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A Rare Mandate, A Historic Responsibility A Message to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman

Ambassador M. Osman Siddique

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is, by any measure, a fortunate man.

Not simply because he has reached the highest elected office in Bangladesh, but because he has arrived there at a moment when history has placed an extraordinary opportunity before him. Few political leaders are given the chance to inherit a country so eager for change, so conscious of its past failures, and so hopeful about its future.

But history can be generous—and unforgiving.

The opportunity before Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is immense. So is the responsibility. He has been given something political leaders everywhere seek but rarely receive: a genuine opportunity to reshape a nation's direction.

He must not waste it.

His first address to the nation offered an important principle: that Bangladesh belongs to all its citizens, regardless of whom they voted for or whether they voted at all. He has also identified law and order and the fight against corruption as priorities, emphasizing that the rule of law—not political influence or coercion—should govern the state. Those are important words. The challenge now is to turn them into a genuine governing culture.

The Moment Belongs To Him—But It Really Belongs To Bangladesh

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has inherited a country with enormous potential but equally formidable problems.

Bangladesh has a large, youthful population, an increasingly sophisticated private sector, an important manufacturing base, a globally significant diaspora, and a strategic geographic position.

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But these advantages cannot be taken for granted.

The country needs stronger institutions, greater economic discipline, better governance, reliable energy, more productive investment, quality education, employment for its young people and a financial system in which citizens and investors can have confidence.

At the United Nations, the Prime Minister presented a vision built around **"Recovery, Restoration and Reconstruction."** He spoke of transforming Bangladesh's working-age population into skilled human resources, creating employment, strengthening manufacturing, empowering women and building a more inclusive economy.

That is an ambitious agenda. But ambition alone will not transform Bangladesh.

The Greatest Danger Is Not Failure—It Is Distraction

Mr. Prime Minister, perhaps the greatest danger before your government is not that you lack ideas. It is that politics could consume the time and political capital required to implement them.

Every new government faces the temptation to reward supporters, accommodate political interests, settle old scores, and become preoccupied with the daily battles of politics.

You have an opportunity to resist that temptation.

The citizens of Bangladesh did not give you a mandate simply to change who occupies government offices. They gave you an opportunity to change **how government works.**

That distinction is fundamental

If institutions remain vulnerable to political influence, if corruption merely changes hands, if bureaucratic decisions continue to depend upon connections, or if economic opportunity remains concentrated among the privileged, then Bangladesh will have changed governments without fundamentally changing governance. Your most important legacy could therefore be institutional rather than political.

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Build institutions that are stronger than individuals.

> ***Build a civil service that serves the state rather than whichever party happens to be in power.***
>
> ***Build a judiciary whose independence is respected.***
>
> ***Build a police force that citizens can trust.***
>
> ***Build an economic system in which entrepreneurs succeed because of innovation and productivity—not proximity to power.***
>
> ***And build a political culture in which disagreement is not treated as disloyalty.***

Govern Beyond BNP

There is another opportunity before you.

You have said that every Bangladeshi has equal rights under your government, whether they voted for the BNP, another party, or did not vote at all.

That principle should become a defining characteristic of your premiership.

You have won political power. Now you have the opportunity to transcend partisan power.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh cannot govern only for the people who supported him. He must govern for the farmer in Rangpur, the garment worker in Gazipur, the entrepreneur in Dhaka, the student in Chattogram, the expatriate worker in the Middle East, and the Bangladeshi-American building a business in New York or Washington.

They may disagree politically. They may have voted differently. But they are all Bangladeshis.

A leader becomes truly national when those who did not vote for him nevertheless believe that the government belongs to them.

That is a much higher standard than winning an election.

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The Economy Must Become The Great National Project

Bangladesh's economic transformation should now be treated as a national project, not simply a government program.

The Prime Minister's ambition of building a trillion-dollar economy over the coming decade is extraordinary. Achieving anything approaching that goal will require much more than government spending.

It will require private investment, foreign investment, technology, skilled workers, energy security, modern infrastructure, predictable regulation and—above all—confidence.

Confidence is an economic asset.

Investors must believe contracts will be honored. Entrepreneurs must believe rules will not suddenly change. Young Bangladeshis must believe that their future does not require leaving the country. And diaspora members must believe that investing in Bangladesh is an opportunity rather than a bureaucratic ordeal.

The diaspora, in particular, represents an enormous reservoir of capital, expertise and international connectivity. **Use it.**

Bangladeshis abroad should not be viewed merely as remittance providers. They can be investors, mentors, technology partners, educators, entrepreneurs and ambassadors for Bangladesh.

A government that successfully mobilizes its diaspora could create an entirely new dimension of Bangladesh's economic diplomacy.

Do Not Confuse Political Victory With Historical Achievement

Mr. Prime Minister, political victory is temporary.

History is not.

Governments come and go. Political parties rise and fall. Elections are won and lost. But institutions endure—or fail generations of citizens.

Your UN address gave the international community a picture of the Bangladesh you want to build: democratic, prosperous, inclusive, economically confident and respected internationally.

The real test begins after the speeches.

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> ***Can Bangladesh become a country where a young person can build a successful career without political connections?***
>
> ***Can an entrepreneur start a company without navigating unnecessary bureaucracy?***
>
> ***Can a citizen obtain justice without influence?***
>
> ***Can a woman travel, work, and build a business with confidence?***
>
> ***Can an investor look at Bangladesh and see predictability rather than uncertainty?***
>
> ***Can a farmer receive a fair return for his labor?***
>
> ***Can a talented young Bangladeshi conclude that his or her future is better built at home than abroad?***

These are the questions by which your administration will ultimately be judged.

You Have Been Given a Rare Chance at History

Something else makes your position unusual.

You have spent years outside the formal exercise of executive power, observing Bangladesh's political evolution from a distance. You therefore enter office with an understanding of both the possibilities and the costs of political power.

That experience can become an advantage if it produces humility.

Do not surround yourself only with people who agree with you.

Seek out people who will tell you uncomfortable truths.

Listen to economists who challenge your assumptions. Listen to young people who have no political connection. Listen to business leaders, workers, farmers, academics, women entrepreneurs and members of the diaspora.

A successful prime minister does not need to know everything.

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He needs to know how to build a government that can find the right answers.

Mr. Prime Minister, Don't Waste this Opportunity.

You are fortunate, Prime Minister, because Bangladesh has given you an extraordinary opportunity.

But remember: **Being fortunate is not the same as being successful.**

Luck places a person at the right moment in history. Leadership determines what that person does with the moment.

You now have the opportunity to move Bangladesh beyond the politics of grievance and toward the politics of achievement.

> ***You can make the rule of law more powerful than political influence.***
>
> ***You can make economic opportunity more widely available.***
>
> ***You can make the diaspora a strategic national asset.***
>
> ***You can make young Bangladeshis believe that their dreams can be realized at home.***

And perhaps most importantly, you can leave behind institutions that do not depend upon the personality of Tarique Rahman—or any other political leader.

That would be a legacy worthy of the opportunity history has placed in your hands.

The world is watching Bangladesh again. Your appearance at the United Nations gave you the opportunity to tell the world what Bangladesh intends to become.

Now comes the harder task.

Turn the promise into performance.

Do not allow partisan politics, personal loyalties, or the habits of the past to consume the opportunity of the present.

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You have been given a rare political moment.

Use it to build something larger than a government, larger than a party and larger than a political career.

Build a Bangladesh that, when your time in office is over, is stronger because you were there.

That is the opportunity.

And that is the responsibility.

Ambassador M. Osman Siddique served as the United States Ambassador and Chief of Mission under both Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He was the first American Muslim to serve as US Ambassador and the only Bangladeshi-American to serve in that position.

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Bangladesh: The End of the Honeymoon?

Jon Denilowicz

As October begins, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party government led by first-time Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is approaching eight months in office. When the PM and his team took office in mid-February, they announced ambitious goals and pledged to rigorously monitor their performance at the 180-day mark. With this milestone passed and the PM returning from a high-profile visit to the United States, now is an appropriate moment to assess the government's performance and analyze its most likely path forward.

To start with the good news, the Prime Minister has brought energy and a strong work ethic to the job and has smartly set aside some of the pomp and circumstance that surrounded the office during Hasina's tenure. Government insiders speak admiringly about the PM's long hours in the office and his expectation that advisors and cabinet members keep up with the pace he has set. This has been a real shock to the system, particularly for some of the older and more experienced member of the government who became accustomed to a more leisurely pace as opposition political leaders. On the whole, the Prime Minister has largely retained those who joined him in government in February, with only some minor tinkering to the composition of his Cabinet. Given the age and frail health of a number of Ministers, however, it is likely that there will be a number of additional Cabinet changes over the course of the government's remaining tenure in office. It appears that the Prime Minister has given significant authority to a small group of Ministerial-ranked advisors who form his inner circle. This was seen prominently in New York, where a number of these advisors were by his side in key meetings.

Recent public opinion polls indicate that the Bangladeshi public appreciates the efforts that the Prime Minister has made, with his personal popularity outpacing that of his government. That said, overall satisfaction with the government's performance remains strong, indicating that voters are still willing to give the BNP the

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benefit of the doubt. Whether the PM and government retain this popularity will largely depend on the performance of Bangladesh's stressed economy.

Where the Prime Minister has had seemingly greater challenges has been in preventing excesses by some members of his party who are seeking to use their positions for personal advancement and enrichment. There is nothing new about this phenomenon in Bangladesh, but it has nonetheless been jarring to see reports of extortion, cronyism, and corruption involving lower-level party leaders and workers. The Prime Minister and his inner circle appear to understand the damage that these reports can do to his image and have acted swiftly to discipline some involved in public and egregious cases of misuse of power. At the same time, it is hard to dismiss the critique that there has been a certain return to business-as-usual vis a vis the interaction between party and government. With the BNP now led by an Acting Secretary General following Mirza Fakhrul Alamgir's elevation to the Presidency, there is a risk that internal party discipline might continue to suffer.

By far the biggest challenge facing the government is managing the economy in the context of severe energy supply and price shocks related to the U.S.-Iran war. The press is full of reports of the negative consequences of energy shortages on industry, agriculture, and day to day life. The financial cost of meeting a vastly increased energy bill has forced the government to rethink or scale back some of its signature social welfare programs. While remittances and garment exports remain healthy, the government realized the need to develop new industries to bring in foreign exchange and provide employment.

In foreign relations, the BNP government's performance has been consistently strong, with the Prime Minister and his foreign affairs team giving substance to the campaign pledge of pursuing a "Bangladesh first" policy. The PM's decision to make his first foreign trip to Malaysia and China made good sense in this regard and was welcomed by the Bangladeshi people. The Prime Minister also had a strong debut in New York, making very good use of his truncated schedule to hold important bilateral and multilateral meetings on areas of priority for his government. These include the Rohingya crisis, the dangers posed by climate change, and the need to attract investment to Bangladesh.

Many had expected that one of the PM's top priorities would be pursuing a "reset" in Bangladesh's relationship with India. Foreign

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Minister Dr. Khalilur Rahman made an early visit to New Delhi and plans were put in motion for subsequent high-level interaction. These hopes were thwarted, however, after Indian authorities allowed Sheikh Hasina to use her refuge in India to continue efforts to destabilize Bangladesh's political transition. As the Bangladesh side had warned, Hasina's press conference scuttled plans for PM Tarique to visit India and cast an overall pall over the relationship. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has been able to capitalize on the election of FM Khalil as UNGA President to gain additional clout on the world stage. Relations with a number of partners, to include the U.S., European Union, Turkey, Pakistan, United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia remain strong. In many ways, India remains the odd man out.

Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Opposition led by the Bangladesh Jamaat e Islami and National Citizens Party is continuing to find its way, alternating between working within the system and putting pressure on the government on the streets. Social media remains a contested space and accusations by party supporters against their opposite number remain heated. There continues to be a mix of misinformation and disinformation, at time amplified by outside actors. Much of the opposition's political program centers around implementation of the July Charter, which was approved by a strong majority of voters in February. Despite pledges to implement the July Charter (albeit with some amendments) this has clearly not been a priority for the government.

For its part, the Bangladesh Awami League remains stuck in the past and seemingly incapable to breaking with Hasina and others who bear the primary responsibility for crimes committed in their government's name. In an attempt to remain relevant, Hasina continues to claim that she and her party leaders in exile will return to Bangladesh in December—even as few judge that to be a realistic possibility. As long as Hasina and her cronies remain recalcitrant, there is little hope that the government will move forward with an effort to promote national reconciliation. At the same time, international and domestic human rights groups have warned about backsliding on issues related to preventing enforced disappearances, reforming security agencies, protecting rights to freedom of expression, depoliticizing the judiciary and empowering an independent human rights commission.

In sum, while it is possible, after eight months, to draw some conclusions about the BNP's performance and make hazard predictions about the future, there is still significant scope for

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change. Much will depend on whether the economic situation stabilizes and gives the government additional breathing space. For the PM, it has been an incredible two years going from a life in exile to the leadership of his party and government. After a tumultuous period, culminating in the overthrow of Hasina's government and the transition from an interim to an elected government, Bangladesh needs the current government to succeed.

Jon F. Danilowicz is a retired U.S. Department of State Senior Foreign Service Officer with extensive experience in South Asia, including service as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka. He is currently President of Right to Freedom and a Nonresident Senior Fellow on South Asia at the Atlantic Council.

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Tarique Rahman and the BNP: From Political Comeback to the Test of Governance

Ghulam M. Suhrawardi

Seven months after taking office, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman occupies one of the most unusual positions in Bangladesh's recent political history. He commands an overwhelming parliamentary majority, leads a party restored to government after years in opposition, and has entered the international arena with considerably more confidence than many expected when he returned home.

Yet the contrast between success abroad and difficulty at home is becoming increasingly important.

In foreign policy, the government can point to several significant developments. Relations with China have expanded rapidly. Bangladesh has pressed ahead with the politically sensitive Teesta River project. Relations with Pakistan have warmed. Dhaka has widened engagement with other Asian and West Asian countries while attempting to preserve productive relations with the United States and the wider West. At the United Nations General Assembly in September, Tarique presented an ambitious vision of national Recovery, Restoration and Reconstruction, the "3Rs."

The economic relationship with Washington has also acquired a new dimension through trade negotiations and ambitious commercial plans, including prospective purchases of American aircraft. At the same time, Bangladesh appears to be reconsidering important aspects of national defense, placing greater emphasis on drones, modern combat aircraft, maritime surveillance, technology, and eventually greater domestic defense-production capability.

At home, however, Tarique confronts an altogether more formidable landscape: stubborn inflation, a troubled banking system, weak revenue collection, unemployment and insufficient private investment; allegations of corruption, extortion and abuse of political

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influence involving members of his own political camp; an unsettled bureaucracy; a police force still struggling with the consequences of political polarization; and the continuing question of how deeply remnants and loyalties of the former political order remain embedded within state institutions.

Perhaps just as significant will be whether the government can build a good relationship with the opposition and follow through on its promises in the July National Charter to make long-term constitutional changes.

This is the paradox of Tarique Rahman's first months in power. Foreign policy may prove to be the easier part of governing Bangladesh.

A Foreign Policy Beginning with Confidence

Perhaps the clearest early achievement has been diversifying Bangladesh's external relationships.

Tarique's June visit to China, his first major overseas tour after taking office, produced 15 memorandums of understanding, two agreements and a joint communiqué covering trade, investment, infrastructure, connectivity and strategic cooperation. The two governments also expanded discussions on defense and diplomatic coordination.

Is it a tilt towards China? Some analysts argue yes, while others claim it's just one piece of Bangladesh's multi-alignment strategy. This makes a difference. If Bangladesh traded overreliance on India for overreliance on China, it would not truly be strategically autonomous.

The Teesta issue illustrates both the opportunity and the danger.

For years, Bangladesh has waited for a satisfactory resolution of the Teesta water-sharing question with India. During Tarique's visit to China, Beijing pledged support for managing the Teesta and other Bangladeshi rivers, and the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project became an important component of bilateral discussions.

For Dhaka, this offers practical possibilities for river management, flood control, dredging, irrigation and development of northern Bangladesh. But the Teesta is also geopolitically sensitive because of its proximity to India and the Siliguri Corridor.

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The government's approach toward India has consequently appeared firmer than the relationship Dhaka maintained during the later Sheikh Hasina years. Bangladesh has continued pressing New Delhi regarding Sheikh Hasina and has insisted that bilateral relations proceed on the basis of reciprocity, dignity and mutual interests.

Firmness, however, should not become hostility. Bangladesh and India share geography, rivers, borders, trade, transportation networks, energy connections and security concerns that neither side can wish away.

Tarique's challenge, then, is not to be "pro-India" or "anti-India," but to build a relationship in which cooperation does not require political subordination.

That principle should apply equally to China.

Pakistan, the Region and a Broader Bangladesh

Another noticeable development has been the improvement in relations with Pakistan.

At the UN General Assembly in New York, Tarique met Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The two governments described bilateral relations as having positive momentum and discussed expanding cooperation in trade, investment, connectivity, education, tourism and people-to-people relations.

Bangladesh has simultaneously broadened contacts elsewhere. During the UNGA visit, Tarique met leaders from Türkiye, Iran, Pakistan, Bhutan, Thailand, Croatia and Haiti. His government's diplomacy has also emphasized economic relations with Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and other partners.

This diversification is sensible for a country of Bangladesh's size, economic ambitions and strategic location. The country should be able to work with Beijing without becoming China's satellite, cooperate with Washington without becoming entangled in every American strategic contest, maintain friendship with Pakistan without allowing that relationship to be defined by India, and cooperate with India without surrendering the ability to disagree with New Delhi.

That may ultimately be the practical meaning of "Bangladesh First."

The same philosophy appeared in Tarique's maiden address to the United Nations General Assembly on September 24. He presented his

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government's program through three words: Recovery, Restoration, and Reconstruction. He addressed democratic and economic transformation, the Rohingya crisis, climate change, migration, and international conflict while emphasizing dialogue and diplomacy.

It was an effective international presentation. But the real test of the 3Rs will not take place in New York.

It will take place in Dhaka.

America, Trade and the New Economic Diplomacy

One consequential development deserves more attention: Bangladesh's evolving economic relationship with the United States.

The new trade framework seeks to place relations with Washington on a more explicitly commercial footing. That matters because Bangladesh's foreign policy cannot be measured only through meetings with presidents, prime ministers and diplomats. Economic diplomacy must ultimately produce exports, investment, employment, technology and access to markets.

Civil aviation provides an interesting illustration.

The government has pursued plans for Biman Bangladesh Airlines to acquire additional Boeing aircraft while also considering Airbus aircraft. If ultimately carried through on commercially sound terms, a mixed expansion could increase Biman's capacity and international network while strengthening commercial ties with both the United States and Europe.

However, they will also need to meet normal business criteria.

Many factors affect an airline's profitability; having new aircraft alone does not cut it. Routes you can fly with certain aircraft, demand for those flights, the ability to service the plane, pilots who can fly them, and the cost to operate them all play a role.

Bangladesh should therefore treat aircraft acquisition as much an aviation-business decision as a diplomatic instrument.

The broader trade relationship deserves the same scrutiny.

The government should explain not simply that agreements have been achieved, but how Bangladeshi exporters, especially the garment industry, will remain competitive; how domestic producers may

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be affected by greater foreign market access; and what Bangladesh receives in investment, technology, and employment in return.

Good diplomacy is not measured by the number of agreements signed.

It is measured by the national advantage those agreements produce.

The Economic Reality Cannot Be Escaped

Here the picture becomes considerably more difficult.

Bangladesh's growth rate is still too low. High inflation has affected ordinary people's lives. We have taken a step back in the fight against poverty. The banks are overloaded with non-performing loans. And because of Bangladesh's incredibly low tax-to-GDP ratio, we cannot generate enough funds for public infrastructure.

International financial institutions have repeatedly emphasized banking reform, stronger revenue collection, inflation control, fiscal discipline, and financial-sector restructuring.

Tarique did not create these problems in seven months. Many accumulated over years.

But political inheritance offers only temporary protection. Eventually inherited problems become the responsibility of the government currently holding office.

Banking reform may be the most revealing test.

It is relatively easy to promise action against corruption. It is considerably harder to make politically connected borrowers repay loans, restructure weak banks, prosecute financial wrongdoing regardless of affiliation, and allow regulators to operate independently.

The same applies to employment. Bangladesh cannot indefinitely depend upon garments, remittances and government employment to absorb a large, increasingly educated population. Industrial diversification, information technology, maritime industries, pharmaceuticals, light engineering, logistics and modern agriculture must create jobs on a much larger scale.

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Foreign investment will follow speeches only when investors encounter predictable regulation, reliable electricity, functioning banks, enforceable contracts and confidence in the rule of law.

The July Charter and the Relationship with the Opposition

The most important domestic political test may ultimately be constitutional reform.

The July–August 2024 uprising, the reform process that followed, the July National Charter signed in October 2025 and the February 2026 referendum created public expectations that Bangladesh would not simply change governments but reconsider the institutional arrangements that had allowed excessive executive power to develop.

The Charter contains more than 80 reform recommendations. Major proposals include a bicameral Parliament, limits on prime-ministerial power and tenure, stronger parliamentary checks, greater judicial independence, reform of the caretaker-government system, and broader protection of fundamental rights.

The referendum gave the reform project a substantial political mandate, but it did not resolve the legal disagreement over implementation.

The BNP maintains that constitutional amendments must proceed through Parliament under the existing Constitution. Jamaat-e-Islami, the National Citizen Party and other opposition representatives have argued that the Constitution Reform Council contemplated by the July Charter implementation process should be convened.

The disagreement should not become another winner-takes-all confrontation.

With its commanding parliamentary majority, the BNP possesses enormous legislative power. The more important question is whether it will construct a constitutional settlement that extends beyond that majority.

Constitutions are strongest when political actors believe the rules will remain legitimate even after they lose power.

The government therefore has an opportunity to establish a different political culture: invite the opposition into substantive negotiations, distinguish constitutional questions from ordinary partisan competition, publish a clear timetable for implementing

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agreed portions of the July Charter, and transparently identify the provisions requiring further consensus.

