Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan, reduced the freedom fighter quota to 5% for children of freedom fighters, martyred freedom fighters, and Biranganas, with 1% for ethnic minorities and another 1% for people with disabilities and third-gender individuals [*The Daily Star* 2024, 22 July]. The verdict called for major reform of the quota system in government, semi-government and autonomous organisations, slashing the reservation to only 7% the earlier 56% [*The Daily Star* 2024, 22 July].

However, the Supreme Court's decision failed to pacify students, who now demanded the release of jailed comrades and action against officials responsible for violence against protesters. Initially, the protestors made nine demands:

- Hasina must publicly apologise for the mass killings of students.
- Then Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Education Minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel, and Law Minister Anisul Haque must resign from the cabinet and the Awami League.
- Police officers present at the sites where students were killed must be sacked.
- Vice chancellors of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar and Rajshahi universities must resign.
- The police and the BCL members who attacked the students and those who instigated the attacks must be arrested.
- Families of the killed and injured protestors must be compensated.
- All party-affiliated student politics, including BCL, should be banned and student councils should be established instead.
- All educational institutions and halls of residence must be reopened.
- Guarantees must be provided that no academic or administrative harassment of protesters will take place [*Al Jazeera* 2024, 25 July].

It is estimated that over 1,000 people died in violence between security forces and protesters. A United Nations Fact-Finding Report found

that discontent against the Hasina government had been brewing among many Bangladeshis for years. The report held institutional attitudes toward protesters responsible for the July-August violence [United Nations Human Rights Office 2025].

Hasina's reaction to the violence, where she expressed concern about the damage to the public property instead of the loss of human lives, eventually coalesced the protestors to demand her resignation [Mahmud 2025, 5 August]. The confrontation between Hasina's government and the protestors ended with her resignation and exit to India.

Following Hasina's exit, an interim government was formed, which initiated judicial proceedings into crimes committed under her administration. On 17 November 2025, the three-member International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), led by Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder, delivered its verdict, finding Sheikh Hasina guilty on three counts: incitement, ordering killings, and failing to prevent atrocities during the 2024 student protests. The tribunal sentenced her to death. The ICT also sentenced Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death, while former Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who became a state witness, received five years' imprisonment. In response, Hasina stated: «The verdicts announced against me have been made by a rigged tribunal established and presided over by an unelected government with no democratic mandate», adding that: «They are biased and politically motivated» [The Hindu 2025, 17 November]. The way the case against Hasina was pursued faced criticism, and the fairness of the judgement was questioned by a few like Meenakshi Ganguly Deputy Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, an international organisation, and a British investigative journalist, David Bergman, who had earlier questioned the Awami League's number of three million Bangladeshis killed during the 1971 war and was punished by the ICT set up by Hasina's government in December 2014. The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner called the verdict «an important moment for victims of the grave violations committed during the suppression of protests last year», but it «regret[ed] the imposition of the death penalty» which it opposed «in all circumstances» [Ranjan 2025, 20 November].

5. Countering the Established Narrative and Political Image of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

While protesting against Hasina, demonstrators also challenged the hegemonic narratives [Tanima and George 2025] that her government had used to favour her administration. Countering established narratives is a common strategy employed by protesters and rebel groups. To remain relevant over time, such movements build popular consent for their narratives by dismantling those established by the previous regime.

This counter-narrative is typically constructed by demolishing the heroic portrayal of figures championed by the previous establishment or by critically examining their historical roles.

In Bangladesh, protesters attacked portraits of Mujib and questioned his legacy. During Hasina's lengthy tenure, the Liberation War of 1971 remained central to all political narratives in Bangladesh. The Liberation War centred on her father, Mujibur Rahman, and any alternative narration was strongly rejected and suppressed. He was portrayed as an infallible leader. Many of those who questioned the official narrative were branded as anti-Bangladeshi and sometimes also punished.