The opposition carries responsibilities as well.

Participation cannot mean transferring every disagreement from Parliament to the street. An opposition committed to democratic reform must use Parliament, committees, courts, public debate and peaceful political organization rather than treating confrontation as the default instrument of politics.

Bangladesh has repeatedly suffered because governments have viewed opposition parties as enemies and opposition parties have viewed governments as illegitimate occupants awaiting removal.

The July Charter offers an opportunity to break that pattern.

The State Tarique Inherited and the State He Must Build

The bureaucracy presents a different problem.

The administration cannot simply be purged and reconstructed whenever governments change. Yet concerns about politicization accumulated during the previous regime cannot be ignored.

The police face an even more delicate transition.

Officers implicated by credible evidence in corruption, unlawful violence, election manipulation, or partisan abuse should be investigated through credible procedures. But professional civil servants and police officers should not be punished merely for having served under another government.

Otherwise, Bangladesh will reproduce the very politicization it claims to be dismantling.

For decades, governments have been tempted to ask of senior officials: Whose people are they?

A reforming government should ask different questions:

Are they competent? Are they honest? Will they enforce the law impartially?

The objective must be a bureaucracy loyal to the Constitution rather than to the BNP, Awami League, Jamaat or any other party, and

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a police service whose officers enforce the law regardless of who occupies Ganabhaban.

Tarique's Hardest Problem May Be His Own Party

An even more politically sensitive challenge remains.

Allegations of extortion, land grabbing, patronage and abuse of political influence involving people identified with the BNP have become impossible for the leadership simply to dismiss as opposition propaganda.

If someone uses the BNP's name to seize property, collect money or intimidate a businessman, the government must investigate the conduct. If the allegation is false, the accused deserves protection. If it is true, political affiliation should offer no protection.

That principle is the dividing line between party government and rule of law.

After years of repression and exclusion, there may understandably be BNP members who believe political victory entitles them to opportunity, recognition or compensation.

It does not entitle anyone to the assets of the state or another citizen.

Recent political commentary has portrayed Tarique as moving toward a harder line against disorder and misconduct, including alleged misconduct involving people within his own political camp. One discussion supplied for this essay claims that the government is considering action against a group of prominent figures accused of corruption, extortion, and destabilizing activities.

Those allegations require independent verification before anyone can draw conclusions about particular individuals.

But the larger question raised by the discussion is legitimate:

Can a governing party impose the rule of law upon its own supporters?

The easiest crackdown for any government is against its opponents.

The more meaningful demonstration of political reform is enforcement against its own ministers, MPs, party officials, financiers and local leaders when credible evidence of wrongdoing exists.

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If Tarique is prepared to do that through lawful investigation, prosecution and due process, he could establish an important precedent. If enforcement becomes selectively severe against political adversaries but negotiable for political allies, the government will simply reproduce an old Bangladeshi political tradition under a new administration.

The Temptation of Another "Operation Clean Heart"

The deteriorating law-and-order debate has inevitably revived memories of Operation Clean Heart, the nationwide security operation undertaken during Khaleda Zia's government in 2002.

The comparison is understandable.

When citizens see extortion, political musclemen, property seizures, organized violence and apparently untouchable local power brokers, demands for extraordinary action become politically powerful. A state that appears incapable of enforcing ordinary law eventually creates public demand for extraordinary enforcement.

But Operation Clean Heart should be remembered as both a precedent and a warning.

The 2002 operation deployed the armed forces alongside other security agencies in an attempt to confront crime, illegal weapons, and politically protected criminal networks. Supporters credited it with disrupting criminal organizations and restoring some public order.

Yet the operation was also deeply controversial because of allegations of torture, custodial deaths, and other abuses.

That history poses an important question for the present government.

Bangladesh certainly needs a cleaner heart.

It does not necessarily need another Operation Clean Heart.

The distinction matters.

The objective should be to produce the results citizens sought from such an operation: security, freedom from extortion, removal of political protection for criminals, and restoration of state authority without reproducing methods that generated serious human-rights concerns.

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A modern democratic government should be capable of arresting an extortionist without torturing him, prosecuting a corrupt politician without making him disappear, removing a violent party activist without punishing his political associates, and investigating an opposition leader without turning prosecution into political persecution.

That is harder than conducting a sweeping security operation.

It is also far more valuable institutionally.

An "Operation Clean Government" Instead

The temptation to use the military whenever civilian institutions fail presents another danger.

Bangladesh's armed forces are among the country's most important national institutions. But continually asking the military to compensate for failures of policing, prosecution, and civilian administration ultimately avoids repairing the institutions that are failing.

The better legacy would therefore be an "Operation Clean Government" rather than another Operation Clean Heart.

> ***Clean the ministries.***
>
> ***Clean the police stations.***
>
> ***Clean the contracting system.***
>
> ***Clean the banks.***
>
> ***Clean the regulatory agencies.***

And, most importantly, clean the political parties themselves.

A ruling party cannot credibly demand discipline from the country while tolerating indiscipline within its own organization.

Tarique therefore has an opportunity to establish a simple principle: no BNP identity card should function as immunity from the law.

If ministers are corrupt, investigate them. If MPs improperly use political influence, investigate them. If local party leaders engage in

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extortion, prosecute them. If accusations are fabricated, protect the accused through due process.

The same standard must apply to every political organization.

This is where a harder line could reinforce democratic government, provided that hardness is directed against criminal conduct rather than political disagreement.

There is an enormous difference between suppressing disorder and suppressing dissent.

> ***A businessman forced to pay extortion money needs a strong state.***
>
> ***A journalist criticizing the government needs the state to exercise restraint.***
>
> ***A family whose property has been illegally seized needs decisive police intervention.***
>
> ***An opposition party holding a peaceful meeting needs police protection, not obstruction.***

A mature government must understand all four situations simultaneously.

Strength Without Authoritarianism

This leads to a larger question about what Bangladesh means when it demands a "strong state."

Bangladesh needs a state strong enough to prevent extortion, recover stolen assets, collect taxes, regulate banks, prosecute corruption, control organized crime, protect minorities, secure borders and enforce contracts.

But strength should not be measured by a government's ability to silence newspapers, intimidate political opponents, arrest critics or deploy extraordinary security powers whenever ordinary institutions prove inconvenient.

Those are two fundamentally different concepts of state power.

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Operation Clean Heart illustrates the distinction. Extraordinary coercive measures can sometimes produce immediate and highly visible results.

Institution-building is slower, less dramatic, and politically more frustrating.

Yet only institution-building creates durable capacity.

If Tarique wants a political "clean heart," then he can begin with his own government and party. If he wants stronger law enforcement, he can professionalize the police. If he wants political stability, he can negotiate seriously with the opposition over the July Charter. If he wants to combat misinformation, he can make government information more transparent. If he wants a stronger state, he can strengthen the institutions that will remain after his government eventually leaves office.

That would constitute a more consequential form of political toughness than another extraordinary security operation.

Information, Disinformation and Public Confidence

Bangladesh also faces a genuine information problem.

Social media has transformed Bangladesh's political environment. Rumors, edited videos, partisan commentary, and unverified allegations can circulate nationally within minutes.

Governments can no longer assume that an official press release issued several hours later will control public understanding of an event.

The answer, however, should not be government "narrative control" in the traditional sense.

It should be government credibility.

That requires rapid publication of verifiable information, accessible government data, regular briefings, independent fact-checking, transparent correction of official mistakes, and willingness to answer difficult questions from journalists.

A government that tells the truth quickly will eventually possess something considerably more valuable than narrative control:

Public trust.

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Conversely, once citizens conclude that official information is merely another form of political messaging, even truthful government statements become less effective.

This is another reason independent journalism matters. A government genuinely confident in its record should not require a compliant press to defend it.

A New Defense Policy: Technology, Deterrence and Self-Reliance

Another significant development is occurring with less public debate: Bangladesh appears to be reconsidering the structure of its defense policy.

The emerging approach places greater emphasis on technology, drones, modern combat aircraft, cyber capability, maritime surveillance and domestic defense production.

This represents an important conceptual change.

Bangladesh has traditionally purchased much of its major military equipment abroad. Modernization based entirely on imports, however, creates permanent dependence not simply on the original equipment but on ammunition, spare parts, upgrades, maintenance, and technical expertise.

A credible self-reliance strategy should therefore emphasize technology transfer, licensed production, local maintenance and overhaul capability, electronics, communications, shipbuilding, unmanned systems and eventually the ability to manufacture selected equipment and components domestically.

Drones deserve particular attention.

Recent conflicts have demonstrated how relatively inexpensive unmanned aircraft can transform reconnaissance, surveillance and battlefield operations. Bangladesh should develop indigenous capabilities in unmanned systems rather than remaining entirely dependent upon imported technology.

The same principle applies to fighter aircraft.

Bangladesh has been examining modern combat-aircraft options as part of its military modernization. But a fighter aircraft is not simply an aircraft purchase. It creates decades of expenditure involving

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weapons, simulators, pilot conversion, maintenance infrastructure, engines, spare parts, and software support.

The objective should therefore not be to acquire the most impressive equipment available.

It should be to build the most coherent defense capability Bangladesh can sustainably operate.

There is also a wider economic opportunity. Bangladesh already possesses substantial capabilities in shipbuilding, engineering, electronics, garments and manufacturing. A carefully constructed defense-industrial policy could connect some of these capabilities to military requirements while creating skilled employment and reducing foreign-exchange expenditure.

But defense self-reliance should not become an excuse for unaccountable expenditure.

Parliament should retain meaningful oversight of major procurement decisions, and national-security requirements must be balanced against Bangladesh's enormous needs in education, healthcare, infrastructure and employment.

The Armed Forces: Modernization, Professionalism and the Civil–Military Balance

No discussion of the Tarique Rahman Government can ignore the Armed Forces. They played a major role in Bangladesh's current state after 2024. When our country went through turmoil, the Armed Forces stood tall and kept law and order intact when most civilian agencies, i.e., the police, failed to do so. They also played a vital role during the political transition and the 2026 elections.

The important question now is what role the military should play under an elected civilian government.

Tarique has publicly stated that the Armed Forces belong to no individual, family, or political party and that their loyalty must remain with the Constitution and the people. This principle is particularly significant in Bangladesh, given its history of military governments, coups and military involvement in political transitions. A professional military must be powerful enough to defend the state but politically neutral enough never to determine who governs it.

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At times, Bangladesh has resorted to using the Armed Forces to maintain law and order in the country. This may be necessary when there is no other option. We shouldn't make it a habit to rely on military forces to do the jobs our Police Force isn't doing. They can only help us to a certain extent.

This is especially relevant to renewed discussion about an Operation Clean Heart-type campaign against extortion, organized crime and politically protected criminal networks. The 2002 operation demonstrated the organizational effectiveness the military can bring to a security crisis, but it also became controversial because of allegations of custodial deaths, torture and other abuses.

Bangladesh may need stronger law enforcement, but the objective should be an "Operation Clean Government" rather than another Operation Clean Heart. Police, prosecutors and courts must ultimately have the capacity to confront criminals regardless of political affiliation, without routinely depending on the military.

At the same time, keeping the Armed Forces out of partisan politics does not mean keeping them weak. Bangladesh's strategic position on the Bay of Bengal, maritime interests, ports and expanding economy require credible defense capabilities.

With this in mind, the government's plan to improve its military will consist of drones and counter-drone technology. Modern fighter aircraft and air defense systems. Cyber and Electronic warfare. Surveillance at sea and increasing co-operation between the different branches of the military. There are many reasons to look more closely at modernizing our fighter aircraft. When you buy an aircraft, you are tied to that platform for many years with weapons, engines, personnel, maintenance, computer programs, etc.

That's why we need to focus on our own "Made in Bangladesh" initiative. We need to start making some of these things in our country. Like drones, electronic communication, Ship maintenance engineering, and a few other defense-related industries. That doesn't mean we have to produce all of these. But at least make sure that no country can hold us hostage if they decide to stop supplying these to us.

Ultimately, however, Tarique Rahman's most important military reform may have little to do with weapons.

What Bangladesh needs is a fresh understanding between civilian rule and the military. Civilian rulers should honor the professionalism

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and needs of our Armed Forces. On the other hand, the military should remain under civilian control and avoid political affairs.

No politician should invoke the help of our Armed Forces to fight against other civilians. And our Armed Forces should not be an institution people look to when civilian rule fails.

The strongest military is not necessarily the one most visible in civilian life. It is one capable of defending the country while remaining firmly outside the struggle for political power.

If Bangladesh can combine technologically modern, increasingly self-reliant Armed Forces with civilian supremacy and genuine political neutrality, it will have achieved something more consequential than acquiring any fighter aircraft, submarine or missile system: a military that is simultaneously stronger in defending the state and more restrained in governing it.

Simplicity Is Valuable, but Institutions Matter More

One favorable aspect of Tarique's public image has been the perception of a less extravagant and more restrained personal style.

Such symbolism matters in Bangladesh. Leaders who demonstrate modesty can communicate that public office is service rather than entitlement.

But individual simplicity can't make up for corruption in higher levels of government.

The Prime Minister may live simply, but his cabinet, party members, and contractors, etc., can be riddled with corrupt individuals and crooks.

The stronger legacy, therefore, would be to transform personal restraint into institutional restraint.

Can He Overcome So Many Adverse Conditions?

Seven months is too short a period for a definitive assessment of any government, and it is certainly too early to determine the eventual outcome of Tarique Rahman's premiership.

We can, however, identify the conditions against which that record will eventually be measured.

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Foreign policy has given the government a consequential beginning. China has been engaged without formally abandoning relations with the West. Teesta has returned to the diplomatic agenda. Pakistan-Bangladesh relations have expanded. Dhaka is reaching toward a broader range of Asian and West Asian partners. The relationship with the United States has acquired a stronger commercial dimension. Bangladesh is simultaneously attempting to modernize its defense posture while moving toward greater technological and industrial self-reliance.

The United Nations gave Tarique a platform to articulate the 3Rs and present Bangladesh as an independent state seeking multiple partnerships rather than becoming the client of one regional or global power.

The difficult part will be in Bangladesh.

> ***They need to fix their banking system without covering for big loan sharks.***
>
> ***Collect more tax money from people who can actually pay it.***
>
> ***Create jobs instead of giving out bribes.***
>
> ***It must professionalize the police without conducting a partisan purge.***
>
> ***It must reform the bureaucracy without merely replacing one party's loyalists with another's.***
>
> ***It must deal firmly with criminal conduct among its own supporters.***
>
> ***It must modernize national defense without allowing procurement to escape financial discipline and parliamentary accountability.***

And it must find a political accommodation with the opposition over the July Charter, rather than letting constitutional reform itself become the next source of national polarization.

Most importantly, Tarique Rahman must demonstrate that the BNP has learned something from Bangladesh's political history.

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With a two-thirds parliamentary majority, his government possesses enormous power. The most consequential question is not how much of that power it can exercise, but how much of it it is prepared to place within durable institutional boundaries.

Which means accepting the fact that there will be an opposition that will try to bring it down, media that will try to expose it, courts that can find against it, regulatory agencies that will try to take on politically affiliated groups, and a parliament where they will have to listen at times, not just count their votes.

Bangladesh has already experienced governments in which the party gradually became indistinguishable from the state.

Repeating that cycle under another banner would not constitute reform.

Breaking it would.

It's incredible how Tarique Rahman has been able to accomplish all this. After living abroad and leading an opposition that kept losing, he returned to Bangladesh, helped take the BNP to power, and became Prime Minister of Bangladesh.
But winning power and governing well are different achievements.
The next phase of his government will therefore be more revealing than the first. Diplomatic visits, trade agreements, aircraft purchases, defense modernization and international speeches can demonstrate energy and ambition.
They can't change things on their own.

It will happen when the Constitution places meaningful limits on the concentration of power in the office of the Prime Minister; when Parliament becomes an effective check on the executive; when the judiciary and other state institutions can function independently; and when a credible political opposition is accepted not as an enemy of the state, but as an essential part of democratic government. When banks are no longer political bank accounts. When we can interact with our police and officials without party affiliation. When we invest trust that our contracts and properties are safe. And when ruling party members realize that winning an election doesn't put them above the law.

If Recovery, Restoration and Reconstruction are to become more than memorable words delivered from the podium of the United Nations, they must ultimately produce a professional civil service, accountable police, independent judiciary, healthier banking system,

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competitive economy, disciplined ruling party, credible national-defense capability and a political culture in which governments can change without the machinery of the state changing political ownership with them.

The July Charter may prove particularly important in this respect. Bangladesh's constitutional problem has never been merely the wording of individual articles. It has been the recurring concentration of authority and the weakness of institutions that can restrain it.

The Charter and Referendum have allowed us to solve this issue. If the BNP and the Opposition can fulfill the will of the people and achieve a legal resolution which everyone can agree on. Will we be able to see what July stood for take effect?

The same principle applies to Tarique's broader concept of "Bangladesh First."

Strategic independence is not achieved merely by balancing China against India or America against China. Genuine independence requires economic strength, functioning institutions, technological capability, military preparedness, political stability and public confidence in the state.

A country dependent on foreign creditors, foreign weapons, foreign technology and politically connected domestic institutions cannot become strategically autonomous simply by declaring that it is so.

Bangladesh therefore stands at a consequential point.

Its government possesses an unusually strong parliamentary mandate. Its foreign relationships are diversifying. New commercial relationships are being negotiated. Defense policy is being reconsidered. Constitutional reform remains possible. And a generation shaped by the upheaval of 2024 expects something more substantial than a change of personalities at the top.

That combination creates both opportunity and danger.

The opportunity is to construct a more confident Bangladesh, economically competitive, strategically independent, institutionally restrained, and politically pluralistic.

The danger is that familiar habits of Bangladeshi politics will gradually reassert themselves: concentration of authority,

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politicization of institutions, patronage, intimidation of opponents and the assumption that an electoral mandate gives the winner temporary ownership of the state.

This is why the debate about another Operation Clean Heart ultimately reaches far beyond law and order.

Bangladesh does not merely need another campaign to clean criminals from the streets.

It needs to remove the political conditions that repeatedly allow criminality, corruption and impunity to return.

It would take something much subtler but far harder to achieve. We would need police that are free from political influence. Prosecutors that will prosecute those in high power. Courts that we can trust to render just decisions. Regulatory bodies that will go after the politically influenced. Political parties that will punish their own. A government that will accept checks on its power.

That would be the real Operation Clean Government.

Tarique Rahman has already accomplished the political task of returning the BNP to power.

The much larger task is to demonstrate what that power will be used to build.

The ultimate measure of strong leadership is not how many opponents a government can control.

It is whether a government possessing extraordinary political power can build institutions strong enough to control the government itself.

That is a far more difficult project than winning an election, signing a trade agreement, purchasing aircraft, modernizing the armed forces, or conducting successful diplomacy.

It is also the project by which Tarique Rahman's period in office will eventually be judged.

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Tarique Rahman at a Historic Crossroads: Challenges, Risks and Opportunities

Minar Rashid

To understand the scale and nature of the challenges confronting Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, one must first consider Bangladesh's history, geopolitical circumstances, contemporary political realities, and the political and social psychology of its people.

For centuries, the people of Bengal have lived through invasion, foreign domination, exploitation, political upheaval, and economic plunder. Mothers once put their children to sleep with rhymes that recalled the terror of the Bargi raids and the Maratha incursions, which became embedded in Bengal's collective memory. At different times, the Portuguese and other foreign adventurers and marauders also preyed on the region. In more recent history, Bangladeshis have experienced another form of exploitation: the misuse of state power and national resources by domestic political elites.

These events can affect a country. Bangladeshis have been under occupation and have been let down many times by their own leaders, so they tend not to trust their political leaders. This goes into why the incumbency effect is so strong in Bangladesh. People can become very disappointed in their government if they're not pleased.

Against this historical background, Tarique Rahman has assumed responsibility for governing Bangladesh with an overwhelming popular mandate.

That mandate is both an extraordinary opportunity and an enormous burden.

Public expectations are very high. The political change before this administration has also led many citizens to believe major change can

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happen. Therefore, they will most likely not accept half measures or talking points that they have grown used to hearing. They need to see changes happen. Such as better government and security. Economic opportunities and more transparency in politics and among those who surround this government.

Tarique Rahman also faces the unusual burden of being measured against two very different political legacies. On one side stands the record and reputation of his parents, whose achievements remain closely tied to the history of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. On the other stands the record of the previous Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina. Inevitably, every major decision of the present government will be compared with one or both of these experiences.

Another reason we should remain cautious is this. When any government has a 2/3 majority in parliament, they have huge scope to bring about positive changes. However, many instances in South Asian countries have shown that high majorities can be harmful if no institutions check them.

So the question at hand for Tarique Rahman is can a country achieve prosperity with such a big majority in parliament and maintain healthy democracy?

Slogans Cannot Defeat Corruption

Bangladesh must begin by recognizing an uncomfortable reality: neither politics nor public administration can be populated exclusively by honest people overnight.

Corruption is not merely an individual moral failing. Political patronage, economic insecurity, institutional weakness, social tolerance, and the absence of effective accountability sustain it. Fighting Corruption therefore requires simultaneous political, economic, legal, administrative, and social reforms.

A poorly paid employee struggling to afford medical treatment for his family or milk for his child is unlikely to be transformed by moral lectures alone. At the same time, wealth and privilege provide no immunity against Corruption. Excessive opportunity combined with unchecked power can corrupt people at every level of society.

The answer must therefore be institutional.

The rule of law must operate alongside economic reform and social awareness. Political competition must become sufficiently open that

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parties have an incentive to nominate competent and respectable candidates rather than individuals valued primarily for money, influence, or loyalty.

As political institutions improve, better people are more likely to enter politics. As genuine electoral competition increases, political parties will have stronger incentives to put forward credible candidates. Over time, improving the quality of politics can become one of the most effective weapons against Corruption.

This is where the BNP faces both its greatest challenge and perhaps its greatest opportunity.

Confronting Extortion and Abuse of Power

Allegations involving extortion, land grabbing, tender manipulation, political intimidation, or abuse of influence by ruling-party leaders and activists are particularly damaging because they directly affect public perceptions of the government.

Auto denial will always be your worst option.

Just because you deny a problem does not mean there is no problem. You may get away with denial for a while as a politician, but once facts come to light, it will be much harder on the people who believe in you.

Always have your facts when dealing with these types of situations.

When someone is accused, whether they are an MP, a Party Leader, or anyone associated with your government or party. Your Government should prove that being one of them will not protect you from accusations. If it is found true, there should be action.

A recent willingness to demand accountability from politically connected individuals could set an important precedent. But such actions will acquire lasting significance only if they are transparent, evidence-based, and consistently applied.

Selective punishment creates fear. Consistent accountability creates institutions.

That distinction will be crucial for Tarique Rahman.

Separating the Party From the State

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One of Bangladesh's persistent political problems has been the blurring of boundaries between the governing party and the machinery of the state.

A political party may form the government, but the state does not become that party's property.

Civil servants, police officers, regulators, local administrators, universities, public corporations, and other institutions must not become extensions of the ruling party's organizational structure. When MPs, local party leaders, or politically connected individuals exercise informal authority over these institutions, administrative professionalism deteriorates.

Tarique Rahman therefore has an opportunity to set an important democratic precedent: instead of making the state dependent on the BNP, he can make state institutions stronger than any political party.

Such an approach would inevitably create difficulties. Party activists accustomed to expecting rewards after an electoral victory may resist restrictions on political influence. Local leaders may resent independent administrators. Some MPs may dislike being told that winning an election does not entitle them to control police stations, contracts, appointments, or local government.

Yet this is precisely where leadership matters.

If Bangladesh is to become institutionally stronger, the administration, law-enforcement agencies, judiciary, and local government must gradually acquire professional independence from partisan control.

Discipline and a New Generation of Leadership

The BNP must also confront its internal organizational challenges.

When a large political party comes to power, numerous groups and individuals inevitably attempt to benefit from their association with the ruling establishment. Competition for influence, contracts, appointments, and local authority can rapidly undermine party discipline.

Maintaining an effective chain of command within the BNP, Jubo Dal, Chhatra Dal, and associated organizations will therefore be a significant test.

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But discipline alone is insufficient. The party must also decide what kind of political culture it wishes to create.

If sycophancy becomes the principal route to advancement, the organization will eventually weaken. If competence, integrity, organizational ability, intellectual capacity, public service, and connection with ordinary citizens become the criteria for leadership, the party can gradually renew itself.

This is particularly important for the younger generation. Bangladesh needs political leaders who understand economics, technology, international relations, climate change, energy, maritime affairs, education, and modern public administration—not merely the mechanics of street politics.

The BNP now has an opportunity to cultivate such a generation.

The Economy Will Ultimately Decide Public Confidence

No government can sustain popularity indefinitely through political rhetoric.

For ordinary citizens, governance is experienced through the price of rice, vegetables, electricity, fuel, transportation, rent, education, medical treatment, and employment.

Inflation, investment, energy security, exports, infrastructure, banking stability, employment, and public safety therefore matter more to most people than political speeches.

The government should establish measurable national performance indicators and regularly disclose its progress. The government should present inflation, job creation, domestic and foreign investment, electricity generation, fuel availability, exports, crime, infrastructure development, and other important indicators transparently to the public.

Such a system would gradually replace political propaganda with measurable accountability.

Citizens could then judge the government not merely by what ministers say, but by what the government actually accomplishes.

Communicating With Honesty

Political communication represents another major challenge.

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Even when a government has legitimate reasons for a difficult decision, failing to explain them can create misunderstanding. Worse still, attempts to conceal obvious problems can rapidly destroy credibility.

The government therefore needs a regular, professional, fact-based communication system.

Political communication should not consist solely of announcing achievements. A confident government should also acknowledge difficulties.

Its message to citizens should essentially be:

> ***We know there is a problem. This is our plan to address it. This is what we have accomplished so far. And this is where we have not yet succeeded.***

Such language may appear politically risky, but in the long run it builds credibility. Citizens generally understand that governments cannot solve every problem immediately. What they resent is being told a problem doesn't exist when they encounter it every day.

Democracy Requires Institutions That Can Say "No"

Perhaps Tarique Rahman's greatest opportunity is to strengthen Bangladesh's democratic institutions.

An independent opposition, free media, an impartial judiciary, a credible Election Commission, a professional civil service, and genuinely independent anti-corruption institutions should not be regarded as obstacles to government. They are essential components of a functioning democratic state.

A government with a large parliamentary majority has less immediate need to fear criticism. It can therefore afford to demonstrate political tolerance.

If the BNP accepts dissent as a normal part of democratic competition rather than treating criticism as hostility toward the state, it can help establish a political culture fundamentally different from what Bangladesh has experienced during many periods of its history.

There may be some judgments that are unfavorable towards the Government from time to time. An independent Anti-Corruption Commission may investigate people close to politics. A free media

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would write articles that are uncomfortable to read. An effective opposition would raise negative issues about the Government's actions.

These things may create short-term political discomfort.

But they also signal a functioning democracy.

The Danger of an Overwhelming Majority

A large parliamentary majority is one of the most powerful instruments available to a government. It can facilitate legislation, constitutional reform, administrative restructuring, and long-term economic planning.

Yet the same majority can weaken democracy if it eliminates meaningful restraints upon executive authority.

The question, then, is not whether a two-thirds majority is inherently good or bad. The question is how it is used.

If Bangladesh continues with party hegemony over the country's opposition parties, politicization of state agencies, and centralization of power, it will simply continue with the same pattern under different parties' rule.

On the other hand, if this party rule is used to streamline government functions, establish an independent judiciary, curb corruption, improve election processes, decentralize government powers, modernize the economy, and strengthen our constitutional frameworks, it can become one of the greatest turning points in Bangladeshi history.

Power itself is neither reformist nor authoritarian. Its character depends on the purposes for which it is exercised.

Performance, Not Image

The government must also recognize the difference between restoring its image and reforming governance.

Advertising, publicity campaigns, speeches, slogans, and social-media messaging can influence public perceptions temporarily. They cannot substitute for competent government.

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> ***If extortion declines, citizens will notice.***
>
> ***If political interference in the administration diminishes, officials and businesses will notice.***
>
> ***If prices stabilize, families will notice.***
>
> ***If police act professionally, ordinary people will notice.***
>
> ***If courts operate independently, litigants will notice.***
>
> ***If public institutions become accountable, the entire country will notice.***

The government will then have little need to manufacture an image. Its performance will create its image.

That should be the objective.

The Historic Opportunity

Tarique Rahman's central challenge is therefore much larger than maintaining his own popularity or ensuring the BNP's continued political dominance. His challenge is to transform a political mandate into a more effective system of government.

Standing up to extortion and land grabbing. Separating the party from the state. Political elites being based on their ability. Administrative neutrality. Economic Intelligence. Being open with the people about what you're doing. Judicial system and more. All of these go together when trying to make a country run correctly.

The ultimate measure of Tarique Rahman's success should consequently not be whether his government survives five years or whether the BNP wins another election.

At the end of his term, Bangladesh should ask more important questions.

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> ***Are the state's institutions stronger than they were when he assumed office?***
>
> ***Do citizens feel more secure in their persons, property, and political rights?***
>
> ***Is the economy built on a stronger, more sustainable foundation?***
>
> ***Has Corruption become harder because institutions, not merely political leaders, can resist it?***
>
> ***Can the judiciary, Election Commission, civil administration, law-enforcement agencies, and anti-corruption bodies perform their responsibilities without fearing political retaliation?***
>
> ***And, perhaps most importantly, will these institutions continue functioning effectively when another political party eventually assumes power?***

A democratic leader's greatest achievement is not creating a system that works only while he governs. It is creating institutions strong enough to work when he no longer does.

That is the historic test before Tarique Rahman.

It is also his historic opportunity.

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Governance Successes of Begum Khaleda Zia

Helal Uddin Ahmed

Vast areas of southern Bangladesh were hit by one of the deadliest cyclones and tidal bores of 20th Century only 39 days after Begum Khaleda Zia (1945-2025) assumed office of the prime minister for the first time on 20 March 1991. The calamitous situation was handled quite efficiently by her government despite acute shortages of relief and rehabilitation materials. The inflation rate was brought down to an all-time low during her tenure, and industrial cum agricultural growth underwent rapid acceleration. A new industrial policy was announced in 1991, which paved the way for private foreign investments and rapid expansion of the private sector, especially in the small and medium enterprises sub-sector.

Hundred percent foreign ownership and joint ventures were allowed without any restrictions. The government actively promoted the growth of livestock sector, which led to the swift establishment of numerous poultry and dairy farms across the country. The local currency was made partially convertible for the first time and foreign exchange reserve reached an all-time high level. Pragmatic measures were taken to reduce dependence on external aid in the country's development budget by increasing the share of local resources from 21 percent to over 40 percent in five years.

Value-added tax was introduced for the first time in the country at production and import levels during 1992-93 fiscal year, which opened up new avenues for augmenting the mobilisation of domestic budgetary resources. Side by side, there were massive cutbacks on customs duties at the import level as part of the free-market trade liberalisation policy.

The canal digging programme was reintroduced during this period to augment agricultural production and reduce floods. During the Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95) period, the highest allocation was earmarked for the education sector, 70 percent of which went to primary and mass education sub-sector. A National University and an

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Open University were set up by the government, and establishment of private universities and medical colleges were allowed to prop up the country's higher education sub-sector.

A separate Primary and Mass Education Division was created under the Prime Minister's Office in order to make the country's population literate within the shortest possible time. Primary education was made compulsory throughout the country from 1 July 1993.

The Khaleda Zia government also introduced the 'Food for Education' programme in 1993 to promote education among the poorer segments of the population. Secondary education for girls was made free in the rural areas, and a stipend programme was introduced for the secondary level female students all over the country.

A permanent Law Commission was set up by the government for continuous updating of the country's laws. Significant steps were also taken during her first tenure to develop the country's communication network. These included the launching of the physical construction work of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge on 16 October 1994, construction of the Meghna-Gumti Bridge on the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway for uninterrupted road communication between Dhaka and Chattogram, construction of a modern railway station in Chattogram, and the undertaking of a project to upgrade Chattogram Airport into an international one.

For the first time in Bangladesh's history, preparatory work on Barapukuria Coal Mine and Madhyapara Hard Rock projects were completed, and agreements were signed with Chinese and Korean agencies for full implementation of these mining projects. New gas fields were also discovered at Bhola and in the Bay of Bengal.

Bangladesh's international image was greatly boosted by the holding of the Seventh SAARC Summit in Dhaka in April 1993, where Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was elected chairperson of the regional forum. Because of unrestricted press freedom, the number of newspapers and periodicals nearly doubled during her first tenure.

For the first time in the country's history, satellite TV channels like CNN and BBC were allowed to broadcast their programmes in Bangladesh, and other international channels followed suit very soon. Cellular mobile telephone also commenced its journey in the country during this period.

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Some administrative measures taken by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during this period included implementation of the recommendations of National Pay Commission for enhancing the salaries and allowances of government servants; raising the age of entry in the civil service from 27 years to 30 years; simplification of the pension-sanctioning procedure, and introduction of life-long family pension for widows and offspring in case of deaths of government employees; fixation of minimum wage for workers in 17 sectors; establishment of the Coast Guard for curbing piracy and smuggling in the Bay of Bengal; and creation of a Securities and Exchange Commission for overseeing the functioning of the country's stock market.

It was also her government which for the first time enacted a bill in Jatiya Sangsad for distribution of voter identity cards among the voters, and a project was launched for the purpose.

There were hardly any allegations against the first Khaleda government regarding politicisation of administration. However, she attracted the wrath of a section of bureaucracy, as she tried to change the status quo and remove disparities among various cadres of Bangladesh Civil Service. The government also showed exceptional political tolerance as no crackdowns or repressions were carried out against political opponents despite record numbers of countrywide strikes, blockades, and other forms of disruptive cum violent activities during the period by opposition political parties led by the Awami League.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's third tenure (2001-06) in office brought more dividends for the country in terms of socio-economic advancement. For the first time in Bangladesh's history, average GDP growth rate during 2002-2006 period remained above 6 percent. The per capita national income rose from US Dollar 374 in 2,000-01 to US Dollar 482 in 2005-06. The foreign exchange reserve crossed the 3-billion-dollar mark from a mere 1 billion dollar in 2001. The flow of remittances almost trebled from 2001 to cross US Dollar 5 billion at the end of 2006.

Despite the abolition of MFA quota system in 2005, the readymade garments sector continued to thrive due to efficient handling of the situation. The strides made by Bangladesh in the field of industrialisation due to investment-friendly economic policies and strategies pursued by the Khaleda government attracted the attention of foreign investors. Foreign direct investment amounted to a remarkable 2.5 billion US dollar during 2002-2006 period; around 9 thousand industrial projects worth Taka 620 billion were

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registered with the Board of Investment in four and a half years up to March 2006, which was more than double compared to the previous five years. As a result, the contribution of the industrial sector to GDP exceeded 17 percent and the growth rate in the sector crossed 10 percent during 2005-2006 fiscal year. A new EPZ was set up on the compound of Adamjee Jute Mills in 2004-05 after paying all outstanding dues to officers and employees of this loss-incurring state-owned enterprise.

A Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was formulated by the Khaleda government as a medium-term plan document in line with the Millennium Development Goals declared by the United Nations. The budgetary allocation for poverty alleviation programmes was gradually increased each year and its share stood at 56 percent during 2006-07 financial year. The government expanded the social safety net programmes for direct poverty alleviation of hardcore and underprivileged people in the rural areas.

A fund worth over Taka 500 million was created for generating employment opportunities in the country's Monga-infested (famine-like state) northern region during the lean season. A Taka 5 billion Char Livelihood Programme was launched for improving the livelihood of poor people living on shoals.

The population below poverty line in the country diminished by around 9 percent during the third tenure of Khaleda Zia. Numerous measures were taken for the welfare of backward and neglected segments of society. The monthly allowances received by the widows and distressed women were raised and their numbers increased. Arrangements were made for providing them with training and micro-credit, so that they could become self-reliant. The old-age allowance and the number of beneficiaries in the programme were also increased. The government also took some notable measures for environmental conservation in the country.

Twenty-year-old buses and trucks were withdrawn, and CNG driven 4-stroke baby taxies were introduced on the roads in place of 2-stroke diesel-driven ones. Production and marketing of harmful polythene bags were banned throughout the country.'

The Khaleda Zia government also achieved some successes in the education sector. The net enrolment rate in primary schools was raised to 97 percent, education for female students was made free up to class twelve, and gender parity was achieved among boys and girls in schools. Besides, two new girls' cadet colleges and three new

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polytechnic institutes for women were also set up. Initiative was also taken to establish an Asian University for Women in Chattogram with assistance from the USA. Side by side with modernising the madrasa education system, the government decided to recognise the 'Dawra' certificate of Quawmi madrasas and made Fazil-Kamil degrees equivalent to bachelor's and master's degrees. A number of new public universities were set up for expanding the opportunities for higher education, which mostly comprised of universities of science and technology. Many new private universities were also allowed to go into operation. Effective steps were taken for promoting vocational education. Existing vocational institutions were upgraded into colleges and their number was raised to 64 from the previous 51.

The Khaleda Zia government also implemented many programmes to reach healthcare services and concomitant infrastructural facilities to the doorsteps of the common man. The number of beds was raised to 50 from 31 in upazila hospitals, from 50 to 100 in hospitals of new district towns, and from 100 to 250 in hospitals of old district towns. Besides, some new medical colleges and hospitals were set up. Infant and maternal mortality rates declined in the country due to measures taken by the government. The rate of population growth came down to 1.47 percent due to strengthening of the family planning programme.

The Khaleda Zia government also attached much importance to the development of telecommunication sector. The number of fixed telephones in the country was increased to 12 lakh 20 thousand in 2006 from 6 lakh 85 thousand at the time of her assumption of office. The number of fixed-phone subscribers of private telephone operators also crossed 150 thousand in 2006. Digital telephone exchanges were set up in 64 districts of the country, and the upazilas were also gradually brought under digital telephone coverage.

The total number of fixed and mobile telephone connections in the country crossed the 15-million-mark during her tenure. Seventeen private companies were given permission to provide fixed-phone services in order to make fixed telephones more accessible to the common people. Side by side, the government-owned 'Teletalk Bangladesh' also provided mobile phone services to the public. Bangladesh's linkage with the information super-highway was reinforced through linking up with another submarine cable. As a result, overseas communication, data exchange, and internet connections became speedier, cheaper, and easier.

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Although the Khaleda Zia government did not do much to raise the power generation capacity in the country, a network of 89 thousand kilometres of new transmission lines was installed during the period for supplying electricity. Because of stringent measures, system loss in the power sector was reduced to 22 percent from the previous 28 percent. It was also possible to bring almost 50 thousand villages under the purview of rural electrification programme. Fifteen new upazilas were created by the administration, thereby raising their number to 480. The post of a Tax Ombudsman was also created by the government for the first time in the country.

It was during the third tenure of Khaleda Zia that direct bus service between Dhaka and Agartala was launched and the direct railway link between Dhaka and Kolkata was finalised. Besides, railway service between the eastern and north-western part of the country via the Jamuna Bridge was also started during the period.

Some notable road-bridges constructed during this period were: Shikarpur and Dwarika Bridges on Dhaka-Barishal highway, Fakir Lalon Shah (Pakshi) Bridge on the river Padma, Khan Jahan Ali Bridge over the river Rupsha on Khulna-Mongla highway, Haji Shariatullah Bridge over the river Arial Khan on Dhaka-Khulna highway, Dhaleshwari Bridge on Hemayetpur-Singair road, Mollarhat Bridge over the river Modhumati, the second Buriganga Bridge at Babubazar, the Dharla Bridge on Kurigram-Bhurungamari road, the Chandpur Bridge over the river Dakatia, and the Fenchuganj Bridge over the river Kushiara. Another notable project undertaken with assistance from the Kuwaiti government was the construction of Third Karnaphuli (Shah Amanat) Bridge at Chattogram.

It was the Khaleda Zia government that constituted the Anti-Corruption Commission through an Act passed by the Jatiya Sangsad, as a successor organisation to the erstwhile Bureau of Anti-Corruption. Another notable administrative measure taken by her government was the introduction of a new national pay-scale for government servants in 2005. However, promotions given to higher echelons of bureaucracy were not always above controversy, and there were some allegations of juniors superseding the seniors on political grounds.

Bangladesh was elected to 13 UN bodies, including the United Nations Human Rights Council, Peace Building Commission, and ECOSOC during the third tenure of Begum Khaleda Zia as prime minister. Besides, the country became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 2006. She also discharged the responsibility

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of SAARC Chairperson after hosting the 2005 Summit. Bangladesh played a crucial role in global peace initiatives during the period by sending the highest number of troops to the UN Peacekeeping Missions. Begum Zia's government lent its whole-hearted support to the Western countries in the fight against international terrorism, but at the same time sought to reinforce mutually beneficial and cooperative relationships with the Muslim World.

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From Water Sharing to Shared Water Security: Reframing Bangladesh–India Ganges Cooperation before December 2026

Rear Admiral (Rtd) A S M Abdul Baten

The Ganges is both a lifeline and a source of vulnerability for Bangladesh. As the downstream riparian of a basin shared principally with India, Bangladesh experiences the consequences of upstream regulation in two contrasting forms: shortage during the dry season and destructive excess during the monsoon. The 1996 Ganges Water Sharing Treaty provided an important framework for bilateral cooperation, but its fixed arrangements and limited formal provisions are increasingly inadequate in the context of climate change, changing river morphology, increasing water demand and escalating upstream infrastructure. The treaty is due to expire in December 2026, making an important opportunity to negotiate a more comprehensive and climate-responsive framework. This paper argues that the next agreement should move beyond the allocation of water at a single point and establish a basin-wide regime based on equitable utilization, transparency, environmental sustainability, prior notification and shared flood management. It also examines the relevance of South Korea's Peace Dam experience as a cautionary and constructive analogy, and considers whether neutral technical or regional third-party engagement could support a durable solution.

A Personal Preamble: a Lesson from the Han River

Almost 28 years ago I was attending a mid-level military staff course in Istanbul Naval Staff College. As part of the course curriculum, I had to present my country to the college, where at one stage I did talk about water-sharing issues with our neighbor. Immediately after presentation, one of my friends attending the same course, Lt Commander Kim from Republic of Korea, told me privately about a

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similar situation in his country. He described the challenges South Korea faced in managing the North Han River. He particularly mentioned the challenges created after North Korea constructed the Imnam, or Kumgangsan, Dam.

According to his account, South Korea, as the downstream riparian, feared two apparently contradictory dangers. In dry periods, upstream retention could reduce downstream availability. During periods of heavy rainfall, sudden or insufficiently communicated releases could aggravate flooding downstream. He also recounted how South Korea responded by constructing the Peace Dam, supported in part by a remarkable public fundraising campaign. The project became a symbol of national concern and unity over the security implications of unilateral control over a shared river.

The broader historical dispute between the two Koreas is documented, including concerns relating to the Imnam Dam, the Peace Dam and later efforts at inter-Korean cooperation. However, the personal recollection that the Peace Dam was deliberately used to flood North Korean territory, thereby directly compelling an agreement, should not be presented as established historical fact without further evidence. The more reliable lesson is different: a transboundary river cannot be managed safely through unilateral decisions, secrecy or the assumption that one riparian can permanently externalize the costs of its actions onto the other. That lesson is highly relevant to Bangladesh and India as the 1996 Ganges Water Sharing Treaty approaches its expiry in December 2026.