Contrary to the established political narrative about Mujibur Rahman, his government is accused of engaging in various forms of atrocities against dissenters after the country's liberation. In 1972, Mujib formed the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini [National Defence Force, JRB]. By 1975, JRB recruits numbered 25,000, with plans to expand to 120,000-130,000 by the end of 1980. The JRB «monopolized» the use of violence in Bangladesh [Cordon 2007, p. 13]. It received 13% of total expenditures allocated to the country's armed forces. This preferential treatment of the JRB over the armed forces in budget allocation, recruitment, and status created hostility among the armed forces toward the Mujib government [Maniruzzaman 1976, p. 121]. The JRB ostensibly targeted Mujib's political opponents [Almamun 2020, pp. 50-51] and was associated with arbitrary terrorizing tactics, though the government argued that the JRB was created to fight the Marxist dissident group, Gono Bahini [Riaz 2008, pp. 10-11].

Subsequently, the Mujib government passed the Fourth Amendment to the country's constitution, paving the way for one-party rule and absolute power. Following this amendment, the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL) was established in January 1975, and all other political parties were declared illegal under it. Also, in June, all the country's daily newspapers, except four, were shut down. Of the four permitted newspapers, two were government-owned: *Dainik Bangla* and *Bangladesh Observer*. The other two were *Daily Ittefaq* and *Bangladesh Times* [Paul 2025, 25 January].

In the post-Hasina times, on the 50th anniversary of Mujibur Rahman's death (15 August 2025), NCP convenor Md Nahid Islam wrote a lengthy Facebook post stating:

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is not the Father of the Nation. We acknowledge his role and sacrifices in winning independence, but we also remember the national tragedy that unfolded under his rule. Through his leadership, Bangladesh was reduced to a tributary state of India, the anti-people Constitution of 1972 was imposed, and the foundations were laid for looting, political killings, and the one-party BAKSAL dictatorship [BSS News 2025, 15 August].

In July-August 2024, the protesters had vandalized and set fire to Mujib's murals, the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, the statue of Themis at the Supreme Court premises, Shadhinata Sangram Bhashkarjo, the sculpture of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin in Mymensingh, the Mujibnagar Liberation War Memorial Complex in Meherpur, and the Madhusudan De Smriti Sculpture at Dhaka University [*The Daily Star* 2024, 8 August]. Six months later, in February 2025, after Hasina delivered an online speech from her exile in New Delhi calling on supporters to oppose the interim government, mobs – many affiliated with Students Against Discrimination – torched Dhanmondi-32, Mujibur Rahman's residence. Awami League offices and houses of exiled party leaders were attacked in 19 other cities across Bangladesh [Sujan 2025, 7 February].

In a major action in June 2025, Bangladesh's interim government amended the 2022's law referring to Mujib as Father of the Nation. The interim government revised school textbooks, removing references to him as «Father of the Nation» while providing sufficient coverage of his role in Bangladesh's liberation. In the revised textbook for 2025, titled *History of Bangladesh: World Civilisation, Classes Nine and Ten*, prepared by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Mujib's role in the Liberation War receives substantial mention. The textbook mentions Mujib's famous March 1971 speech, in which he asked people to establish struggle committees under Awami League leadership to advance the struggle [History 2025, p. 202].

On the declaration of independence, the book states: «Major Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh from Kalurghat Betar Centre in Chittagong on 26th March. Then he declared independence again on 27th March on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman» [History 2025, p. 204].

Such changes to school textbook syllabi to suit regime politics are not new. In the past, Hasina was accused of infusing textbooks with her party's ideology by erasing alternative political histories of the country.

In post-Hasina times, General Zia's role in Bangladesh has received greater attention. For instance, on 7 November 2025, the BNP and many others celebrated the 50th anniversary of National Revolution and Solidarity Day – commemorating the date in 1975 when General Zia captured power.

The protestors had also raised questions about the character of the Bangladeshi state. The question of Bengali versus Bangladeshi nationalism remains largely unsettled. In 1977, the military government replaced «Bengali» with «Bangladeshi» as the national identity in the Constitution through a proclamation. This was reversed in 2011 by Hasina's government, which reinstated Bangalee nationalism along with secularism and socialism through the 15th Amendment [Riaz and Harun O Rashid 2026].

On this matter, in 2025, the reform commission recommended calling the nation «Bangladeshis» instead of «Bengalees» [Constitution Reform

Commission, Government of Bangladesh n.d.a & *The Daily Star* 2025, 16 January]. The Constitution Reform Commission also recommended dropping the word secularism, generating fears among many in the country that Islamists would become politically stronger. The following section discusses Islamist groups and Hindu minority issues in Bangladesh.

6. *The Islamists and the question of minority in post-Hasina Bangladesh*

According to the 2022 census, Bangladesh's population is approximately 165.16 million, of which 91.04% are Muslims, 7.95% are Hindus, 0.61% are Buddhists, 0.30% are Christians, and 0.12% are from other religions [Population and Housing Census 2022]. In this multi-religious country, Bangladesh adopted secularism and a secular vision in its 1972 Constitution, yet Islamists gained ground through political and social support. Governments under General Ziaur Rahman (1977-1981) and General Hussain Mohammed Ershad (1983-1990) are largely accused of promoting Islamization from above.

Before proceeding, it is important to understand the term «Islamists» in the Bangladeshi context. Islamism is a political ideology that derives its legitimacy from Islam. Those who adhere to Islamism are called Islamists [Cagaptay 2016, 8 July]. Ali Riaz observes that, as elsewhere in the world, Islamists in Bangladesh are not «a homogenous and monolithic entity»; they do not belong to a single political party. Based on political parties drawing from Islamic referents, Riaz divides them into three broad groups: those who participate, even if grudgingly, in the existing political system; those who operate within the democratic political system despite reservations; and those who refuse to participate in constitutional politics and remain clandestine [Riaz 2008, p. 30].

These three groups share the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Bangladesh through an «Islamic revolution», though they differ on various matters, including the «ideal disposition of an Islamic state» [Riaz 2008, p. 30]. Riaz has further divided these groups into subgroups, identifying which Islamic parties belong to which category [Riaz 2008, pp. 30-31].

The rise of Islamists in Bangladesh has a history which is essential to understand the present context. During his tenure, General Rahman survived 21 coup attempts [Ahsan 2022] and several rebellions supported by both the political right and the left of the centre forces [Riaz 2016]. To quell unrest against his rule, Ziaur Rahman attempted to appease religious groups by enacting the Political Party Regulation Act, which cleared the way for BJI and other like-minded groups to participate in the country's political system. A series of constitutional amendments changed the nature of the Bangladeshi state. The words «secularism» and «secular» were deleted from the Preamble and Article 8 of the Constitution. A sentence stating that

«absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah» should be «the basis of all actions» was inserted through the Second Proclamation Order Number 1 in 1977. The words «Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim (*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful*)» were also inserted above the Constitution's Preamble [Majumder 2016]. Rahman also facilitated the return of Ghulam Azam, perpetrator of violence against Bengali speakers during the Liberation War, from exile. General Zia was assassinated in 1981 in Chittagong (now Chhatogram).

The Ershad government made Islamiyat (Islamic religious studies) mandatory for school students. Society also witnessed the parallel rise of a radical version of Islam during the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, the centuries-old Sufi version of Islam [Chowdhury 2016, 4 July], practised by many Bangladeshis, was gradually being replaced by Wahhabism, which became popular in rural areas, especially among the lower middle class and those below them [Schendel 2009].

After democracy's return in 1991, the spread of radical Islam yielded electoral dividends for Islamists and was also exploited by other political parties. The most active Islamist party in Bangladesh is BJI. In the 1991 parliamentary elections, BJI contested 221 of the 300 seats open to direct election, winning 18 seats and securing 12% of the popular vote [Rehman 2013, 13 March]. Through a tactical alliance with the BNP, BJI gained two additional seats from the 30 indirectly elected seats for women. In 1996, BJI won three seats and 8% of the total polled votes. In the 2001 elections, it secured 4% of the votes and won 17 seats [Rehman 2013, 13 March].

In 2009, a petition against BJI was filed in the High Court by Bangladesh Tariqat Federation's Secretary General Rezaul Haque Chandpuri and 24 others, arguing that the party's charter breaches Bangladesh's secular Constitution as it is a religion-based political party that does not believe in the country's independence and sovereignty [The Hindu 2013, 5 August]. The High Court declared the BJI illegal. The BJI challenged the decision in the Supreme Court. In 2013, the Supreme Court rejected BJI's challenge to a High Court verdict that declared it illegal and barred it from contesting future elections [The Hindu 2013, 5 August]. Consequently, BJI was unable to contest the 2014, 2018, and 2024 elections.