The Asymmetry of the Ganges System

Bangladesh and India officially share 54 transboundary rivers. The Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna systems are by far the most important because they carry the vast majority of the region's river flow and shape Bangladesh's agriculture, fisheries, navigation, flood regime, sediment deposition, delta ecology and overall life of people. The river enters Bangladesh after flowing through India, where substantial infrastructure and withdrawals influence downstream conditions. The Farakka Barrage, located in West Bengal, was constructed to divert water towards the Hooghly system. Its operation has long been a central concern in Bangladesh, particularly because dry-season flows are essential for agriculture, fisheries, navigation, salinity control and the ecological health of the southwest.

The problem is not simply that Bangladesh receives **"too little"** water. It is that the timing, variability and quality of streams matter as much as aggregate volume. During the dry season, reduced

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freshwater flows can intensify salinity intrusion, degrade wetlands, impair navigation and threaten agricultural productivity. The consequences are distributed across communities that have limited capacity to adapt. The environmental effects may also extend beyond immediate human use, affecting complete **Riverine biodiversity.**

At the other extreme, Bangladesh is exposed to severe monsoon flooding. Flooding is a natural feature of the delta and cannot be attributed solely to upstream releases. Rainfall within Bangladesh, basin-wide precipitation, river morphology, drainage congestion, embankments and tidal conditions all contribute. Nevertheless, upstream storage, barrage operations and the timing of releases can influence flood peaks and the capacity of downstream authorities to prepare. The issue, therefore, is not to make an unqualified allegation against India, but to insist that upstream operational decisions affecting downstream populations must be communicated transparently and **governed through agreed procedures.** Bangladesh's vulnerability is intensified by geography. As a densely populated lower riparian situated in a delta, it bears risks generated across a much larger basin. This lopsidedness gives the principle of equitable and reasonable utilization with particular practical importance.

Why the 1996 Framework Requires Renewal

The 1996 Treaty was a significant diplomatic achievement. It established a formula for sharing Ganges flows at Farakka during the dry season and created a Joint Committee to monitor implementation. Its continuation for three decades demonstrates the value of negotiated arrangements. Yet the treaty was designed in a hydrological and political context that has changed substantially.

First, climate change is altering the reliability of historical flow patterns. Rainfall is becoming more variable, extreme events are intensifying, and prolonged dry periods may occur alongside severe floods. Recent disaster of flooding in Nepal has also significance on probable consequences in future. A formula based primarily on historical averages may not adequately protect either riparian under increasingly uncertain conditions.

Second, the treaty's focus on dry-season allocation does not fully address the wider river system. A modern agreement must include monsoon flood management, environmental flows, sediment, salinity, navigation, groundwater interactions and ecosystem protection. Water sharing should not be reduced to the division of measured discharge at one station only.

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Third, trust depends on credible information. Where data on rainfall, reservoir levels, barrage operations and expected releases are incomplete, delayed or inaccessible, technical disagreements quickly become political disputes. Bangladesh has a legitimate interest in receiving timely prior warning with information that allow authorities to protect lives, properties and evacuate vulnerable populations.

From Water Allocation to Water Security

The central conceptual shift should be from "sharing water" to "sharing water security." This approach recognizes that India's legitimate needs and Bangladesh's downstream rights are not necessarily unharmonious. Cooperation can create benefits through improved storage, coordinated release schedules, flood forecasting, watershed restoration, sediment management and optimum agricultural use.

A Renewed Treaty Should Contain Minimum Four Mutually Reinforcing Elements.

The first is a dynamic allocation mechanism. Instead of relying exclusively on fixed historical figures, the parties should establish rules that respond to verified hydrological conditions. Such rules could include minimum ecological and humanitarian thresholds etc.

The second is a binding information-sharing regime. Data should cover river discharge, rainfall, reservoir storage, planned operational changes and flood forecasts. Notification of major releases should occur sufficiently in advance and through reliable, continuously functioning channels at both state and divisional levels.

The third is integrated flood management. Downstream flooding should not be treated solely as Bangladesh's domestic problem. India and Bangladesh should develop joint flood forecasting, coordinated reservoir operations, emergency communication and, where appropriate, shared investment in protective infrastructure. Such cooperation would not eliminate floods, but it could reduce losses.

The fourth is institutional accountability. A strengthened joint commission consisting of experts should possess regular meeting schedules, transparent reporting obligations and procedures for resolving technical disputes. Independent scientific review could help determine whether disagreements arise from measurement, interpretation or policy.

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The Peace Dam analogy and third-party engagement

The South Korean Peace Dam experience offers a useful analogy, but not a blueprint. Bangladesh should not interpret it as an argument for retaliatory infrastructure or an adversarial arms race in water. Rather, the analogy highlights the political importance of national resilience and the risks created when a downstream country lacks confidence in upstream conduct.

For Bangladesh, a "Peace Dam" mindset could mean investment in flood-resilient infrastructure, improved early-warning systems, basin research, dry-season water conservation and public awareness. More importantly, it could represent a diplomatic demand for cooperation rather than unilateral control. Although India and Bangladesh have traditionally preferred bilateral negotiations, limited third-party engagement may be useful, if carefully designed. A neutral technical institution, an international river-governance body or a regional platform could assist with data verification, hydrological modelling and mediation. Third-party involvement need not undermine sovereignty or convert the dispute into international litigation. Its purpose would be to reduce suspicion and provide jointly accepted scientific evidence.

A more recent good initiative has already been taken by the present government (TDS, 13 May 2026) to raise barrage to safeguard the interests of the people of the country. The government has approved the **Tk 34,497.25 crore Padma Barrage (1st Phase) project,** to be implemented by the Bangladesh Water Development Board from July 2026 to June 2033 with full government financing. Covering **19 districts**, the project aims to restore the flow and navigability of major rivers, reduce salinity and waterlogging, improve irrigation and drainage, and strengthen groundwater recharge and freshwater availability. It is also expected to protect the **Sundarbans ecosystem**, enhance biodiversity, and support agriculture, fisheries and forestry across a large part of Bangladesh. Overall, the project is intended to address the long-term consequences of reduced dry-season Padma flows following the **Farakka Barrage** and promote sustainable water-resource management and regional economic development. This initiative should be successful for the survival of the people in the northern as well as southern part of Bangladesh.

Regional cooperation could also connect the Ganges issue with broader Himalayan and South Asian water governance. Organizations such as SAARC have historically faced political limitations, but a specialized technical mechanism involving basin states, universities

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and international experts could still contribute to knowledge-sharing and disaster preparedness.

Recommendations

As negotiations approach December 2026, Bangladesh should pursue the following objectives:

- Negotiate a climate-responsive treaty based on verified real-time and seasonal hydrological data rather than relying only on historic averages.
- Secure a meaningful minimum-flow and guarantee clause that protects human needs, ecosystems, agriculture and salinity control during severe dry periods.
- Expand the treaty's scope to include monsoon floods, environmental flows, sediment, navigation, fisheries and water quality.
- Establish mandatory prior notification of significant changes in barrage, reservoir or dam operations that may affect downstream flows.
- Create a permanent joint technical commission with experts along with authority to monitor data, publish reports and address implementation disputes.
- Develop an open data platform through which agreed river-flow, rainfall and operational information can be accessed by researchers and affected communities.
- Introduce drought- and flood-sharing protocols so that exceptional hydrological conditions do not leave one country carrying disproportionate costs.
- Invite neutral scientific observers or technical facilitators where both parties agree, particularly for data verification and dispute resolution.
- Strengthen Bangladesh's domestic resilience through river restoration, wetland protection, flood forecasting, salinity management and efficient water use.
- Adopt a basin-wide diplomatic strategy that treats India's legitimate requirements and Bangladesh's downstream security as interdependent rather than mutually exclusive.

Conclusion

The expiry of the 1996 Ganges Water Sharing Treaty should be understood immediately not merely as a deadline, but as a historic opportunity. Bangladesh's concerns are grounded in geography,

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ecology and the lived experience of communities exposed to both dry-season deprivation and monsoon devastation. At the same time, durable progress requires careful distinction between verified evidence and political assertion. The most sustainable outcome is a treaty that recognizes the Ganges as a connected system. India cannot secure its water interests by disregarding downstream consequences, and Bangladesh cannot protect its people through protest alone. The future lies in transparent data, equitable rules, shared flood management and institutions capable of adapting to climate uncertainty. The voice raised in favour of Bangladesh is therefore not a demand for privilege; it is a demand for fairness, accountability and shared security in a common river basin.

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When Politics Devours the State: Bangladesh's Bureaucracy at a Crossroads

Dr. Habib Zafarullah

There is a peculiar ritual that plays out with clockwork regularity in Bangladesh each time a new government takes office. Before the ministers have finished unpacking their offices, the reassignments begin. Officers associated with the outgoing party are bundled off to obscure postings or placed on what is euphemistically called "officer on special duty" status — a bureaucratic purgatory where they draw salaries but perform no meaningful work. In their place, loyalists of the incoming party are elevated to key positions, regardless of seniority, competence or track record. The machinery of state, briefly, grinds to a halt, and then resumes, rewired for a different set of masters. This is not an occasional aberration. This has been the operating system of public administration in Bangladesh.

For a country that has achieved remarkable development gains, such as pulling millions from poverty, expanding access to education and healthcare, building a formidable garment export industry, the persistence of a deeply politicized, poorly accountable bureaucracy is both paradox and tragedy. It is paradox because development has occurred despite the dysfunction. It is tragedy because so much more could have been achieved without it.

Understanding why the Bangladesh bureaucracy is what it is requires going back further than independence. The colonial administration of British India bequeathed the region a civil service designed not to serve citizens but to govern them. Its tasks were to collect revenue, maintain order and transmit the commands of an imperial authority to a subject population. The Indian Civil Service, that so-called "steel frame" of British rule, was efficient precisely because it was insulated from popular accountability and organized around hierarchy, deference and discipline. It was not built for democracy. It was built against it.

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After partition in 1947, Pakistan inherited this structure largely intact, and the Civil Service of Pakistan, dominated by a small, well-connected elite, simply substituted one set of masters for another. Bangladesh, born in 1971 from a brutal war of independence, inherited that legacy. The officers who staffed the new nation's ministries were products of a tradition that valued procedural compliance over public responsiveness, institutional self-preservation over reform, and personal advancement over service. What changed with independence was not the culture of bureaucracy, but its political environment. And that environment made everything worse.

The first Awami League government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, facing a bureaucracy it distrusted for its association with the Pakistani regime, moved quickly to bring civil servants to heel. Officers suspected of political disloyalty were forcibly retired, sometimes without right of appeal. Party sympathizers were inducted laterally into senior positions regardless of experience or merit. Those civil servants who had crossed into India during the war to support the government-in-exile—the so-called "patriots," were rewarded with accelerated promotions and preferential postings, sowing resentment among their colleagues who had remained within the country. Factionalism rooted in the politics of independence quickly spread through the entire administrative fabric.

Military rule from 1975 brought a different dynamic but not a cleaner one. The generals needed bureaucrats to run the state and the bureaucrats, comfortable in a hierarchical, non-political environment, provided enthusiastic support. Senior civil servants were appointed to presidential advisory councils, assigned ministerial portfolios and incorporated into the machinery of military legitimation. The bargain was straightforward: bureaucrats provided governance cover for military rule; in return, they accumulated power and insulation from political accountability. The relationship was mutually reinforcing and, for democratic development, thoroughly corrosive.

When multi-party democracy returned in 1991, the country did not recover a neutral civil service. What it recovered was a civil service already deeply divided along partisan lines, broadly between a pro-Awami League faction and a pro-Bangladesh Nationalist Party faction but exposed to intensified competitive patronage from whichever party happened to win elections. The BNP manipulated recruitment and promotion to seed the administration with its loyalists; the Awami League did the same when it returned to power; and both parties, when in opposition, used their partisans within the bureaucracy to obstruct the government of the day. The bureaucracy had not merely been politicized. It had become an extension of party warfare. This form was crystallized

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further and fully entrenched during 16 years of authoritarian rule (2009-2024).

The consequences for governance are profound and compounding. Consider what patronage-based promotion actually means in practice. Officers advance not because they have designed effective policies, delivered services efficiently or demonstrated integrity under pressure, but because they have cultivated the right political connections. The incentive to perform is replaced by the incentive to affiliate. Over time, the senior ranks of the civil service were filled with people whose primary qualification is partisan loyalty rather than administrative competence.

Nor is this merely a problem of personnel quality. Politicization fundamentally disrupts institutional continuity. When every change of government brings wholesale replacements at key positions, institutional memory evaporates, ongoing programs are abandoned, and policies pursued by the previous administration are reversed not because they failed but because they succeeded under the wrong party. The machinery of the state cannot develop sustained expertise, coherent institutional culture or the kind of long-term planning capacity that meaningful development requires.

There is also the problem of what happens to those officials who refuse to play along. In Bangladesh, non-partisan civil servants, i.e., those who attempt to maintain professional neutrality, face a peculiar double jeopardy. Distrusted by the ruling party for their lack of demonstrated loyalty, they are sidelined, posted to irrelevant positions or left to stagnate. Yet when the opposition returns to power, they are equally suspect, now tainted for having served under the previous regime. The rational response, for a career-minded official, is obvious: choose a side and maintain it. Neutrality is not rewarded; it is punished.

Meanwhile, the generalist-specialist divide within the Bangladesh Civil Service compounds the dysfunction further. Administrative generalists, whose dominance in the higher echelons of government dates from colonial traditions, have consistently resisted reforms that would open senior positions to specialist cadres—doctors, engineers, financial professionals—who possess the technical expertise that modern governance demands. Reform commissions have repeatedly recommended restructuring. Generalist associations have repeatedly frustrated those recommendations, using political connections to protect institutional privilege. The result is a top-heavy, technically limited administrative structure poorly equipped for the complexity of contemporary policy challenges.

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None of this is news to anyone who has observed Bangladesh closely. Reform prescriptions have been circulating for decades, from the Administrative and Services Reorganization Committee of 1973 to successive World Bank and UNDP assessments of the 1990s to the Public Administration Reform Commission of 2000 and the reform proposals of the interim government after the overthrow of the authoritarian regime. The diagnosis has been clear and consistent. What has been missing is political will and bureaucratic backing.

And therein lies the central irony: the very politicians who benefit from a politicized bureaucracy are the ones who must ultimately dismantle it. Each party, while in opposition, denounces its rival's patronage practices with righteous indignation. Each party, upon taking office, reproduces those practices on a scale. The rhetoric of reform masks a structural incentive to perpetuate dysfunction.

Breaking this cycle requires something harder to legislate than organizational charts or recruitment procedures. It requires a political leadership willing to sacrifice short-term partisan advantage for long-term institutional health and willing to accept that a competent, neutral civil service serves the public interest more effectively than a compliant, partisan one, even if it is harder to control.

That bargain for political restraint in exchange for institutional effectiveness has been struck in countries as different as South Korea, Botswana and Brazil. It is not structurally impossible. But it requires political actors to internalize a long-time horizon, to think about the state they are building rather than only the election they are fighting.

Bangladesh's citizens deserve public servants whose first loyalty is to the state and to the people it exists to serve, not to whichever party currently occupies the prime minister's office. Achieving that will require more than another reform commission. It will require leaders with the courage to bind their own hands, and the wisdom to understand why that matters. That may sound idealistic. However, in a country that has defied development odds before, it should not sound impossible.

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India's Foreign Policy and Hegemon's Dilemma

South Asia Journal

India considers itself the largest democracy in the world, and its identity is strongly rooted in constitutionalism, pluralism, and electoral legitimacy. Democracy and talk about international law/order figures largely in its foreign policy discourse abroad. However, its neighbors are less inclined to agree on India's regional behavior. India is increasingly viewed across South Asia as willing to sacrifice democratic principles in pursuit of geopolitical expediency when dealing with its neighbors. Hegemony is on the line.

Democracy and Realpolitik

India, like all great powers, tends to act primarily out of self-interest and realism rather than idealism. India has been accused of siding with authoritarian regimes within its own neighborhood, despite India professing to be the world's largest democracy. Activists and opposition politicians in neighboring countries have also accused India of harassing or coercing political opponents of its foreign policy in South Asia.

Several prominent dissidents in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan have allegedly been abducted or have mysteriously died after coming into conflict with India's interests. Despite many of these claims lacking evidence or being contested by India, they have fueled a general perception among South Asian publics that India bends its commitment to democracy when it feels its national interests are at stake. Some of these accusations came back into the spotlight after high-profile cases in Canada and the United States alleged assassination attempts on persons abroad by India's external intelligence agency, RAW.

Myanmar: Strategic Interests Above Democratic Principles

India's approach toward Myanmar could be the best illustration of its pragmatic regional policy. After the 2021 coup, several Western nations downgraded ties with and imposed sanctions on the military junta led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. India decided to walk a separate path.

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Rather than cutting ties with Myanmar's military rulers, New Delhi has kept up working relations with them. India says security concerns and strategic considerations drive it. The South Asian nation shares a 1,643-kilometer border with Myanmar. It views stability along that border as key to containing insurgencies, the flow of illegal arms, drug trafficking, and refugee influxes in its northeastern states.

New Delhi is also concerned that freezing ties with Myanmar will only create further openings for China to increase its influence. For this reason, India has maintained diplomatic contacts with Myanmar, continued economic engagement, and coordinated on security issues with the junta. These actions have drawn criticism from democracy activists and human rights groups who say it gives legitimacy to the military junta that's committed widespread human rights abuses in Myanmar. Others say India has little choice but to act pragmatically given the geopolitical situation on its borders.

Afghanistan: Humanitarian Engagement and Strategic Outreach

India's foreign policy faces new complexity with "neighborhood first". While speaking at the United Nations Security Council in June of 2026, India committed to further assisting Afghanistan with peace, stability, and development. Indian Ambassador to the United Nations Harish Parvathaneni highlighted India's "contributions in delivering humanitarian assistance and health care services, facilitating educational support, and helping in infrastructure development in Afghanistan."

India delivered aid shipments containing tons of wheat, medicine, vaccines, and other related supplies. This was in addition to shipments of disaster relief supplies and development assistance. India provided more scholarships for Afghan students and constructed hospitals throughout Afghanistan. India's Ambassador to the UN stated that India has helped build more than 500 development projects across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Praise has been given to India for these actions, which are said to demonstrate productive engagement with Afghanistan and regional neighbors. Skeptics of Indian foreign policy say humanitarian aid has been linked to goals like wanting to stay involved in Afghanistan and prevent gains by rival neighboring countries. India's approach to policy in Afghanistan has many similarities to its policy on Myanmar, as it walks the line between humanitarianism and realpolitik.

Bangladesh: Supporting Hasina against all odds

India's relationship with former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina has at times been Bangladesh's most polarizing discussion

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about India. India is accused of putting her as prime minister in 2008 and supporting her in three consecutive elections, including the controversial 2024 election. Reasons given for this are drawn from dialogues presented in former Indian president Pranab Mukherjee's memoir with then Bangladesh Army Chief Moeen U Ahmed during Bangladesh's power transition before the 2008 election, in which Mukherjee claims India wanted Hasina as prime minister and helped install her to keep its interests steady in Bangladeshi politics.

Opponents of Hasina's regime further alleged that India was always willing to accept elections with little mass political support and limited democratic credibility. Also, corruption charges, authoritarianism, and alleged economic mismanagement were often ignored by successive Indian governments that provided diplomatic support to Dhaka. Critics also allege that many bilateral deals signed under Hasina's regime unduly favored India, raising questions over the national interests of Bangladesh's sovereignty.It has been linked to old conspiracy theories like the Agartala Conspiracy Case in the 1960s, when Mujibur Rahman was charged by Pakistan for conspiring with India. Although many Bangladeshis idolize Mujib as the Father of the Nation, many skeptics point out that the conspiracy is an example of seeing nationalists vs foreigners from different points of view.

Another key area of debate is India's alleged role in the 2009 Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutiny and massacre. During the 2009 Bangladesh Rifles massacre, a total of 74 people were killed, including 57 Bangladesh Army officers. Accusations about Indian involvement have resurfaced due to new probes into the mutiny and massacre, and ongoing public discourse. Some conspiracy theories also point towards the involvement of foreign hands. It has been alleged that agents from India attempted to create/hijack the mutiny crisis. Even some proponents say that sabotaging the Bangladesh Armed Forces was beneficial for India's long-term goals. That said, these are only allegations. India has denied all such claims.

The SAARC Paradox

Another criticism of India is its regional cooperation. South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world. Despite shared history, culture, and geography, cooperation between South Asian countries has not reached the level it needs to. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was established to encourage economic and political cooperation among South Asian countries, but its utility has been diminishing with each passing year.

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Many regional experts believe that India, being the largest economy in South Asia and the most powerful state in the region, has a special responsibility to energize regional institutions. They argue that the politicization of issues has stalled significant progress, and SAARC is largely moribund at a time when regional cooperation is needed more than ever.This vacuum has led countries to look to bilateral partnerships outside South Asia, reducing the chances of regional economic development and problem-solving.

The Challenge of Regional Leadership

In addition to economic and military might, true leadership also demands trustworthiness, inclusiveness, and accommodation of smaller neighbors' interests. Supporters of India say it has promoted regional development by increasing trade and investment, providing disaster relief, and humanitarian aid. Critics of Indian behavior believe such positives are outweighed by the view that India interferes in the political affairs of its neighbors and expects a privileged relationship.

India's struggle to reconcile the attractiveness of its soft power, rooted in its democracy, with hard-power aggressiveness will influence regional affairs for some time. South Asia's coming decades will be determined by how it collectively addresses climate change, economics, migration, and security, but also by whether its largest country can earn the trust of its neighbors while standing up for itself.

Conclusion

India will always play a critical role in South Asia. Its large size, economy, and geopolitical interests tie its future to the rest of the region. However, being a leader also has its obligations. India must do more if it wants to be seen not only as the world's largest democracy but also as South Asia's most responsible leader. It needs to address contentious issues with its neighbors, do more to solidify regional cooperation through institutions, and demonstrate that its democracy extends to how it conducts business with them if South Asia ever hopes to thrive.