The BNP has been accused of using religion to win elections or allying with Islamist parties to retain power. However, the Awami League (AL) has also used Islam and Islamist groups to win elections. Between 1991 and 1996, the AL developed close relations with BJI [Riaz 2016, p. 164]. AL leaders publicly affirmed their belief in Islam and presented themselves as custodians of Islamic values. They also highlighted their founder, Mujib's, contributions to enhancing Islamic education, establishing the Islamic Foundation, and making Bangladesh a member of the OIC [Riaz 2016].

Years later, when Hasina faced severe criticism from the opposition over her April 2017 visit to India and the signing of 22 agreements – includ-

ing a crucial US\$4.5 billion concessionary line of credit to finance development projects and defence purchases – she courted Hifazat-e-Islam, an Islamist pressure group of madrassah teachers and students [Crispin 2017, 21 April].

Besides political organisations, there are militant groups that draw inspiration from a radical interpretation of Islam. Some prominent militant groups include Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB), Neo-JMB, Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya, Hizb ut-Tahrir, etc. Not only males but also, as a work by Lorch and Azad [2023] shows, women have been involved in the terror networks. One of the deadliest militant attacks in Bangladesh occurred on 1 July 2016, when seven fully armed militants stormed Dhaka's popular Holey Artisan Bakery, taking approximately 60 people – mostly foreigners – hostage. The area was cleared following a joint operation by commandos from the Bangladesh Army and Navy, special weapons and tactics teams, the elite Rapid Action Battalion, and the paramilitary Border Guards Bangladesh. In that operation, two policemen and six militants were killed, and one militant was captured. The militants killed nine Italians, seven Japanese, three Bangladeshis, and one Indian hostage [Roy 2016, 3 July]. In follow-up operations to the hostage crisis, Bangladeshi security officials reportedly killed approximately six to eight militant leaders between July and December 2016 [Bhaumik 2017, 4 April].

Shortly after Hasina's exit in late August 2024, the interim government revoked the ban on BJI and its student wing, Islami Chhattra Shibir (Islamic Students Organisation) [Bhattacharjee 2024, 31 August]. Later, in June 2025, the Bangladesh government restored its registration as a political party, allowing it to participate in elections, following the Supreme Court's May decision reversing the cancellation of BJI's registration. The order also overturned a conviction against key BJI leader ATM Azharul Islam, one of the party's prominent figures, who had been sentenced to death in 2014 for rape, murder, and genocide during the Liberation War [*Al Jazeera* 2025, 1 June].

The emboldened Islamists now form an important part of the country's politics and society. For instance, in October 2025, the interim government allowed controversial Islamic preacher Zakir Naik to visit Bangladesh. However, citing law and order, security, and logistics, the government later decided not to allow him to visit Bangladesh before elections [*The Business Standard* 2025, 5 November]. He had been banned from entering Bangladesh after the 2016 militant attack in Dhaka.

In November 2025, according to media reports, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education scrapped newly created posts for music teachers in government primary schools after facing criticism from religious organizations [Bdnews 24.com 2025, 5 November]. Earlier, in September, after the position was announced, Islami Andolan Bangladesh chief Ameer Syed Mohammad Rezaul Karim condemned it and called for appointing

religious teachers in primary schools instead. Leaders from BJI, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh criticized the government's decision in a seminar. Hifazat-e Islam denounced it as an «anti-Islamic agenda» and demanded cancellation [Bdnews 24.com 2025, 5 November].

The government's decision to cancel recruitment of Music and Physical Education Teachers in primary schools under pressure from Islamic groups contradicts Bangladesh's National Education Policy 2010, which states that «a congenial and joyful environment need to be created in the schools to promote healthy physical and mental development of the children» [Ministry of Education, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh]. The policy «envision[s] education as a tool for moral, social, and cultural development» and «explicitly includes music, arts, crafts, and physical education as part of primary learning to ensure children's creative and emotional growth» [Khaled 2025, 5 November].

Furthermore, Bangladesh's National Children Policy 2011 guarantees the holistic development of the country's children. Bangladesh also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990. Therefore, by scrapping music and physical education posts, Bangladesh not only contradicts its own policies but also its universal obligations under the UNCRC and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) that call for children's holistic development [Khaled 2025, 5 November].

Bangladeshi Islamic groups argue that music and physical education contradict Islam, yet Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, and Turkey include music in their educational curricula [Shetu 2025, 18 September]. Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigoshthi, a cultural organization, decided to protest the government's decision to cancel music and physical education teacher recruitment in primary schools. In a written statement opposing this decision, Amit Ranjan Dey, General Secretary of the organization, stated: «The cancellation of teacher recruitment in music and physical education is part of a far-reaching and conspiratorial political decision. There is an ongoing plot to remove fine arts, music, dance, and drama from the curriculum as well. Udichi believes these decisions are self-destructive and stem from communal and politically narrow motives» [*The Daily Star* 2025, 8 November].

For Islamists in Bangladesh, Hindus largely symbolize India. Even Hindus who vocally opposed Hasina were not spared by protesters during the anti-Hasina demonstrations in 2024. Shortly after the fall of the Hasina-led government, the homes of some of the Hindu citizens, their temples, and business establishments were attacked by protesters. In Dhaka's Dhanmondi, the house of Rahul Ananda, a Hindu musician from the band Joler Gaan (song of water), was set on fire. The Dhanuka Manasa Bari temple in Shariatpur was ransacked, the idols of Radha-Krishna were destroyed, and all 16 CCTV cameras installed inside the temple premises were damaged.

The Dinajpur Centre Cremation yard was vandalized. Similar incidents were reported across Bangladesh [*The Daily Star* 2024, 7 August].

In October, the crown gifted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Jeshoreshwari Temple during his 2021 visit to Bangladesh was stolen. Taking note of the theft and attacks, India issued a statement: «These are deplorable events. They follow a systematic pattern of desecration and damage to temples and deities that we have witnessed over several days now. We call upon the Government of Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of Hindus and all minorities and their places of worship, especially during this auspicious festival time» [GoI 2024]. At that time, the Bangladesh government maintained that figures on the number of attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh presented by India were «misleading and highly exaggerated» [*The Wire* 2024, 21 December].

In 2025, according to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity (BHBCU) Council, between 4 August 2024 and 30 June 2025, 2,442 incidents of communal violence occurred in the country [Unity Council 2025]. The organization found that 50 people from minority communities were murdered, and 29 women, especially minors, were raped or gang-raped. The BHBCU also stated that communal attacks continued to plague minorities in 2025, citing several cases: 20 minority families in Daharmoshihati, Jashore, lost everything and had their homes burned; in Muradnagar, Comilla, a minority woman was raped and the video circulated online; and in Dhaka's Khilkhet, temples were demolished by government bulldozers without prior notice [Unity Council 2025].

However, in a positive development, Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, spokesperson for Bangladesh Sammilat Sanatan Jagran Jote (United Sanatan Dharma Awakening Group) and a former ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) leader, who was earlier arrested on sedition charges in November 2024, was finally granted bail [Unity Council 2025].

In August 2024, Islamic groups and their affiliates were accused of attacks on Hindus. At that time, in an interview with *The Indian Express*, Golam Parwar stated: «They (those behind the attacks) are criminal elements who have taken advantage of the situation, some out of past enmity, some local disputes, and they should be dealt with as per law. The authorities must investigate and do justice...according to Islamic philosophy, we don't believe in violence against our brothers» [Roy 2024, 18 August]. He mentioned that the Ameer (Chief) of BJI, Shafiqur, visited the Dhakeshwari temple and met members of Hindu groups [Roy 2024, 18 August].

The Indian Express report added that Hindu leader Basudeb Dhar, who met BJI leaders at that time, said: «I told the Jamaat leaders that you have an image of being a communal and fundamentalist group. This is your opportunity to prove yourself otherwise» [Roy 2024, 18 August]. Dhar stated that BJI members guarded the temple. Parwar added: «There

has been a wrong perception created that Jamaat is an extremist, fundamentalist and communal party. They have labelled us like that» [Roy 2024, 18 August].