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The Erosion of Indian Ethos, religion, and culture

Ajmal Sobhan

Hinduism is arguably the oldest religion, with its roots and traditions that date back to more than 4,000 years. Although the formulations of primary religious texts, treatises, and philosophical elaborations date back at least to 2,500 years, it is only subsequent to the advent of the Upanishads and the Mahabharata, of which Bhagavad Gita is a part, that led to the progress of deeper and inner spirituality, as opposed to a ritualistic praxis of the earlier times. Vedanta, of which the Advaita Vedanta was a dominant stream of thought, came to be a more refined approach at transcendence - a movement away from an external God to one immanent within one's own being. "Tat Tvam Asi", meaning 'You Are That', became one of the four principal profound sayings of the Upanishadic philosophy, positing the ultimate unity of the individual soul with the universe.

Adi Shankaracharya (8th century AD), Ramakrishna Paramahansa (19th century AD), and Ramana Maharshi (20th century AD), were some among the most well-known spiritual leaders of eminence. Their spiritual practices easily lent themselves to adoption by anyone regardless of their religious persuasion, in that, enlightenment or liberation of universal suffering could be attained even by an average man living out a life of humdrum existence, by leading a life of purity of mind and action.

So far so good. But, now, fast forward in time.

Modern-day India appears to have turned its back on those days of enlightenment of the yore. Today's India abhors Mahatma Gandhi while at the same time glorifying Nathuram Godse - his killer. The RSS - the rabidly ultra-rightwing organization that harbors pervasive and virulent hatred against Muslims and Christians, was in fact the cradle of Godse's perverse Hindu nationalistic ideology, now known as the Hindutva. The political wing of the RSS is the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). Narendra Modi, schooled in the principles of Hindutva vis-a-vis RSS ever since his younger days, is currently the Prime

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Minister of India. He has been in power for the past 15 years. Under him, the present-day India has become increasingly and stridently intolerant of religious minorities (especially, the Muslims and the Christians), thus flagrantly violating the secular ethos enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

There are multiple voices of sanity that seek to portray Sanatana Dharma - the Eternal Way, in glowing ways. However, the RSS theological construct, would rather have its own distorted modus operandi to restore India back to its halcyon days of eminence. In pursuing this path, the fact that India is home to a multiplicity of religions, cultures, and traditions, all living together once upon a time in accord, the RSS has deliberately chosen to sully the intrinsically secular character of the country. Their attempt to create a "Hindu Rashtra" has not only been their dream, but also a fait accompli of late in their own minds. To an observer, with an admiring eye for its catholicity of religious ethos spanning several thousand years, today's India, in contrast, would appear to be hyper-religious (Hindu), hyper-nationalistic (Hindutva), overtly hyper-patriotic (Hindu Rashtra), and championing a propagandist cause. Such a phenomenon, if not in all of its details, is true elsewhere in the world, as well. For example, it also is the mantra being chanted currently in the US; and, it is catching up in Europe, as well. India's dream of rapidly becoming a super-power overnight appears not to be grounded in reality. The far from democratic regime of Modi, has bought off a majority of the news outlets in the country; and these, in turn, have become cheerleaders and mouthpieces for whatever the government does and says. The recent GenZ protests at Jantar Mantar in Delhi, and the spontaneous uprising of the Cockroach Janata Party against the entrenched establishment, were a direct product of the ruling BJP's arrogance towards the youth, and their increasing dire plight for survival by way of job opportunities in a rigged system. In addition, the overt hostile attitude being shown towards its immediate neighbor to the east, namely Bangladesh, by many of the India news outlets, and also the government, begs the question: have they lost their marbles? The bizarre idea that Sheikh Hasina, the ousted erstwhile PM of Bangladesh who fled to India and is currently enjoying political asylum there, can still be instituted back into power in Dhaka where she is not welcome anymore, was amply displayed recently by letting her orchestrate a "news conference". Therein, a manufactured group of "foreign correspondents" delved on how Hasina was being wronged in Bangladesh despite her 'virtuous rule' there. Such shenanigans do not bode well for the highly desirable amity between these two neighboring countries.

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Of late, the US Congressional decision to levy 100% tariff (now awaiting the US President's signature) on those countries which buy Russian oil (and India, is one of them), has put the whole Indian intelligentsia in a convulsive rage, and vowing that India will draw a red line and exact" revenge". The fact of the matter is, while China holds cards by virtue of its immense economic clout, India does not. But, India's continued display of megalomania, and the frequent tirades and outbursts from its media (but not from the people), only betray a deep-seated arrogance and hubris on their part.

Whether India will recover from this morass, and see the light, remains to be seen. There is hope yet, because India is still blessed with a great deal of science-based, technological heft in a number of leading technologies of the future, plus a population that boasts a thriving, secular, elite intellect. Therefore, for the sake of maintaining a balance of power in the subcontinent rather than hegemonical pursuits in-social, political, and economic spheres - India, urgently needs to rise above the self-inflicted chaos, discordance, and disharmony, foisted by its current political establishment in New Delhi and its cheer leaders over these last 15 years.

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Robin Hood in Reverse: How Modi Government Feeds the Corporates and Starves the Nation

Bhabani Nayak

The Hindutva government led by the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has revealed the true nature of 'Hindu Rashtra' (Hindu State) over the last 12 years of its rule. There is no other government in the world that writes off corporate debts faster than the Modi government is doing in India. Recently, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), under the Modi government, approved a repayment plan of approximately Rs 6.5 crore for the Essel Group of Companies and its chairman, Mr Subhash Chandra—a known Rajya Sabha member of the BJP—against admitted creditor claims of about Rs 22,006.57 crore. This means more than 1,260 creditors stand to lose nearly 99.97 per cent of their money. Major creditors such as Axis Bank, RBL Bank, IndusInd Bank, IDBI Trusteeship (for Franklin Templeton), LIC Housing Finance, Union Bank of India, and HDFC Bank opposed the settlement plan, yet it was imposed on these institutions as binding. The public deposits in LIC Housing Finance alone are going to lose ₹1,322.39 crore. This is private squandering of public money—small savers and depositors whose hard-earned money is wiped out for corporate gain. This is not the first time the Hindutva government has written off corporate debts.

The Modi government has written off corporate loans worth Rs 9.87 lakh crore, out of which Rs 7.21 lakh crore went to large corporations, Rs 2.65 lakh crore to large business houses, and only Rs 1.67 lakh crore to agriculture and allied sectors during the period between 2014 and 2025. Most of the agricultural and allied sector loan write-offs go to millers, large farmers, and fertiliser companies rather than to small and poor farmers. Indian banks have written off more than ₹19 lakh crore in corporate loans over the last 11 years of the Modi government. Agricultural loan write-offs are not only marginal but have also declined in the financial year 2024–25.

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These figures from the Modi government reveal the true nature of Hindutva politics led by the BJP and shaped by the RSS. In the name of cultural nationalism, Hindutva is a project of corporate capitalism.

From day one, the Modi government has borrowed heavily from the open market, written off corporate debts, and disinvested from the public sector, making it weak and defunct before selling public sector institutions to private companies at low prices. The Modi government is a profit-accelerating machine for corporates. It is not only providing security to corporations but also providing all suitable conditions for corporate loot. The Hindutva government is acting like Robin Hood for corporates, distributing public money to private individuals. Efficient plundering of public money defines the Modi government. Hindutva is no ideology but a merely a corporate project.

The Hindutva government works like an absolute bourgeois monarchy but operates like a lawless, corrupt casino where corporate criminals rule the roost. This not only reveals the Hindutva crony capitalism of the Modi government but also exposes the true nature of the promised 'Hindu Rashtra'. As the morning shows the day, the Modi government reveals the future nature of 'Hindu Rashtra'—which will be nothing more than an absolute bourgeois monarchy controlled by corporations. Every other promise made by Hindutva ideology is mere public eye-washing. It does nothing to change the material conditions of the people or address their everyday issues and challenges.

There is no money for education, health, housing, or public works; there is no money for public investment in roads, transportation, and communication; there is no money for investment in large-scale industrialisation to create mass employment; there is no money for seed, irrigation, and fertiliser subsidies for farmers—but there is money to write off for corporates. The Modi government is doing everything to ensure that corporates flourish in India at the cost of the people.

It is clear that 'Hindu Rashtra' is an absolute bourgeois monarchy that undermines the people, their democratic Constitution, and constitutional rights, in order to guide and uphold corporate plunder. It is worse than the crony capitalism at work in the Western world. The Modi government and the Hindutva ideological project are the wet dream of every corporate capitalist, whose interests are secured by the state and government under BJP rule. Public welfare can be looked after by all the gods and goddesses in India, while

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the BJP government looks after its corporate clients. They remain the lifeblood of Hindutva ideology, which has nothing to do with the Indian people other than creating social, political, cultural, and religious disharmony to hide corporate plunder under Hindutva guidance.

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Sri Lanka's NPP at two: political reforms and economic dilemmas

Ramindu Perera

This 21 September marks the second anniversary of Sri Lanka's National People's Power (NPP) government, a political movement led by the left-wing Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Two years ago, the NPP candidate Anura Kumara Dissanayaka secured a dramatic victory in a three-cornered Presidential election and emerged as the first-ever left-wing leader in Sri Lankan political history to hold the country's highest office.

The dramatic rise of the JVP/NPP in 2024, which had long been a peripheral force in Sri Lankan politics and was often overlooked by its opponents as a mere protest party, is associated with the unprecedented economic crisis Sri Lanka endured in 2022. The economic crisis, which led to a sovereign debt default in April 2022, resulted in a political crisis that eroded public confidence in established political parties — mainly the *Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP), led by the powerful Rajapaksa dynasty. In a sense, the rise of the NPP largely reflects the aspirations and expectations that underlined the massive public protests that swept Sri Lanka amidst the 2022 economic crisis.

At the time of the crisis, the JVP-led NPP framed the political scenario as a contest between the people and a 'corrupt elite-establishment'. This populist framing aimed at appealing to diverse social segments, capitalising on the disappointment and discontent among the masses with traditional political parties.

The NPP pledged to form a government free of corruption and to bring to justice those accused of various corrupt deals associated with former governments. It further promised a 'new political culture' in which political representatives would be accountable to the people and cease to be a privileged vocation channelled towards self-interest.

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The two years of the NPP rule, which it has framed as a 'rule of the people', offer a nuanced picture characterised by a tension between attempts to establish a new form of governance reflecting a modernising effect and constraints imposed by a challenging and largely unfavourable international environment.

Politics and Governance

President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka's two-year tenure has been marked by an unprecedented, ongoing process to transform the country's politics and governance. There has been a significant attempt to dismantle what Dissanayaka described as the corrupt political establishment. Factors like widespread corruption, nepotism, political patronage for illicit underworld activities and impunity enjoyed by the political elite have been defining features of Sri Lanka's day-to-day political life for decades. The NPP government has launched an ambitious programme to reverse these tendencies. Some significant developments are as follows.

Anti-corruption has become a defining feature of day-to-day politics at the highest levels of government, contributing to a marked decline in the appropriation of public funds for personal gain. Furthermore, the nexus between the criminal underworld and governance, which had been an enduring feature of Sri Lankan politics, has been significantly disrupted. A sense of altruism and modesty has been introduced to the style of governance. The government scrapped many privileges afforded to those who hold political office, including pensions for Parliamentarians and former Presidents. Luxury bungalows used as ministerial residences in the past have been allocated for public use.

Further, the government has embarked on a drive to end impunity, resulting in many prominent political figures associated with the old political establishment being investigated and prosecuted. For example, for the first time in the country's history, a former President, Ranil Wickremasinghe, was arrested and is now facing prosecution on charges of misappropriation of public funds. Leading figures of the once-powerful Rajapaksha dynasty are also awaiting prosecution. Ensuring justice for the misdeeds of those who held power has also been a prominent demand in the 2022 protests.

At the level of day-to-day governance, changes are visible too. For instance, political allegiance appears to play a considerably less significant role in decisions regarding recruitment to public-sector employment and eligibility for welfare schemes. Nepotistic practices have been significantly discouraged. Sri Lanka's traditional parties, which have historically been organised around powerful political families,

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have often facilitated the reproduction of power through familial and personal connections. On the contrary, the JVP/NPP, which is influenced by principles of democratic centralism, represents a marked departure in its conduct. Responsibilities of the administration today appear to be largely decided on the grounds of merit, not dynastic links.

Another significant achievement is evident in the field of ethnic relations. The government — which also secured the highest number of seats in the Tamil-speaking North and Eastern provinces during the 2024 Parliamentary elections — has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to building 'national unity' and combating communalism. For sure, issues stemming from structural discrimination faced by minority communities are not completely addressed, and there is much to be done in that respect. But the government detaching from the discourse of ethno-nationalist supremacy and making a stance of equality for all ethnic communities, stands in stark contrast to what Sri Lanka was a few years ago.In a country like Sri Lanka, in which politics and governance have been seriously intertwined with practices of nepotism, lavish privileges, political patronage, and divisive tactics to stir hatred among ethnic communities, the above measures are of no less importance. These represent an effort to bring a sense of modernisation to the country's politics and governance, a revival in the democratic quality of the political system, which is also the central dimension of NPP's mandate in 2024.

Economic Constraints

Nevertheless, political transformation cannot be separated from economic considerations, and this is where the NPP government has been facing a challenging situation. The 2024 election manifesto of the NPP spoke of a 'production-based economy' that emphasised the state's role in shaping the country's development trajectory. It also outlined a number of social measures — notably, enhancing public services such as free education, healthcare, and public transportation. However, once in power, the NPP government has been compelled to navigate a complex economic environment that has proven less accommodating of the vision outlined in the manifesto.

After the debt default in April 2022, Sri Lanka entered negotiations with its external creditors for a debt restructuring deal, facilitated by an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF programme negotiated by the previous Ranil Wickremasinghe government was characterised by a number of conditionalities, including an aggressive revenue-based fiscal consolidation target, the removal of subsidies for public utilities such as electricity and fuel, and strict monetary financing rules.

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The NPP government in 2024 inherited the IMF programme and an agreement with external bondholders, which has been widely criticised for imposing a disproportionate burden on Sri Lanka. Before the elections, the NPP's stance was that it did not seek to repudiate the IMF agreement but would attempt to renegotiate it to ease the burden on the masses. It appears that this stance stemmed from the concern that not following the programme would have adverse repercussions for the fragile economy, which is only beginning to recover.Thus, the NPP government has been functioning over the last two years within the constraints it inherited due to the IMF programme. This has led to the accusation that the new government has been following the same economic policies as its predecessor. There is a partial truth in this claim, as the NPP government, in pursuance of the EFF agreement, had to adhere to its broader parameters.

However, certain discontinuities indicate that adherence arises from necessity rather than ideological commitment. The most notable change is the reversal of the massive privatisation process launched by the previous regime. The government has vowed to maintain state ownership of strategically important sectors of the economy. For example, the plan to unbundle the functions of the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) into twelve companies in a manner that leads to privatisation was reversed, by assuring state ownership of the companies that succeeded the CEB.

Decisions like the reactivation of the Paddy Marketing Board to purchase rice directly from farmers to control oligarchal influence in the paddy market, the ambitious project the government has launched to transform public transportation through greater investments in the state-owned Sri Lanka Transport Board, are further examples underlying the government's interest in defending state intervention in the economy. The government also ended the moratorium on public-sector recruitment imposed by the previous regime.

Furthermore, there has been considerable attention to expand social spending. For instance, targeted cash transfers for families living below the poverty line were increased, and allowances for vulnerable groups such as the elderly and persons with disabilities were raised. Significant allocations were made to expand the scheme to provide meals free of charge for schoolchildren. A new programme has been introduced to enhance primary medical care in rural areas, *inter alia* to reduce patients' reliance on private medical entities for primary health care. Moreover, there has been a substantial increase in subsidies for small-scale producers, such as farmers and fishermen.

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Economic Independence?

Despite these efforts, the limited fiscal and policy space imposed by the IMF programme continues to impede the government's preferences. Certain social welfare-related pledges of the NPP — such as the removal of taxes on essential food items and educational equipment — had to be compromised to meet the fiscal targets required by the programme. Strict fiscal targets and restrictions on monetary financing will continue to impose significant constraints on the government's ability to pursue a developmentalist path.

Moreover, Sri Lanka is expected to begin servicing its external commercial debt starting in 2028, which is likely to increase the country's financial burdens. Sri Lanka faces other external economic obstacles, such as tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on Sri Lankan exports and pressure on the country's balance of payments from the conflict in West Asia.Economic conditions — an improvement in the lives of ordinary people — are crucial to sustain the modernisation drive the NPP government has embarked on in politics and governance. A decline or stagnation in people's standards of living is likely to provide grounds for mobilisation by parties representing the old establishment. This can undermine the legitimacy that the government has derived so far through its political reforms.

In a recent speech at a public rally celebrating the government's second anniversary — while outlining the achievements over the past two years — President Dissanayaka stated that the ultimate objective of the government is to achieve economic sovereignty. He admitted that the country is still far from genuine economic independence. \

In the context of an international economic architecture insensitive to the developmental aspirations of small and weaker nations, and a hostile political environment shaped by aggressive unilateral policies pursued by superpowers, the Sri Lankan government is likely to face an uphill battle. How the NPP government envisions navigating these challenges remains to be seen.

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The BJP Win in West Bengal : Perspectives of a Concerned Bangladesh

Mohiuddin Zaman

Recently in the elections in West Bengal, India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) , the Hindutva sectarian party led by Shuvendu Adhikari defeated Mamata Banerjee's All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), ending its 14-year rule of the state. The BJP's win in West Bengal, which has been part of a series of wins by the BJP, India's ruling party, is a testimony to India's rising influence of Hindutva-inspired sectarian politics that not only threaten the safety and security of its minorities, especially the Muslims, but also pose a source of much concern for countries that border India.

From a Bangladeshi perspective, the radical transformation of India's political landscape and social psyche over the past two decades – from liberal democracy to majoritarian sectarianism - is anything but inspiring; rather, it is deeply worrying.

Many observers trace this transformation to the rise of Narendra Modi, with his tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat and the anti-Muslim riots of 2002, which many believe he passively encouraged. Since then, a powerful current of Hindu sectarian revivalism — variously described as Hindutva, Hindu cultural nationalism, or civilizational nationalism — has steadily moved from the ideological margins into the centre of Indian political life, if not Hindu India's way of life these days.

Today, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies govern most Indian states and union territories, giving the movement unprecedented institutional reach. Ironically, the ideological roots of Hindu revivalism that emerged in late nineteenth-century Bengal appear to have come full circle with the BJP's recent electoral victory in West Bengal.

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For many in Bangladesh and elsewhere in South Asia, the most troubling aspect of Suvendu/BJP's victory is not merely electoral success, but the accompanying social polarisation; this transformation is not merely an electoral transition, but a warning of social polarisation and open hostility towards Muslims.

Reports of post-election violence, attacks on homes and businesses, inflammatory rhetoric, and the renaming of places associated with India's Muslim past have deepened fears that the country is moving toward a more exclusionary national identity, which is in contradiction to India's constitution – a democratic secular polity - which India's founding fathers formulated to advance India.

Indeed, statements by some regional political leaders in states such as Assam and West Bengal have further intensified the anxieties of the Muslims.

Critics argue that these developments are part of a broader attempt to centralise political and cultural power around the BJP and Narendra Modi personally. This has led some commentators to draw comparisons with other highly centralised political systems of the twentieth century, including that of Mao Zedong's China during the Cultural Revolution, and some even compare Narendra Modi's India with interwar Europe under Adolf Hitler.

No doubt that such comparisons are extreme but given the rise of the BJP's grip over India and its sectarianism, the fear is genuine.

Nevertheless, concerns about India's human rights backsliding cannot be ruled out completely, can they? Besides, the rising spectre of one leader and one party; personality-centred politics; the rise of 'Godi media' (an appeasing media) and increasing pressure on freedom of speech, curtailments of dissent by the NGOs, universities, and intellectuals; and attempts to reshape historical narratives, educational content, and cultural identity around a majoritarian nationalist framework are disturbing.

Some analysts therefore describe present-day India not as a totalitarian state, but as an "illiberal democracy", with electoral majoritarianism — where democratic institutions promote political and social isolation, space for and marginalisation of minorities and where voices against the majority dissent steadily narrow and are either stifled or ignored.

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The comparison with Mao's Cultural Revolution is usually less about communist ideology and more about cultural "purification." Mao sought to destroy the "Four Olds" — old ideas, customs, culture, and habits — to reshape Chinese society around a communist revolutionary identity.

Critics argue that aspects of Hindu nationalist politics similarly seek to erase or civilisation, minimise centuries of Muslim influence on Indian culture and civilisation through symbolic policy interventions and political acts, for example banning beef consumption (Hindus, the majority people in India, regard cow as a deity and this prohibit consumption of beef) renaming cities and public places, revising textbooks by deleting India's Muslim history, redefining national identity, and portraying Muslim rule as invasion, an affront to the Indian civilization.

More troubling is the recent rise in venomous anti-Muslim rhetoric that has contributed to polarisation of Indians along religious lines – the majority Hindus and the minority Muslims, more so, India's political polarisation, since Modi's rise in Gujarat in 2001.

The communal messaging witnessed during recent election campaigns in states such as West Bengal and Assam, has since promoted targeted violence against Muslims in both these states of India.

Some civil society organisations have even drawn parallels between the rise of Muslim othering in India and the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. Such comparisons should not be made casually, because the Holocaust was a singular historical atrocity involving industrial-scale genocide. Nevertheless, the comparison emerges from concerns over dehumanising propaganda, collective suspicion toward a minority community, and the portrayal of Muslims as demographic, cultural, or political threats to the nation.

Furthermore, A US-based expert tracking on communal harmony in India has testified before the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) on "senior political leaders' role in enabling hate and violence, …in demolishing minority properties, social media platforms' amplification of hate speech, and the growing transnational repression targeting critics abroad." The testimony has submitted proofs of involvement of the top leaders, central and state systematic repression of the minorities especially Muslims as "embedded in bureaucracy, codified in law, shielded by absolute impunity, and steadily more ruthless in execution," .

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For many in Bangladesh, the rising trends in Muslim persecution in India are seen with great apprehension. These sectarian initiatives are not only about India's internal trajectory but also about the broader implications for South Asia, especially in the neighbouring Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh, where they host a large number of Hindu minorities as well.

However, the good news is that BJP's sectarian policies have started to hurt India itself, politically and, more importantly, economically. Most Hindus and Muslims prefer and continue to live side by side without seeing one another as enemies. The social realities of the Sub-Continent seem to be still stronger than the narratives of hatred propagated by demagogues , television studios and social media networks .

Ultimately, the future of India — and perhaps the stability of South Asia itself — may depend on whether those quieter traditions of coexistence can prevail over the politics of fear, hate and division. Let us hope for the best.

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Will Nepal's New Political Realignment Transform the Nation?

Hari Prasad Shrestha

The wave of victory of newcomers with novel streams of thoughts swept away the monopoly of old guards in the election of the House of Representatives (HoR) in Nepal. This political realignment is the change in behavior of voting groups, switching of their preferences from one party to another. The culture of voters that is altered over time as technology advances, needs for change, and values evolve are also factors for political realignment. With this shift, people's views and desires have also changed by resulting in parties realigning relevant to the new political atmosphere.

A political realignment is a composition of fast changes in party-related ideology, issues, leaders, regional bases, demographic bases, and/or the structure of powers. These changes result in a restructuring of political focus and power that lasts for decades, usually replacing an older dominant coalition. Political realignments can be sudden (1–4 years) or can take place more gradually (5–20 years). Political scientists and historians often disagree about which elections are realignment and what defines a realignment, and even whether realignments occur.

The terms themselves are somewhat arbitrary, however, and usage among political scientists and historians does vary. In the US, some argued for a 30–38 year "cycle" of realignments and other favored 38-year cycles are considered "realigning" for different reasons. Though they differed on some of the details, earlier realignments scholars generally concluded that systematic patterns are identifiable in American national elections. Such cycles occur on a regular schedule: once every 36-years or so. This period of roughly 30 years fits with the notion that these cycles are closely linked to generational change.

In Nepal, it usually occurs in the duration of 30-35 years as a "cycle" of realignment. After multiparty democracy in 1990, Gen Z protest

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in 2025 is the latest cycle of political realignment in Nepal. The "Gen Z protest" was a driving force for political realignment in Nepal, which was, largely leaderless, youth-led uprising that erupted in September 2025, driven by frustration over systemic corruption, high unemployment, and a government ban on social media.

The protests forced the government of KP Oli to step down, after which President Ram Chandra Paudel appointed Sushila Karki as the interim Prime Minister of Nepal. The goals of the Gen Z movement were to end corruption, reduce unemployment, promote good governance, and ensure economic equality, which were missing parts before the period of Gen Z protests. During these protests, at least 74 people were killed, and multiple government buildings, political parties' offices as well as the parliament and the president's residence along with private and commercial properties were set on fire, causing losses in trillions of rupees.

During the last municipal election, the victory of independent Mayors from Kathmandu, Dharan and Dhangadhi are also considered to be a sign of people's aspirations for political realignment as well as indication for change in the political monopoly of old political parties. Last year, as a product of the Gen Z movement, some political incidents and events gave new momentum to political change. A new alliance formed by Rastriya Swatantra Party(RSP) leader Rabi Lamichhane and former Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah, which challenged the traditional, long-established political parties, proved to be a well articulated strategy for better performance in the election.

The rising nationwide popularity of Balen Shah made RSP the number one political party in the election of HoR. The victory of Balendra Shah by defeating former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in HoR election from Jhapa 5 constituency has been an historical moment in politics of Nepal. This election squeezed major political parties into the lower positions.

Most importantly, the formation of a new government under the Premiership of RSP party leader Balendra Shah by breaking the musical chair rotational monopoly of leaders of old political parties has been a big bout in the process of political realignment in Nepal. Moreover, it has already started to implement the recommendation of a high-level inquiry commission led by former high court judge Gauri Bahadur Karki, formed to investigate the September 2025 Gen-Z protests, which uncovered a centrally coordinated crackdown by top political and security officials. As a first step to implement the findings of the high level committee, the government has arrested

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former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and former Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak for their alleged involvement in the killing in last year's Gen Z protests.

Previously, after the promulgation of constitution of Nepal in 2015, three figures (Sher Bahadur Deuba from Nepali Congress, KP Sharma Oli from Nepal Communist Party, UML and Pushpa Kamal Dahal from Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) were continuously in position of premiership turn by turn.

After the Gen Z protests, there have also been big changes in the Nepali Congress party. A special convention of the Nepali Congress, by the majority of representatives, convened under the leadership of the Gagan Thapa–Bishwa Prakash Sharma group, which elected Gagan Thapa, it revolted against the party President Sher Bahadur Deuba faction and the special convention elected Thapa as party president unanimously.

This convention changed the old guards in the party, however due to strong divisions and declining democratic exercises inside the party, the new establishment of Nepali Congress could not get the confidence and good support from the people in the general election and the party squeezed in the small position of opposition with nominal seats in HoR. And, based on experiences of some countries, the weak opposition in the HoR could be full of risk for democracy, if the high majority government diverted from the main objectives of the state.

The landslide victory of Gen Z supported Rastriya Swatantra Party, in the recent general election has been a center point of new hope for the majority of people in Nepal.This rapid, grassroots-driven rise of a new political party led by a majority of youths would certainly break the cycle of instability that has characterized Nepal's political landscape for decades. And it is expected that the new leadership would extensively implement the transformative changes the population was demanding during the Gen Z protests in Nepal.

After all the ups and down, it is expected that political stability— characterized by low conflict, reliable legal frameworks and rule of law, consistent policies, and, often low level of corruption— would certainly accelerate economic and political transformation in the nation. The first cabinet meeting of the Balen led new government also approved 100 new initiatives aimed at administrative and governance reforms, signaling a focus on efficiency and systemic improvements. Moreover, the newly appointed ministers , in their

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first day, as an indication of morning shows the day have also made encouraging decisions to drive the nation in the right direction. Above all, the fruit of political realignment would certainly be converted into stability and prosperity because economic crises can trigger political collapse, which the nation cannot bear any more.

Hari Prasad Shrestha authored 3 books, worked in UNDP Africa for 6 years and 35 years under the Government of Nepal. The article appeared in the March 29, 2026 online edition of the South Asia Journal.

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Professor Muhammad Yunus, the man who helped a falling nation rise

M. Adil Khan

In recent times, there has been a sharp rise in badmouthing of Prof. Yunus, and it is not difficult to guess who these adversaries are and why they are doing this.

Thus, the time is ripe to do a bit of bookkeeping on the spectrum of Falling and the 'Rising' initiated by Prof. Muhammad Yunus, the Chief Advisor and his Interim Government (IG), and take account of the remaining challenges, unfulfilled tasks, etc.

The Falling

Prof Yunus and his IG, an incumbent who took over the reins of Bangladesh at one of the country's most difficult periods.

In July 2024, at the time Hasina government got toppled by a mass-uprising, the economy of Bangladesh was at a dire strait - inflation was roughly 11.66% overall, with food inflation soaring to over 14% year-on-year, that severely strained household budgets; foreign exchange reserves plummeted to around $15 to $20 billion, down from a high of over $48 billion in 2021, forcing the deposed government to restrict imports of essential materials and capital goods.

The Banking Sector was in a mess – it was turned into a cash cow for the distribution of political patronage, leading to non-performing loans, poor liquidity, and offshore capital flight by the politically connected, becoming the norm and practised with impunity.

Hasina government's three governance tools, namely corruption, patronage distribution and repression not only scarred the economy, fomented massive mass resentment - protests, curfews, and internet shutdowns paralysed the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, causing economic losses estimated at up to US$150 million per day; external debt mounting where the economy was already operating under a

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42-month, US$4.7 billion IMF bailout program that began in January 2023.

Bangladesh was boiling. All it needed was a trigger, and as we already know, the 'quota' movement – Hasina government's 'jobs for boys' - did it. It triggered the simmering resentments to boil over into a mass uprising, toppling her government.

In July 2024, a mass uprising deposed the decade-and-a-half-long autocratic and kleptocratic government of Sheikh Hasina, leaving Bangladesh in a state of virtual collapse, economically, socially, politically and more worryingly, administratively.

This is the Bangladesh – *a falling nation* – which the leadership of the mass uprising handed over to Prof. Yunus and his colleagues to rescue and fix.

The Rising

Prof. Yunus and his governing team, the IG that took over the reign of Bangladesh at that crucial juncture was given to defined mandate but aspirations – which included but not limited to regain trust in the government, secure the country, lift and stabilise the economy, and more importantly, present to the society a road map that help Bangladesh to move forward as an inclusive democratic, transparent and accountable polity.

Yunus and the IG did their utmost to fulfil some, but not all, the aspirations, and these include:

- Prevented a civil war: Had Prof. Yunus not taken charge at the time, on August 5, 2024, Bangladesh would have plunged into chaos; and the possibilities of Bangladesh descending into a civil war were real. Prof. Yunus has worked as a glue for Bangladesh. At that time, Bangladesh needed a leader who enjoyed both national and international appeal. Luckily for Bangladesh, Yunus is the only person who fulfilled both requirements and saved the country from collapsing.

- International recognition and protection of safety, security, and sovereignty of Bangladesh: The presence of Yunus as the leader earned instant international recognition and gave legitimacy to the Interim Government.

The presence of Yunus as leader also averted Indian intervention, possibilities of which were real and not speculative

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- Stabilisation of the economy: Yunus and his Interim Government, which inherited a broken and debt-ridden economy and high inflation, especially food-inflation helped stabilise the economy (inflation was brought down from 11.6% to 8.49% and food inflation to 8.29%); restructured the IMF loans and prevented the IMF from declaring Bangladesh a defaulter; and had this happened, Bangladesh's creditworthiness would have suffered, thereby repositioned Bangladesh's credit-worthiness and ensuring that the country's exports and imports flowed uninterrupted, within manageable costs.

- Restoration of law and order: Against many odds and challenges – disgruntled and politicised bureaucracy and the police -, the Yunus government restored a semblance of law and order. Admittedly, this has been one of his weakest areas of accomplishments

- Investment opportunities: The Yunus government explored several new investment opportunities, and there were many foreign investors who showed genuine interests to invest in Bangladesh but deeply entrenched corrupt and inefficient investment environment prevented these intents to turn into realities and indeed, only a full-fledged reform of the administrative and fiscal reforms that guarantee transparency, accountability, safety, security and sustainable return on capital would help bringing the potential investors back in Bangladesh.

For example, we recently saw in a news item that Mr Robin khuda, a Bangladesh-born Australian based in Sydney, Australia, has invested US$30.0 billion in India's IT sector. His photo showing him shaking hands with Prime Minister Modi, who is not known as a great lover of Muslims or Bangladeshis, was all over Indian media, a testament to the fact that turning investment opportunities into reality requires investor confidence.

Indeed, a market economy is driven by the profit motive and assurances of market predictability, which guarantee safety, security, and the sustainability of return on investment. Neither patriotism nor parochialism has any place in investment decisions.

Luckily, in India, most businesses are politics-free, and existing laws guarantee their safety and security. Thus, unlike in Bangladesh, where power shifts fortunes, in India, regardless of power shifts, rivals never destroy national/private investments.

In Bangladesh, it is the complete opposite: most businessmen are patronage-based and political affiliates, and thus corrupt, which,

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with the change of governments, ushers in and replaces one group of plunderers with another.

In other words, there is no incentive for genuine businesses, local and foreign, to commit themselves to long-term investments in Bangladesh.

If I were the government now, I would ask Robin what made him invest in India rather than in his motherland, Bangladesh, adjust policies accordingly, hold a free and fair election, and transfer power to the elected representatives.

- Propose Reforms and hold a free and fair election: Finally, one of key tasks that Yunus and his IG took upon themselves was to propose reforms for rebuild Bangladesh's democratic governance to make it more inclusive, transparent and accountable and accordingly, its reform commission, produced what has come to be known as July Sanad or July Charter and put it to referendum for endorsement by the citizens which the latter have done.

After a decade and a half, the IG held a free and fair election in February 2026, which the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), under the leadership of Tariq Rahman, won with an absolute majority and has formed the government since March 2026.

Summary: accomplishments, remaining challenges

In summary, Yunus and his Interim Government's (IG) undeclared Terms of Reference that included among other things: (i) stabilisation of the economy, a job which they have done reasonably well; (ii) restoration of law and order, which they have accomplished not so badly though more could be done; (iii) suggest reforms of the political system to make Bangladesh's democracy more inclusive and its governance more transparent, accountable and create investment-friendly environment for potential investors, local and foreign have been accomplished reasonably well.

The Interim Government commissioned several reform commissions that submitted their reports in time and prepared the July Charter that contained proposals for long-term and durable reforms conducive to making governance in Bangladesh inclusive, democratic and corruption-free, and to ensure that people endorse the July Charter apolitically, the IG got the Charter endorsed by the people through a referendum.

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Successful implementation of these recommended reforms does have the potential to deepen democracy and improve transparency and accountability in governance, and curb corruption in Bangladesh

However, the newly elected BNP government does not seem to be following IG's reform proposals and, more worryingly, has ignored and failed to sign the Charter, the citizen-Magna Carta of a sort, which would have helped usher in a new governance culture and build a better Bangladesh.

Tariq's and his party, BNP's failure to appreciate that change of guards without committing to changing the system, complete withdrawal from the July Sanad which promised a more inclusive, transparent and accountable governance in Bangladesh has been a big mistake for which Tariq Rahman, the party and indeed, Bangladesh itself may end up paying a heavy price in not too distant a future.

Finally, while it is true that Professor Yunus and his team of governance were not flawless, let us not hesitate to give them the credit where it is due. After all, and as Nelson Mandela once reminded us, " The glory of a nation is not so much in rising, it is rising from falling."

Yunus' government did just that – they helped Bangladesh rise from falling!

The onus is now on the elected BNP government to turn the aspirations of the July 2024 Uprising – captured in the July Janad – into mandates and move Bangladesh forward economically, socially and politically through good governance.

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Bangladesh: How Osman Hadi Died and What Happened Next

South Asia Journal

Osman Hadi's murder has sent Bangladesh reeling at a time when the country is trying to balance precariously on a knife-edge between transition and turbulence. Young, unconnected, uncorrupted: these were his virtues and his vulnerabilities. Hadi was a politician who wasn't really a politician, in the Bangladeshi sense. He had no dynastic surname, he ran no inherited machine, he did not flash around wealth. His potential was in the very lack of these. He talked the language of representation minus money, of politics without the enrichment and intimidation, of public service devoid of the arrogance that office has too often come to entail in Bangladesh. It was a promise, not grandiose in material terms but subversive in implication. It is that promise that made him visible. And it may have made him vulnerable.

Hadi's thesis was disarmingly simple. Bangladeshi politics, he argued, had been appropriated by a self-reproducing class for which elections were an investment and office the return. In that calculus, winning became everything, accountability an afterthought. He wanted to puncture that logic by demonstrating that power could be contested without capital and that people could be mobilized without patronage. In a country where political office has become for many a shortcut to instant wealth, that was an idea approaching heresy. Hadi was not promising miracles. He was proffering an example. And examples, more than slogans, unsettle vested interests.

Bangladesh's political history is strewn with leaders who have thundered against graft and eventually fallen to it. Hadi had not yet reached that point. He was still developing, still learning, still exposed. That incompleteness made him vulnerable to both the cynicism of the hardened and the aggression of the inexperienced. He was neither a hardened tactician nor a reckless agitator. In today's

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Bangladesh, he was a political innocent with a clear moral compass and few shields.

His murder, therefore, cannot be disentangled from the general political climate. Bangladesh is only just emerging from a phase of hyper-polarization, institutional collapse, and widespread disillusionment. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of leaders of the deposed Awami League have been fleeing the country in the wake of Sheikh Hasina's fall, many of them taking shelter in India. This is not speculation but a fact of public record. Nor is it controversial to suggest that India has wielded outsized influence over Bangladesh in the past, at times brazenly, at times covertly, often decisively. What is disputed, and should be disputed, is how that influence is being exercised today and to what end.

In this overheated context, talk began to emerge, including border-violation talk in Bangladesh, about pledges of funding and organizational support being made across the border to rebuild Awami League networks inside the country. Rumors and political chatter spoke of assurances of thousands of crores of funds intended to reorganize cadres, re-mobilize loyalists, and, if necessary, stoke trouble against the interim order. Whether this is entirely accurate or only partially exaggerated cannot be conclusively proven. What is undeniable, however, is the sense of posture: a sense among certain Bangladesh-based elites that time, pressure, and even anarchy might yet reverse the verdict against them.

Hadi inconveniently occupied space in the middle of this contest. He had not joined the old Awami League structure, and he was not of the traditional opposition's patronage culture. He spoke openly and forcefully of foreign interference, in particular Indian overreach, at a time of rising nationalist sentiment and widespread suspicion of external manipulation. That stance, while endearing him to some, also made him a target. In Bangladesh, to speak against domestic power is imprudent; to speak against external power is often suicidal.

The failure to provide him sufficient protection is one of the most egregious aspects of this atrocity. Hadi had reportedly been receiving repeated threats. In a country where political violence is old and familiar, such warnings should have led to preventive action. The interim government's failure or refusal to protect an individual who had warned of an imminent threat to his life raises serious questions. Was it incompetence? Was it underestimation? Or was it a judgment that Hadi, lacking formal status, did not warrant the deployment of resources that other, better-connected individuals would? Whatever

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the cause, the outcome was the same: a preventable death.

The identity of those who physically executed the operation will, one assumes, be revealed in due course. The more pressing question, however, is not only who fired the bullets but who thrived in the environment that made the shooting possible. Hadi's death removed an ascendant voice that was a threat both to domestic vested interests and foreign backers. It also sent a signal to others who might have followed in his footsteps: idealism is futile, independence exacts a price. And finally, it introduced an element of fear and instability into a political transition that needs calm and credibility.

Narratives that wish to make Hadi's murder part of a grand conspiracy between foreign intelligence services, armed Bangladeshis in exile, and a cynical strategy to internationalize Bangladesh as an extremist hotbed are finding their way to the fore with speed and ferocity. History gives these fears a veneer of plausibility. Bangladesh has been internationally stigmatized in the past through selective narrativization that highlighted militancy at the expense of social resilience and democratic aspirations. Framing Bangladesh as a home for "Islamic extremism" has been a handy leitmotif used by different international actors to legitimate pressure, intervention, and political engineering. To assume that such approaches have disappeared from foreign policy toolboxes would be naïve indeed.

But caution is necessary, too. Not all crimes are the products of a mastermind; not all tragedies are an affirmation of the most sensationalist theory. Conspiracies thrive where institutions collapse, and transparency is absent. The danger is to allow speculation to substitute for investigation and outrage to short-circuit accountability. Bangladesh has long been plagued by the politics of rumor, where truth is collateral damage in factional warfare.

Nonetheless, to willfully overlook the broader context would be irresponsible. Hadi was not killed in a vacuum. He was killed in a country where politics has been militarized, where money has determined access to power, where exile has become a political default, and where external actors have never been neutral spectators. The coming together of these variables created the conditions in which a young, unprotected reformer could be gunned down with relative ease.

Who benefits from this tragedy? Not the people Hadi wanted to serve. Not the interim government, whose own credibility has been sapped by its inability to protect a threatened citizen. Not Bangladesh's international reputation, which is damaged every

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time political violence erupts. The beneficiaries are the cynics who argue that change is impossible, the extremists who prosper in chaos, the power brokers, domestic and foreign, who favor a cowed, fractured polity over an assertive, reformist one.

Hadi is gone. His political journey has ended before it really began. But the idea he represented: that politics can be wrested away from the talons of money, fear, and foreign dependency, has not perished with him. If anything, it has acquired a moral valence rare for living politicians. The question now is whether Bangladesh will honor that idea or entomb it with Hadi.

The way forward demands sobriety, not hysteria. An impartial, credible investigation into Hadi's murder is the minimum requirement if public trust is to be restored. Protection of political players, particularly those not in entrenched power structures, must be a priority if elections are to have any meaning. The interim government must demonstrate, through action, that neutrality does not mean passivity, and that reformist voices will not be left exposed.

Equally important is the refusal to outsource Bangladesh's political narrative to foreign capitals and international media frames. The country has to confront extremism, corruption, and violence on its own terms without allowing these issues to be instrumentalized by others. Finally, those who admired Hadi must channel grief into organization, discipline, and patience. Martyrdom by itself is not enough to change systems; civic engagement is.

Hadi wanted to show that one could enter politics without money and leave it without blood. Bangladesh now owes it to his memory to ensure that his death does not become another casualty of a long roll call of wasted promise.

The article appeared in the December,19, 2025 online edition of the South Asia Journal.

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Assessing Assam's Descent into State-Sanctioned Persecution

Dr. Smit Gupta

The now-deleted video posted on 7 February 2026 by the official Assam BJP X handle should have shocked India's conscience. Instead, it revealed an uncomfortable truth: in Assam, hate against Muslims is no longer whispered—it is performed, recorded, and briefly broadcast by those in power. The video, depicting Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma symbolically "firing" a rifle at images of Muslim men, complete with captions such as "point-blank shot," "no mercy," and the slogan of a "foreigner-free Assam," crossed a dangerous threshold. It was not merely provocative content; it was an unmistakable act of incitement.

That the video was later deleted does not mitigate its impact. On the contrary, its existence—however brief—exposed the ideological environment fostered under BJP rule in Assam: one in which Muslims, particularly Bengali-speaking "Miya" Muslims, are systematically dehumanized, criminalized, and portrayed as existential threats. Critics were right to describe the clip as genocidal in tone. The simulated gunfire, the religious markers of the targets, and the language of extermination were not metaphorical. They were explicit.

This incident cannot be dismissed as an isolated lapse or "troll material," as some BJP sympathizers attempted to argue. It fits squarely into a broader pattern of rhetoric and policy pursued by Sarma over several years. Repeatedly, he has framed Bengali-origin Muslims as "infiltrators," conflating identity, language, and religion with illegality. Calls for "non-cooperation"—urging citizens not to rent homes to Muslims, not to employ them, and not to trade with them—are not administrative measures. They are tools of social exclusion and economic strangulation.