The BJI has frequently appealed for communal unity. For instance, in September 2025, Golam Parwar appealed for communal unity between Hindus and Muslims. In an interactive meeting with Hindu community leaders in Khulna, Parwar stated: «We want to safeguard this country through the collective strength of Hindus and Muslims. I urge everyone not to be misled by propaganda» [BSS News 2025, 25 September].

In an important development, Hindu cricketer Litton Das was appointed Bangladesh's cricket captain for the T-20 format. Hindu-Muslim relations in Bangladesh directly affect New Delhi-Dhaka relations, as discussed in the following section. In an interview with *The Indian Express*, Parwar added: «India is a friendly country...people of India are not our enemies. The Modi government's policy [p]ainted non-Awami League parties as anti-India. They think that only the Awami League can keep them safe, and if Islamic parties like ours come, then it will become a breeding ground for terrorists. This is a wrong perception» [Roy 2024, 18 August].

Nevertheless, Bangladesh-India ties deteriorated after Hasina's departure. Under the interim government, Dhaka has been increasing its closeness with Beijing and resetting ties with Islamabad. The following section examines these changes.

7. Growing Distance from India, Increasing Closeness with China and Resetting Relations with Pakistan

India and Bangladesh enjoyed very close relations during Hasina's tenure. During her time in office, India and Bangladesh signed several important agreements, including the Ganga/Ganges Waters Treaty (GWT) of 1996 and the Land Boundary Agreement of 2011. Under Hasina, New Delhi exercised considerable influence over Dhaka. At that time, India's Bangladesh policy was Hasina-centric, with minimal engagement with other political and social actors from the country. Despite this closeness, differences and disputes over certain issues – including the deal on the Teesta River and the question of «illegal» Bangladeshi immigrants – remained unresolved. Hasina managed these issues well, preventing conflicting matters from affecting the depth of India-Bangladesh ties. Due to such engagement, the then-opposition and a section of Bangladeshis attacked Hasina for «selling the country» to India [Shawon 2024, 25 June].

After Hasina's departure, Narendra Modi greeted Yunus when he assumed the position of Bangladesh's Chief Advisor. India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka in December 2024, and Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar met Foreign Affairs Advisor Touhid Hossain on the sidelines

of the eighth Indian Ocean Conference in Oman in February 2025. Yunus expressed interest in visiting India but did not receive a favourable response from New Delhi [Bhattacharjee 2025, 25 March].

Later, in a message on Bangladesh Day in March 2025, Modi wrote to Yunus: «The spirit of the Liberation War of Bangladesh continues to remain a guiding light for our relationship...We remain committed to advancing this partnership, driven by our common aspirations for peace, stability, and prosperity, and based on mutual sensitivity to each other's interests and concerns» [The Hindu 2025, 27 March].

Modi and Yunus met during the Bay of Bengal Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation Summit in Bangkok on 3 and 4 April 2025. Despite this meeting, bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh have deteriorated. In an exclusive interview with Rahul Joshi from *Firstpost*, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stated: «We do not seek tense relations with Bangladesh, but Yunus should be cautious with his statements» [Firstpost 2025, 7 November]. In response, Bangladesh's foreign ministry spokesperson SM Mahbulul Alam said: «We consider that Mr. Singh's comments are incorrect and unhelpful and not respectful of propriety and diplomatic nicety» [Prothom Alo 2025, 9 November].

More than anything, India-Bangladesh ties are troubled because of New Delhi's sheltering of Hasina. After the 17 November verdict, Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain told reporters: «We will officially communicate our position to India. Whether the letter goes tonight or tomorrow, it will certainly go» [BSS 2025, 17 November]. Regarding earlier letters sent to India, he stated: «Now the situation is different... the judicial process has been completed and they have been convicted» [BSS 2025, 17 November].

In an earlier statement on Hasina's case, the Foreign Ministry «urged New Delhi to immediately hand over fugitive convicts Hasina and Kamal after the International Crimes Tribunal found them guilty of the July killings and awarded them death sentences, describing the move as India's treaty-bound obligation. The existing bilateral extradition agreement between Bangladesh and India marks the transfer of the two convicts a compulsory responsibility for New Delhi» [BSS 2025, 17 November]. The Ministry added that «granting shelter to individuals convicted of crimes against humanity would be considered an unfriendly act and a disregard for justice» [BSS 2025, 17 November].