The political response exposed the gravity of the moment. The Indian National Congress rightly condemned the video as a "call to

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genocide," warning that such content signals a dangerous escalation. AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi's decision to file a police complaint against Sarma for genocidal hate speech further underscored the seriousness of the matter. That no confirmed FIR followed only reinforces concerns about institutional reluctance to hold powerful figures accountable.

Assam's demographics make this campaign especially alarming. Muslims constitute approximately 34 percent of the state's population, with Miya Muslims forming a substantial segment. Under BJP rule since 2016—and particularly under Sarma's chief ministership since 2021—this community has faced what can only be described as systematic persecution. Arbitrary arrests, mass evictions, custodial abuse, extrajudicial killings, and mob violence have become disturbingly frequent.

Human rights organizations have repeatedly sounded the alarm. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UN experts have condemned Assam's policies as discriminatory and violative of international human rights norms. Since May 2025 alone, more than 300 Bengali-speaking Muslims were arbitrarily detained or pushed into Bangladesh, despite many being Indian citizens. Nationwide, nearly two million people—overwhelmingly Muslims—were excluded from citizenship rolls through deeply flawed verification processes, rendering them vulnerable to detention and statelessness.

Violence has accompanied policy. In 2025, at least 50 Muslims were killed across India in incidents involving communal violence or state action, with Assam featuring prominently. Police firing during eviction drives, including the killing of a 19-year-old Bengali-origin Muslim protester, illustrates how administrative actions are enforced with lethal force. Meanwhile, mob lynchings—often linked to cow vigilantism or petty crime accusations—continue with impunity, reinforcing a climate of fear.

Housing demolitions represent another pillar of this campaign. Since 2016, more than 17,600 families—mostly Bengali Muslims—have been evicted in Assam. Since June 2025 alone, around 5,000 families have lost their homes. Recent operations in Sonitpur and Hailakandi displaced thousands more, frequently in violation of Supreme Court directives requiring due process and rehabilitation. Over 50,000 people have been uprooted from roughly 160 square kilometers of land, turning citizenship into a privilege contingent on religious identity.

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What the BJP video laid bare is the ideological logic behind these actions. By labeling Muslims as "foreigners," the state redefines constitutional citizens as demographic threats. By depicting violence symbolically, it normalizes the idea that force is legitimate. And by framing persecution as national security, it shields discrimination from scrutiny.

India's constitution promises equality before the law and protection of minorities. Assam today stands as a stark repudiation of those ideals. When a chief minister's image is associated—even symbolically—with gunfire aimed at a religious community, the danger is no longer abstract. History teaches that genocide does not begin with mass killings; it begins with language, imagery, and policies that strip a group of humanity. The Assam BJP video was not a mistake. It was a mirror. And what it reflected should alarm not just India's Muslims, but anyone who still believes that democracy cannot coexist with state-sanctioned hate.

Dr. Smit Gupta is the author is a student of Terrorism and Extremism in South Asia, pursuing my studies in Australia.
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Modi in Israel: The "Hexagon" Strategy and the Shifting Geometry of Power

South Asia Journal

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's latest visit to Israel marks a significant diplomatic moment. Nearly nine years after his last trip, Modi arrived in Jerusalem at a time when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is articulating a bold new geopolitical vision, a so-called "hexagon of alliances." It is not a coincidence. Six sides make up a honeycomb because a hexagon is the strongest geometric shape found in nature. Honeybees construct their honeycombs with hexagons because it creates a sturdy, level foundation with which they can operate at maximum efficiency. Bibi, it seems, understands geometry as well. He's talking about building a sturdy, tessellated web of partnerships that can hold firm even as storm clouds gather around Israel.

Of course, there is far more serious geopolitical import behind the speech than colorful metaphors.

What Is the "Hexagon of Alliances"?

Netanyahu has described the initiative as "an entire system, essentially a hexagon of alliances," not necessarily a rigid six-member bloc, but a flexible web of like-minded states cooperating across security, economic, and technological domains.

The confirmed core participants include Israel, India, Greece, and Cyprus. These four already maintain strong ties in defense cooperation, energy connectivity, and innovation. Greece and Cyprus are central to Eastern Mediterranean energy projects, while India's defense and technology collaboration with Israel has expanded dramatically over the past decade.

Potential partners extend into the Arab world, particularly the UAE and Bahrain, under the Abraham Accords, along with Egypt and Jordan. African and Asian technology-driven states such as Kenya,

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Rwanda, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore may also intersect with this network.

The "hexagon" is thus conceptual rather than literal, a strategic architecture built to counter what Netanyahu calls both the "radical Shiite axis" and an emerging "radical Sunni axis."

Why the Framework Appeals to India

For New Delhi, this emerging structure aligns comfortably with India's pragmatic, multi-aligned foreign policy. India has long avoided rigid bloc politics, preferring issue-based coalitions that enhance its economic and security interests.

Defense ties between India and Israel are already deep. Israeli drones, missile systems, border surveillance technologies, and counter-terrorism tools play a significant role in India's security matrix. Intelligence sharing has intensified. Joint ventures in weapons manufacturing are expanding.

Economically, it aligns with India's self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat) strategy. Israel's "Startup Nation" environment will aid India in AI, cybersecurity, semiconductors, ag-tech, and water tech, among others. Modi's attendance at innovation conferences during the trip highlights this focus.

Initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) strengthen the rationale for converging with Israel, Greece, Cyprus, and Gulf allies. The hexagon model will help alleviate trade chokepoints and energy routing dependencies.

From a diplomatic standpoint, Netanyahu's public acknowledgment of India as a "global power" elevates New Delhi's regional stature. Modi's address to the Knesset is a first for an Indian prime minister, symbolizing a partnership that has moved beyond quiet cooperation to overt strategic alignment.

The Palestinian Shadow

However, this deepening intimacy comes as the war rages on in Gaza. The Palestinian cause dims further with Modi and Netanyahu shaking hands. India's arms sales and joint ventures with Israel have come under increasing criticism amid claims of disproportionate civilian death tolls in Gaza.

Questions have been raised about India providing arms, labor support, and even logistical help during Israel's attack on Gaza. Pro-Palestine

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protests within India have faced limitations or discouragement, being labelled by authorities as indirect support for Hamas.

Adds a level of complexity to business-as-usual talk of a tech/economic relationship. For many, the India-Israel alliance is seen as growing increasingly ideological alongside its strategic ties.

Hindutva and Zionism: An Ideological Convergence?

Critics worry about what Hindutva, the Hindu nationalist ideology that currently governs India, has in common with Zionism in Israel. The two organize national identity in exclusive ethno-religious terms and securitize Muslim populations.

Hindutva leaders have long admired Zionism as an inspiration for religious nationalism. This personal affinity has translated into state-to-state camaraderie.

India now buys billions of dollars' worth of weapons from Israel. Israel exports surveillance technology and crowd-control weapons that India uses in Kashmir. India offers Israel market opportunities to scale up production.

Israeli and Indian officials may have lessons to learn from one another about how to overwhelm Gaza or Kashmir with soldiers and police. Human rights organizations have rightly compared the two occupied territories, pointing to Israeli tactics that India appears to be replicating.

Rising Tensions at Home

India's growing closeness to Israel has been challenged at home over rising hate crimes and hate speech against minorities, especially Muslims. Civil society groups allege there has been a noticeable uptick in such incidents over the last year; many have occurred in BJP-ruled states.

Media reporters and human rights activists who have been critical of the government say there is less democratic space for dissenting voices. Accusations of economic boycotts of Muslims, targeted demolitions of properties, and harsh language have added to Muslim insecurities in a country home to over 200 million Muslims.

India's critics say the deepening India–Israel relationship buttresses a narrative in which right-wing governments provide cover for each other.

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A New Geometry of Power

Domestic dissent aside, there is merit to Netanyahu's geopolitical gambit from a practical standpoint. The hexagon promises more diversified partnerships, greater economic integration through corridors, intelligence coordination, and an Indian foothold in maintaining stability in West Asia.

The question is whether domestic and diplomatic costs will outweigh benefits. India was once seen as the champion of the Palestinian cause; its non-aligned movement gave it moral authority as the voice of the Global South. Outwardly embracing Israel will certainly impact India's relationship with parts of the Arab world, and deepen fissures at home over India's pluralist identity.

After all, the politics of the Middle East are in constant flux. Will Israel's handful of moderate Arab partners benefit in the long run? More importantly, can such a formation survive without succumbing to the region's volatility?

India stepping into such a formation will give it more agency on the world stage. But it is also remaking its identity within the evolving politics of the Middle East.

"The honeycomb is one of the strongest geometrical structures because the hexagon evenly distributes weight," said Kanwar.

If Netanyahu's honeycomb, which seeks strength in Jewish solidarity, holds, India stands to gain economically and militarily. India, though, is no longer on the sidelines of Middle Eastern geopolitics. It is at the table, drawing up the blueprint.

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Tradwife Content in India, Patriarchy and the Conservative India

Rishiraj Sen and Dibyashree Mahanta

The rise of "tradwife" content in India is unfolding at a moment when the realities of women's lives tell a far more disturbing story, from dowry related murders to domestic violence. Across Instagram and YouTube, young married women often in their late teens and early twenties, present pastel-tinted domesticity as aspiration: early marriage, unpaid domestic labour, and ritualised femininity wrapped into bite-sized reels and soft-focus vlogs. What appears to be harmless "day-in-my-life" content is emerging at a time when women's safety both at home and online is deteriorating, making its cultural impact far from benign.

The Tradwife content in general portrays a female performing household duties and enforcing the gender binary. Researchers have found that the Tradwife content particularly aligns with right and far-right values and often shows women taking archetypal wives and mother roles. In India, research has found a steep rise in misogynist memes, deepfake pornographies and rape-threats to women in the digital sphere.

Amidst the spewing of poisonous anti-feminist hatred by men, this new community of female content creators have vernacularised the right-wing Tradwife phenomenon to cater the Indian audience.

Their content constantly targets feminist notions like economic independence, right to work, and autonomy, as well as dogmatically follows patriarchal traditions. There is a blatant ignorance towards crimes against women within the institution of marriage in the videos that appease to Hindu upper-class, upper-caste sensibilities, that core voter group of Hindutva right-wing parties.

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This article will answer three questions: (i) what kind of content are they creating? (ii) what discourse is it producing? And (iii) how this discourse impacts the Indian socio-political landscape?

What kind of content are they creating?

The upsurge in young female married influencers on Instagram showcasing what their typical day looks like through short form content like reels and mini vlogs have been garnering millions of views. These videos (especially vlogs) usually have titles that clearly state the age and marital status of the creator.

The standard format shows a typical day of an Indian stay-at-home wife spending leisurely time at home, after completing their traditional wife/ daughter-in-law duties. One such popular influencer Japneet Siman Sethi who has 51.7k followers, runs a mini vlog series titled "A day in my life as a 22yrs old married girl" with her voiceover in the background describing her day.

The typical day for her includes cooking meals for her husband and in-laws, taking naps, doing her beauty regimen, going out with her family and editing the vlogs.

She is seen wearing her red *chooda* (bangles), a symbol of marriage, at all times, including during her workout sessions. Even when she has acne-flared skin, she puts on heavy make-up.

Although it is her choice, she does it because she has recently married and hence it is important to look put together even when at home.

Apart from her mini vlogs, in several other reels she has actively voiced her opinions defending her choice of being a 'housewife', causing a heated debate online with other women who found it regressive and reactionary.

Another content creator Tanishkka Tiwari who has 31.3k followers uploads videos of her day to day life. She is 22 years old and has been married since the age of 19. Apart from cooking and cleaning, the most consistent part of her day is doing puja. In such videos, she is mostly seen wearing salwar suit and *sindoor* (very prominently).. The sindoor in Hindu tradition is a symbol of a woman's marital status.

Feminists have, however, long critiqued sindoor for being a patriarchal symbol indicating woman's "unavailability to other men, and the ownership of her body by her husband."

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There are similar other accounts like amayaaaa06 with 32.6k followers who wear all kinds of dresses but not without her chooda (bangles). She is seen cooking, going shopping, taking salon services at home and leading a very comfortable life. She explicitly mentions in a lot of her videos that she is a 20 year old Baniya *bahu* (daughter-in-law).

What discourse is it producing?

All of these influencers/content creators project the perfect picture of a traditional Indian wife and daughter-in-law. They live with their in-laws, take up the traditional cooking-cleaning duties, perform religious rituals, and take care of their husband and his family. In those videos, marriage becomes a performance where each element, from their dress to their actions, feel staged to align to the conservative audience.

The glorified picture of a happy married life, alongside their young age being reiterated in each video, sells the dream of an aspirational early marriage to their young women viewership. These videos highlight only the incentives of marriage where the wife or the daughter-in-law is pampered with expensive gifts, shopping sprees, and international vacations.

There is almost a consumerist, capitalist logic to marriage that these videos attempt to propagate where the end goal is to make-believe that being married is naturally the easiest and most rewarding progression in a woman' s life.

In return, the women only have to perform the minimal duties of cooking the meals and performing pooja. They also get to have house help to lessen the burden of maintaining the household. However, this image is deeply problematic and biased as it conveniently leaves out the darker side of early marriages.

When young women like the ones making those videos transition into a new home with a new family, they often face difficult socio-psychological issues like isolation, loneliness, reduced autonomy as well as health risks that might come with early pregnancy. These young brides are more susceptible to further mental, emotional and physical abuses as they are not financially independent.

These videos often appeal to the upper-caste, upper class Indian society as it rarely acknowledges the caste-class privilege ingrained in their lifestyle. Comfort, in India, is deeply embedded in the class-caste nexus and is intricately connected to the question of access. By

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never reflecting on their privileged positions for being able to choose to not work, they sell a neo-liberal dream to young women. There is a complete erasure of the fact that women do disproportionate domestic labour on an unpaid basis regularly and in this economy, they even have to do jobs to help the family.

Tradwife Mass Culture and the Conservative India

The Tradwife discourse, by appeasing the brahmanical majoritarian conservative values, is becoming part of the larger Hindutva right-wing mass-culture that propagates gendered roles as well as normalises the Hindu traditional way of living. Mass culture, as Max Horkheimer points out, socialises individuals and leads to the erasure of an alternative imagination, which in this case is a progressive feminist future.

The Tradwife culture is consciously choosing the glorious past over the progressive future and thus, actively formulating newer meanings amidst gender struggle for equity.

This choice however comes at a cost for women as Tradwife content creators often refuse to highlight the socio-political realities of women and marriages in India. According to the National Commission for Women (NCW) data in the first quarter of 2025, domestic violence has been the most pressing cause for complaints.

In India, around thirty percent of women have faced some sort of intimate partner violence. With marriages in India comes the issue of dowry and between 2017-2022 over six thousand women have been murdered where the main reason was found to be dowry.

The Tradwife content that glorifies marriage often fails to take into account the crimes that are being committed within the institution of marriage and portray a fairytale romanticised image. They blame educated women who have chosen to not get married early and the working professionals for the apparent higher divorce rates in their videos.

This image, however, has an uncanny similarity with the image that Hindutva nationalist have of women- the glorious nurturing mothers and obedient wives, whose entire life and identity revolves around the lives of the male members of the family.

Hindutva ideologues have also historically opposed modern women who according to them have destroyed Indian culture by exposing

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their bodies. Unsurprisingly, Bharatiya Janata Party often claims distribution of LPG cylinders as women empowerment thus fortifying the notion of gendered space.

It is therefore important that consumers of such videos are critical of both the performance and the motive of these videos, which might look harmless initially but carry a deeper ideological threat to the progressive politics.

Rishiraj Sen is an independent researcher and Dibyashree Mahanta is a doctoral scholar at University of Delhi. The article appeared in the February 28, 2026 online edition of the South Asia Journal.

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When Trophies Triumph Over Truth

Neha Rayamajhi

On July 30th, mountaineer Nirmal "Nims" Purja passed away while climbing a peak in Pakistan. Ten other climbers died with him, their names not as popular as the Netflix star who rose to fame with the documentary 14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible. This week, news platforms from all over the world have been mourning the mountaineer. Bollywood celebrities, Nepali socialites, and international climbers have been sharing their pictures with him, accompanied by lengthy elegies of the departed.

Government officials, public figures, schools, and national media spaces have been publicly grieving this loss and glorifying the man as a martyr. Philanthropists from Europe and the Americas have been pouring euros and dollars into his foundation. And amidst this loud, collective, grieving ceremony, those who are forced to drown are people whose experiences with this man were far from heroic.

In 2024, two women reported sexual assault and harassment by Nims. Despite this being reported by the New York Times, the accused was able to continue his popularity and profit from his businesses. There have been other similar words, mostly whispers among women in Kathmandu and global mountaineering scenes. As usual in such cases, these complaints have been dismissed as propaganda to tarnish his reputation or simply exaggerations.

In 2023, the then-seventeen-year-old victim who accused Sandeep Lamichhane of rape was forced to witness the nation glorify her alleged perpetrator. He was the captain of the national cricket team at a time when Nepal was making history in the field. The accusation didn't matter, even when the case involved a minor. Instead, the young adult was vilified, and her character shamed on public platforms. **How dare she/we shame a national hero?**

This is a norm, and a painful reminder of how we live in a world that will burn women on the stake for the sake of the flag, medals, and a good story. Every overt celebration of men accused of violence

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towards women serves as a trigger to those who have been harmed by them. It is a stabbing of the wound, an invitation to silence and shame.

In 2022, an explosion at his office in Kathmandu caused by the illegal storage of gas cylinders killed three people. Their families and the landlord, who lost his home, reported being threatened for asking compensation. The case was finally settled in the court last year. There are other stories too, tales that cast him in a different light than the headlines this week.

Personal accounts of his arrogance, cases of fraud, exploitation of local guides, and blurring of consent with women- if you are in Kathmandu and among similar circles, you have probably heard of them as well. And yet, he remains a champion in public narratives because that makes a better eulogy than the accounts shared by his victims.

A member of Nepali parliament, who describes herself as a "social leader and human rights advocate dedicated to uplifting marginalized communities in Nepal," has called for the government to declare Nims a national hero. Many others are advocating for similar kinds of honors. Even people who question indigenous folks from Terai and Himalayan regions about their nationality are eager to award this British citizen with national honors reserved for Nepali citizens. Why? Because he "brought our country to the global platform."

This militant support for Nims is also an index of our internalized white supremacy. In this case, a deep desire to be seen and accoladed by the West. Anytime a Nepali is successful, or even present, in Western spaces, whether in a cooking competition or any television shows, the individual is lauded as a national icon, not because of the quality of their skill (like Elephant in the Fogs, which won the Cannes and is a brilliant film), but because the visibility gets Nepal attention among the Western audience.

Mountains exist without white gaze. So can our peoples, and our stories.

Nirmal Purja was a great athlete. He was a successful businessman, and maybe a good family man, friend even. But he is not a martyr.

Conquering mountains does not win you sainthood. In fact, a saint would not want a conquest over any sacred land or women. May

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he rest in peace. May we learn how to mourn quietly. May we stop making gods out of men. May we learn how to love women.

Rest in peace
Killi Pemba "Kilu" Sherpa
Nima Sherpa
Pur Bahadur "Yukta" Gurung
Nawang Thindu Sherpa
Gyalu Sherpa
Sohail Sakhi
Nadhira Ahmed Abdullah Al Harthy
Wang Zhong
Mallory Geis

Neha Rayamajhi is a social worker and a storyteller from Nepal. The article appeared in the August 8, 2026 online edition of the South Asia Journal.

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2026: Celebrating 500 Years of the Mughal Empire

South Asia Journal

The Mughal Empire is one of the greatest empires to have ever existed. It will celebrate its 500th anniversary in 2026. Established in 1526 by none other than Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur, after defeating Sultan Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat, India came under Mughal rule. For the next three centuries, the Mughal dynasty would rule much of India, leaving a legacy that endures to this day. A revisit to this great empire and its accomplishments seems fitting on the quincentennial celebration of the Mughal Empire.

Originating from Central Asia, Babur first set foot in India with a small yet disciplined army. He had defeated Ibrahim Lodi through his excellent use of tactics, field artillery, and mobility during the First Battle of Panipat in April 1526. Thus marking the beginning of the Mughal Empire in India. Babur himself ruled for only four years, reigning from 1526 until his death in 1530. Although he had ruled for a short time, his victories in India paved the way for one of the most prosperous empires to come into power.

It wasn't until the reign of Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb that the Mughal Empire reached its pinnacle. But out of these rulers, none was greater than Emperor Akbar. One of India's greatest emperors, Akbar, took the Mughal Empire to new heights by conquering most of northern and central India. He constructed a unified political system across large territories that he and his successors had conquered. He created a strong centralized system of administration that oversaw efficient tax collection, law and order, and provincial government. His finance minister, Raja Todar Mal, revised the land revenue system and developed a systematic revenue assessment that the British later used during their rule in India. He also introduced a system in which individuals from different ethnic groups could serve the empire according to their skills. This was an important step, as it helped keep a check on the different ethnic groups living in the empire.

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Akbar was unique in that he not only expanded his territories but also fostered religious harmony during his reign. In a world driven by religious conflict, Akbar worked to foster tolerance and respect for all religions. He abolished the tax imposed on non-Muslims and invited scholars of different religions, like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism, to his court at Fatehpur Sikri to engage in philosophical discussions. This was probably the first time in world history when people of different religions were able to sit together as equals and debate various topics.

Culturally, India flourished under the Mughals. As they were of Turko-Mongol origin from Central Asia, they fused their traditions with those from Iran and India. Persian became the official language of the court and influenced many Indian languages, including Hindustani and Bengali. One of the languages that evolved during the Mughal Empire was Urdu. Urdu is written in Persian script and has many Persian-based words in its vocabulary. As with their cultures, the Mughals also assimilated art forms. Mughal miniature paintings evolved under their reign, featuring court scenes, historical events, portraits, animals, and landscapes. Many artists from Persia, Central Asia, and India contributed to the creation of this unique style of painting. Some emperors themselves, such as Jahangir, took a great interest in the arts and commissioned paintings of plants and animals.