In an initial reaction on ICT verdict on Hasina, India stated that it had «noted the verdict» and that New Delhi «remains committed to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh, including in peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in that country. We will always engage constructively with all stakeholders to that end» [GoI 2025].

Anti-India sentiments heightened again after the 32-year-old student leader, Sharif Osman Hadi, succumbed to his injuries in a Singapore

hospital on 18 December 2025. Hadi had been shot by masked men in Dhaka and was sent to Singapore for treatment. He served as spokesperson for Inquilab Mancha (Platform for Revolution) and was critical of India. Following Hadi's death, his supporters carried out attacks on some Hindus. A Hindu worker, Dipu Chandra Das, was lynched by a mob on 18 December 2025 on charges of blasphemy. However, police found no evidence of Dipu making religiously offensive remarks. It was a dispute with his colleagues in the factory that cost Dipu his life [Hindustan Times 2025, 23 December].

Protesters also vandalized and looted the offices of Bangladesh's prominent newspapers – *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*. They accused these publications of «setting the ground» for Hadi's killing, calling them «Delhi's lapdog» and «Sheikh Hasina's enabler» [*The Daily Star* 2025, 20 December]. Cultural institutions – Chhayanaut-Sanskriti Bhaban – also came under attack, and the central office of the cultural organization Udichi Shilpi Gosthi was torched by protesters.

Attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh attracted strong reactions from Hindu groups in India. Under pressure from Hindu seers, groups, and a former Bharatiya Janata Party member of the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly, Sangeet Som, Bangladeshi fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman, who was bought by the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) for the 2026 edition of the tournament, was released. This development further strained ties between the two countries. Following Mustafizur Rahman's episode, the Bangladesh Cricket Board requested the International Cricket Council to shift the country's scheduled matches in the T20 Cricket World Cup, jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, outside India. The interim government also decided not to broadcast the future IPL matches in Bangladesh.

These developments occurred when the Indian state was seeking to engage with those who could emerge as important political actors after the 2026 national elections in Bangladesh. For instance, when Khaleda Zia was seriously ill, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on his X (formerly Twitter) handle: «Deeply concerned to learn about the health of Begum Khaleda Zia, who has contributed to Bangladesh's public life for many years...India stands ready to extend all possible support, in whatever way we can». She did not recover and died on 30 December 2025. Upon her death, Modi sent a condolence letter that was handed to her son, Tarique Rahman, by S. Jaishankar, who represented New Delhi at Khaleda's funeral.

The two countries also decided to renew the GWT, which expires in December 2026. On 1 January 2026, India and Bangladesh began joint water measurement at a point 3,500 feet upstream of the Hardinge Bridge on the Padma River in Bangladesh and at Farakka on the Ganga River in India [Topu 2026, 1 January].

8. *Bangladesh's Ties with China and Pakistan*

The interim government developed close ties with China and Pakistan. In November 2024, a four-member BNP delegation travelled to China at the invitation of the Communist Party of China. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Advisor Touhid Hossain in January 2025. In February 2025, a 22-member delegation from eight Bangladesh political parties embarked on a 13-day trip to China [*The Daily Star* 2025, 24 February]. Yunus then visited China from 26 to 29 March 2025. In an interview with *Xinhua*, Yunus appreciated his country's ties with China and underscored Beijing's economic role in Bangladesh [*Xinhua* 2025, 29 March].

During Yunus's visit to Beijing, China and Bangladesh signed an agreement on economic and technical cooperation, eight memorandums of understanding, and made five announcements of cooperation on investment infrastructure and technology. The post-Hasina days also witnessed engagement between Islamists and the Chinese government. First, in November 2024, a 14-member delegation comprising BJI and Islami Chhatra Shibir, along with four other Islamic organizations, visited China [*The Daily Star* 2024, 28 November]. Second, in May 2025, BJI's Nayebe-Ameer Dr. Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher met and exchanged views with Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen at the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka [BSS News 2025, 7 May]. Third, on 10 July 2025, an eight-member BJI delegation led by Ameer of Jamaat Dr. Shafiqur Rahman travelled to China for a five-day visit [Jamaat-e-Islami 2025].

Although Hasina also maintained good ties with China, a new development following her departure is the resetting of relations between Islamabad and Dhaka. In April 2025, after a 15-year gap, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch visited Dhaka for foreign office consultations. On 23 July 2025, Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited Dhaka, and on 21 August 2025, Pakistan's Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan made a trip to Dhaka. The most significant visit was by Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to Bangladesh from 23 to 24 August 2025 – the first by a Pakistani foreign minister in 13 years. Hina Rabhani Khar was the last Pakistani foreign minister to visit Dhaka in November 2012 to invite Hasina to the Developing-8 countries' summit in Islamabad.

Dar met with a delegation from the National Citizen Party, led by General Secretary Akhtar Hossain; BJI members, led by Naib Amir (Deputy Head) Syed Abdullah Mohammed Taher; and leaders from the BNP. He also met Muhammad Yunus, BNP Chairperson Begum Khalida Zia, and the Amir of Bangladesh BJI, Shafiqur Rehman [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2025].

The two countries signed agreements on visa abolition for diplomatic and official passport holders and four MoUs: establishing a joint working group on trade; cooperation between the Institute of Strategic Studies in Is-

lamabad and the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies in Dhaka; cooperation between the Foreign Service Academy of Pakistan and the Foreign Service Academy of Bangladesh; and cooperation between the Associated Press of Pakistan and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha. They also signed a cultural exchange program [Ranjan 2025, 25 August].

Military visits between the two countries have also increased. In October 2025, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, visited Dhaka. On 10 November 2025, Pakistan Navy Chief Admiral Naveed Ashraf arrived in Dhaka on a three-day visit – the first visit by a Pakistani Navy Chief to Bangladesh since the 1971 Liberation War. The Bangladesh Navy had earlier participated in the joint naval exercise AMAN, held in Karachi and the North Arabian Sea in February 2025. Before Ashraf's visit to Bangladesh on 8 November, the Pakistan Navy ship PNS SAIF arrived in Chattogram for a four-day goodwill visit [*The Daily Star* 2025, 10 November].

Despite efforts to reset ties, several unresolved historical issues remain between the two countries. First, Bangladesh is demanding US\$4.52 billion in financial claims from Pakistan to cover its share of pre-1971 assets, including foreign aid, unpaid provident funds, and savings instruments. Second, it is seeking a formal apology for the 1971 atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army. Finally, Dhaka wants Pakistan to repatriate approximately 324,000 stranded Pakistanis living in Bangladesh [Ranjan 2025, 25 August].

9. Conclusion

This article discusses how, throughout 2025, the country debated the reforms needed to improve the functioning of its political, administrative, and economic organisations. Hasina's administration was also accused of carrying out extrajudicial killings and custodial deaths. However, the situation has not changed substantially. According to data from Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), between January and November 2025, 29 people were killed extrajudicially or died due to torture in custody. During the same period, 28 convicts and 55 under-trial prisoners died in jail [Khan 2025, 10 December].

As discussed in this article, for a long time, a segment of Bangladeshi society, a section of the political class, and the opposition were dissatisfied with Hasina's close ties with India. Therefore, it was predictable that any opposition figure replacing Hasina would not maintain such close relations with India. The interim government and many others in Bangladesh are particularly unhappy with India's decision to shelter Hasina.

The interim government and other political parties have expressed their desire to strengthen ties with China and reset relations with Pakistan, as discussed in this article. On 19 June 2025, a China-Pakistan-Bangladesh trilateral Vice Foreign Minister/Foreign Secretary meeting was held in Kun-

ming, China, where participants agreed to advance cooperation «based on the principles of good-neighborliness, equality and mutual trust, openness and inclusiveness, common development and win-win cooperation» [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China 2025, 20 June].

The year 2025 ended with the death of Khaleda Zia and the return of her son, Tarique Rahman, to Dhaka after 17 years of self-exile in London. In the February 2026 elections, the BNP secured a landslide victory. Now, the onus lies on the Tarique Rahman government to implement reforms, shape the country's politics and society, and determine the foreign policy trajectory.

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