Architecture was another field where the Mughals left their mark on India. With monuments such as The Red Fort, The Jama Masjid, and The Lahore Fort, just to name a few. The Mughals are responsible for some of the finest architecture the world has seen. The Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, who reigned from 1628 to 1658, is considered by many to have presided over the golden age of Mughal Architecture. His love for architecture led to the construction of the Taj Mahal in Agra in memory of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The Taj Mahal is known today as "The Love Monument" and is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Its perfectly symmetrical architecture and intricate marblework reflect the excellence of Mughal-era architecture. Buildings constructed during the Mughal empire were very grand and reflected the rich culture of the empire. They didn't just influence buildings; they also influenced gardens! Persian Gardens gave rise to the concept of gardens with large avenues and water channels separated into quadrants. Mughal gardens were known for their symmetry and influenced garden formations all throughout South Asia.

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Beyond art and architecture, the Mughal Empire's economy was among the largest and wealthiest in the early modern world. Thanks to fertile soil, agriculture was a leading industry in the empire. Rice, wheat, sugar, and cotton were among the numerous crops produced. India was known for its textiles, metalwork, carpets, and jewelry, which were traded worldwide. Because of this, India, under the Mughals, became a hub of global trade. Traders from around the world came to conduct business with the Mughal Empire. This included Portuguese, Dutch, and English traders who established bases in India and traded with the Mughal court.

Cities such as Delhi, Agra, Lahore, and Dhaka became centers of commerce, learning, and administration under the Mughals. Dhaka was especially known for its muslin trade. Muslin was a popular textile worldwide, known for its finesse and quality. With such large urban populations, the Mughals were able to run a tight ship administratively and use extensive networks of civil officials and military commanders to control their empire.

Although these were the golden years of the Mughal Empire, it began to decline in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. This was due to several factors, including succession crises, revolts in newly conquered territories, and the administration of such a large empire. As a result, the central power began to weaken, allowing regional kingdoms to gain autonomy and eventually rule independently of the Mughal court. European powers would also begin to establish a foothold in India and expand their territories at the Mughals' expense.

All in all, the Mughal Empire was the single most important contributor to the shaping of the social and cultural landscape of South Asia. With influences on language, food, clothing, music, and architecture, their legacy lives on even today. Long live the Mughals.

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The Tiger of Mysore and the American Revolution: A Forgotten Global Alliance Against Empire

Ghulam M. Suhrawardi

Most people understand the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) as a conflict that took place wholly within the Atlantic world, pitting the British Crown against its thirteen North American colonies. But in fact, the War for American Independence was part of a larger imperial conflict that spanned the globe, from the Caribbean to West Africa and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. Few participants in this global struggle against empire have been more overlooked or intriguing than Tipu Sultan, the "Tiger of Mysore," who waged war against British expansion into South Asia.

Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan, rulers of the Kingdom of Mysore, were among the most successful opponents of British rule that the East India Company ever faced. While Mysore did not ally itself to the American colonies through a treaty as France did, the continuation of hostilities with Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan strained British military resources in India at crucial moments. It helped tilt the imperial balance of power in favor of the American revolutionaries. The combination of Mysore's wars with those of France pulled British resources in two directions and indirectly but importantly helped ensure American independence.

It turns out that a little-known Indian empire aided America's fight for independence. But that is because the American Revolution was actually part of a global revolution against British imperialism.

British Imperial Expansion and the East India Company's Global Reach

The connection begins with the British East India Company's incredible influence. The Company was given a royal charter in December 1600. The organization started as a trading company, but

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gained control of its own army and navy, built its own tax networks, and exerted its own diplomatic influence. By the mid-1700s, it was essentially governing India.

The British East India Company was just as strong in the East as it was in the colonies. The Company had a monopoly on tea imported to North America, which was a massive point of contention for the colonists. Passed in 1773, the Tea Act essentially subsidized the Company, giving it an edge over colonial merchants who purchased tea from it to sell in colonial markets. The revolt against tea taxes led to the Boston Tea Party.

So here we have it: the same Company that American colonists were fighting against economically was expanding its military might all the way to India. They were a common enemy.

Mysore Under Hyder Ali: A Rising Anti-Colonial Power

Before Tipu Sultan became the "Tiger of Mysore," Hyder Ali modernized Mysore enough to take on European armies.

Hyder Ali revamped the Mysorean army along modern European lines of organization, developed modern artillery, and even allied with the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad when it suited him. Above all else, Hyder Ali correctly identified the British East India Company as the biggest threat to India's future independence.

Hyder Ali managed to devastate British forces during both the First Anglo-Mysore War (1767–1769) and the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780–1784). Hyder disrupted British supply lines and stopped the Company from taking over southern India just as Britain was busy waging war in North America.

Essentially, Hyder prevented Britain from concentrating all its military might on a single front thousands of miles from its other territories.

The American Revolution as a Global War

It didn't take long for the War of Independence to turn into something more. The conflict became international when Europe joined the fray.

France recognized the US in 1778, and Spain and the Dutch Republic followed soon after. Britain then found itself threatened in the

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Caribbean, Gibraltar, West Africa, and India. Spreading itself so thin weakened the British capacity to quell the revolution in the colonies.

The campaigns in India played an important role in this context. British administrators in London cautioned that defeat in India, or even just a lengthy war, would be just as harmful as a colonial loss.

Aware of this fact, American diplomats like John Adams kept a close eye on India. Every battle the British lost only gave the colonies more momentum.

Tipu Sultan: The "Tiger of Mysore"

Tipu Sultan inherited his father's warrior legacy and his anger toward the British colonialists. When Hyder Ali died in December 1782, Tipu rose to power over Mysore at a pivotal time internationally.

Tipu gained notoriety both for his military conquests and public image against the British. Tigers featured on Tipu's swords, flags, clothing, and palace walls symbolized power, independence, and revolution.

Tipu loved tigers so much that he had a machine created with a tiger killing a British soldier, which can now be seen at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is a carved wooden mechanical sculpture (an automaton) showing a tiger attacking a British soldier. Inside the object is a small organ mechanism. When operated, it produced growling tiger sounds and the soldier's groans. Tipu used this tiger machine as propaganda against the British.

Tipu wanted to expand his power beyond just fighting local battles. He wanted Mysore to become an independent nation that could ally with France, the Ottoman Empire, and the United States.

The Battle of Pollilur: A Turning Point in Imperial Warfare

The Battle of Pollilur, fought on September 10, 1780, was one of the most decisive battles against British forces.

The army of the British East India Company, led by Colonel William Baillie, was routed by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan's Mysorean forces. Nearly 3,000 Company soldiers were killed or captured, a catastrophic loss for the British in eighteenth-century India.

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Much of the carnage was enabled by Mysore's deployment of iron-cased rockets, a technology that the British would later reverse-engineer into the fearsome Congreve rockets used in wars on European soil, including the War of 1812.

The defeat sent shockwaves through the British government, showing colonial dominance in India was not inevitable by any means.

French Strategy and the Mysore Connection

France helped bridge the gap between America and Mysore. French soldiers and artillery experts helped professionalize the Mysore army. French navies harassed the British in the Atlantic and Indian oceans. French ports in Île de France (present-day Mauritius) allowed them to aid attacks on the British in Southern Asia. Tipu Sultan corresponded with French officials and attempted to ally himself with France during the French Revolution in the 1790s. Tipu sent his delegate, Salim Ali, to study French warfare and made attempts to request military support from the French Directory. While this occurred after American independence, it was part of the same objective: building alliances abroad against the British. With France's help in America and India, Britain now had to split its focus and resources. Dividing a nation's attention across multiple theaters of war was something the colonials could not do on their own.

American Awareness of Mysore's Resistance

The Americans could not send aid to Mysore due to resource constraints, but they remained informed about events there.

News of Mysorean triumphs spread through dispatches and the colonial press. Americans realized that setbacks in India hurt Britain worldwide.

John Adams notified Congress of Mysore's triumphs over the Company in 1782. Dispatches like these confirmed impressions of multicontinental British weakness.

American privateers also harassed shipping associated with the Company trade networks.

The Limits of Cooperation Between America and Mysore

For various reasons, including distance and poor communications, there was little practical cooperation between Americans and

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Mysore. The Americans needed French assistance and had no ships to send to the Indian Ocean. For his part, Tipu needed to focus on the immediate British threats from other Indian powers.

However, even if there was no alliance between the two foes of Britain, they were part of the same worldwide conflict against British hegemony.

The Treaty of Paris and the Withdrawal of French Support

Things took a turn for the worse with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783. France signed a peace treaty with Britain and turned its attention back to Europe. Mysore lost an important ally just when she needed it the most. Tipu could not hold out much longer without continued French support against the British and their Indian allies, including the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad. The worldwide anti-British alliance that briefly linked America, France, and Mysore began to collapse.

Tipu Sultan's Continued Resistance After American Independence

Tipu Sultan did not give up and continued fighting British expansion even after the American Revolution.

He fought against the British during the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1790–1792) and the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War (1799) to defend Mysore's sovereignty. He tried to develop alliances with the Ottoman Empire and Afghanistan, and maintained contact with the French revolutionary regime as well.

Tipu Sultan's struggle was one of the first major examples of modern anti-colonial resistance in South Asia.

Tipu's monetary and administrative reforms reflected his drive towards making Mysore a modern, industrialized nation-state that could stand up to the European powers.

The Fall of Srirangapatna and the Death of the Tiger

Tipu Sultan's last stand was at the Siege of Srirangapatna in May 1799. British troops breached the walls of the Mysorean capital, Srirangapatna, after months of warfare. Tipu Sultan was killed in action at the gates of the city, unwilling to give himself up. India's status as an independent regional power quickly dissolved. The British were able to increase their presence throughout southern

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India rapidly. British imperialism would remain the controlling power of the Indian subcontinent for almost 150 years, until 1947.

A Shared Legacy of Anti-Imperial Resistance

The connection between the American Revolution and resistance in Mysore demonstrates the global nature of eighteenth-century conflicts. Wars were rarely isolated uprisings, but rather part of a larger global struggle for commerce, control, and empire.

The Americans' revolt lasted a relatively brief period compared to the resistance in Mysore. However, they both defied British control and showed that the empire could be contested, even from thousands of miles away.

Tipu drew Britain's resources thin by taking soldiers, money, and attention away from the fight in North America. It appeared he indirectly helped America gain its independence.

Reframing the American Revolution as a Global Struggle

Revisionist historians are beginning to see the American Revolution as part of a global imperial crisis rather than just an Atlantic world event. Britain was embattled everywhere, from the naval wars in the Caribbean to disruptions in trade networks in West Africa to campaigns over territory in India. The resistance put up by Mysore was among the most formidable in these conflicts. When we view the American Revolution in its global context, we gain a better understanding of the events that took place and recognize the interconnectedness of anti-colonial struggles that preceded 19th-century nationalism.

Conclusion: The Forgotten Tiger in America's Story

We shouldn't forget that the American Revolution was part of a global conflict against British imperialism. The fight against Britain included people and places far beyond the scope of the Atlantic world.

The Kingdom of Mysore and the American colonists were not official allies, but they were enemies of a common foe: The British East India Company and the British Crown. Tipu Sultan's victories, such as the Battle of Pollilur, directly stunted British expansion at a critical time. French support further tied the conflicts together in a joint effort against British imperialism.

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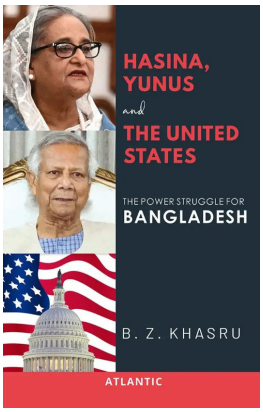
Tipu Sultan may have died in 1799, but his fight lives on as one of the first resistance movements to coincide with the American fight for independence. When you look at the American Revolution through a global lens, the struggle against the British becomes more than a story about America. It's a story that includes the Tiger of Mysore.

Ghulam M. Suhrawardi is the Publisher of South Asia Journal. The article appeared in the May 1, 2026 online edition of the South Asia Journal.

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Book Review
Hasina, Yunus, and the United States: The Power Struggle for Bangladesh

South Asia Journal



Hasina, Yunus, and the United States:
The Power Struggle for Bangladesh
Author B.H. Khasru

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Hardcover USD 30.98

B.H. Khasru's *Hasina, Yunus and the United States*:

The Power Struggle for Bangladesh arrives at a moment when Bangladesh's recent political convulsions are still raw, contested, and intensely polarized. Written with the instincts of a seasoned journalist, the book attempts something ambitious: to place Bangladesh's internal political rivalry—principally between Sheikh Hasina and Muhammad Yunus—within a wider geopolitical frame involving the United States and India. Khasru argues that Bangladesh's contemporary political trajectory cannot be understood solely through domestic party politics; rather, it is the product of a triangular power dynamic where internal authority, international legitimacy, and regional strategy intersect.

The book positions itself neither as a memoir nor as a purely academic study. Instead, it reads as an investigative political narrative, blending

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reportage, diplomatic documentation, and interpretive analysis. For readers of South Asia Journal, accustomed to debates on sovereignty, external influence, and democratic legitimacy in the region, Khasru's work offers a provocative and timely intervention.

The Core Argument

At the heart of Khasru's book lies a far-reaching but straightforward claim: that the rivalry between **Sheikh Hasina** and **Muhammad Yunus** is not merely personal or ideological, but structural—reflecting two competing visions of legitimacy in Bangladesh.

Hasina, in Khasru's telling, represents state-centric authority rooted in electoral dominance, party machinery, and strategic alignment with regional power—particularly India. Yunus, by contrast, embodies a transnational form of legitimacy derived from civil society, global finance, development discourse, and Western approval. The friction between these two models, the author argues, gradually hardened into open confrontation, with the United States emerging as an influential—if inconsistent—external actor.

Khasru situates this rivalry within Bangladesh's longer post-1975 political history, but he gives particular emphasis to two periods: the military-backed caretaker regime of 2007–2008 (the so-called "One-Eleven" period), and the years following Hasina's consolidation of power after 2009. According to the author, One-Eleven permanently altered Hasina's perception of external intervention, reinforcing her suspicion that "alternative leadership projects" could be cultivated with foreign encouragement.

The United States as a Variable Actor

One of the book's most controversial contributions is its portrayal of the **United States** as a fluctuating but consequential force in Bangladesh's internal politics. Khasru does not claim a single, unified American strategy. Instead, he presents Washington as a site of competing impulses—democracy promotion, stability concerns, geopolitical rivalry, and bureaucratic inertia—whose net effect nevertheless shaped political outcomes in Dhaka.

Drawing on diplomatic cables, public statements, and interviews, the author suggests that American attitudes toward Hasina shifted over time, particularly as concerns grew over electoral credibility, governance, and human rights. In this context, Yunus's international stature—bolstered by his Nobel Prize and deep connections within Western policy and philanthropic circles—acquired political salience at home.

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To Khasru, this was not accidental. He implies that sections of the U.S. policy establishment viewed Yunus as a credible, reformist alternative to entrenched party politics, even if no explicit plan was ever formalized. Whether one accepts this interpretation or not, the book compels readers to confront an uncomfortable reality: in smaller states, international reputations can become domestic political assets—or liabilities.

India and the Regional Dimension

If the United States represents global power, **India** represents regional gravity. Khasru consistently frames India as Hasina's indispensable strategic partner—one that prioritized continuity, predictability, and security cooperation over democratic experimentation.

From Delhi's perspective, Hasina's Awami League government ensured stability along India's eastern frontier, cooperation on counterinsurgency, and insulation against unfriendly political forces. Khasru argues that this strategic alignment emboldened Hasina to resist Western pressure and to frame international criticism as interference rather than concern.

This triangular dynamic—U.S. unease, Indian support, and domestic consolidation—forms one of the book's strongest analytical threads. It helps explain why Bangladesh's political evolution has often appeared paradoxical: increasingly centralized and controlled at home, yet diplomatically resilient abroad.

Yunus as Political Symbol

While Yunus occupies the book's title, he remains, in some ways, its most elusive figure. Khasru presents him less as a conventional politician and more as a symbol—of civil society, global moral authority, and non-partisan leadership. The legal and regulatory actions taken against Yunus and the Grameen institutions are interpreted as politically motivated attempts to neutralize that symbol.

Yet the book also raises questions it does not fully resolve. What would a Yunus-led political project have looked like in practice? How would it have navigated Bangladesh's deeply entrenched party system, patronage networks, and electoral realities? Khasru gestures toward these issues but essentially leaves them open, perhaps reflecting the fact that Yunus himself long resisted formal political engagement.

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For critical readers, this may be both a strength and a weakness. Yunus is neither idealized nor thoroughly interrogated as a political actor. Instead, he functions as a lens through which to examine how global legitimacy interacts with national sovereignty.

Strengths of the Book

The book's primary strength lies in its narrative clarity. Khasru writes with momentum, making complex diplomatic and political processes accessible without oversimplification. His use of documentary material—particularly diplomatic reporting—adds texture and immediacy, reminding readers that politics often unfolds through conversations, cables, and perceptions as much as through elections.

Another notable strength is the author's insistence on historical continuity. By repeatedly returning to the trauma of One-Eleven, Khasru highlights how political memory shapes decision-making. Hasina's actions, in this reading, are not merely authoritarian impulses but defensive responses to a perceived pattern of external meddling.

Limitations and Critiques

At the same time, the book's broad causal claims invite scrutiny. Diplomatic cables, while valuable, reflect the viewpoints and biases of their authors. They record what diplomats believed or were told—not necessarily the objective truth. Greater triangulation with court records, electoral data, and grassroots political analysis would have strengthened some of the book's conclusions.

Moreover, the portrayal of the United States, while nuanced, sometimes risks appearing more coherent than reality allows. U.S. policy is rarely monolithic, and internal disagreements often dilute strategic intent. Readers with experience in Washington policymaking may wish for a deeper disaggregation of actors and institutions.

Significance for Bangladesh and Beyond

Despite these limitations, *Hasina, Yunus, and the United States perform* an essential service. It forces a conversation about sovereignty in an interconnected world. For Bangladesh and for many postcolonial states, the question is no longer whether external actors matter, but how their influence is mediated, resisted, or instrumentalized by domestic elites.

Khasru does not ask readers to sympathize uncritically with any single actor. Instead, he invites reflection on a more profound

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dilemma: how can democratic legitimacy be sustained when internal politics are inseparable from global power structures?

Conclusion

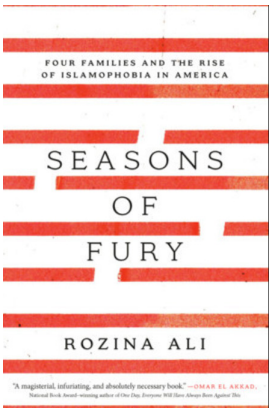
B.H. Khasru has produced a timely, challenging, and often unsettling book. It will not satisfy readers looking for a simple morality tale, nor will it resolve Bangladesh's ongoing political debates. What it does offer is a coherent narrative that connects personalities, institutions, and geopolitics into a single explanatory framework.

For scholars, policymakers, journalists, and diaspora readers concerned with South Asia's political future, this book deserves careful reading not as the final word, but as a serious contribution to an urgent and unfinished conversation.

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Seasons of Fury

South Asia Journal



Seasons of Fury

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The most disturbing argument in Rozina Ali's Seasons of Fury: Four Families and the Rise of Islamophobia in America is that the systematic targeting of Muslims in the United States did not begin with the attacks of September 11, 2001. The War on Terror greatly intensified surveillance, detention, and discriminatory policing, but it did not create the attitudes that allowed those practices to take hold. Rather, 9/11 gave the government an unprecedented opportunity to act upon fears and suspicions that had been developing for decades.

Ali, an investigative journalist and contributing writer for The New York Times Magazine, traces this history through the experiences of four families over approximately eight decades. This narrative structure gives the book much of its emotional power. Instead of treating Islamophobia merely as an abstract ideology or a collection of government policies, she shows what it does to individual lives. Behind every surveillance file, terrorism prosecution, and political accusation is a family forced to endure suspicion, humiliation, separation, or imprisonment.

The book challenges a comforting national narrative. The United States presents itself as a country founded on religious liberty, equal citizenship and constitutional protection. Yet Ali documents

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how readily those principles have been weakened when Muslims, Arabs and political activists have been portrayed as threats to national security. The resulting history is not simply one of prejudice among ordinary citizens. It is also a history of government agencies, courts, politicians, research institutions and media organizations contributing intentionally or otherwise to the construction of Muslims as permanent outsiders.

A History Older Than 9/11

Ali begins with the Jabara family, whose experience exposes how deeply anti-Arab surveillance predates 9/11. The family appeared to embody the conventional American ideal of assimilation. Its patriarch served in the U.S. Army and participated proudly in civic organizations in his small town. Yet the family's patriotism did not protect it from official suspicion. Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Arab Americans who became politically active in support of Palestinian rights increasingly attracted the attention of federal law-enforcement agencies.

Mosques were infiltrated, activists were interrogated, and political advocacy concerning Palestine was frequently viewed through the lens of foreign allegiance and national security. As Ali shows, government investigations were not always based on evidence of illegal conduct. Political beliefs, religious associations, and support for Palestinian rights could themselves become grounds for investigation. Dissent was treated as bordering on disloyalty.

Abdeen Jabara, an attorney and civil-rights activist, becomes a central figure in this part of the narrative. Through his experience, Ali shows how advocacy for Palestine drew Arab Americans into an expanding surveillance regime. She also connects domestic Islamophobia to American foreign policy in the Middle East. The Israel–Palestine conflict was not confined to diplomatic exchanges or debates in Washington. It had tangible consequences for whether Arab and Muslim Americans were treated as citizens entitled to First Amendment protections or as potential agents of a foreign cause.

This is one of Ali's most important contributions. She shows that Islamophobia did not develop solely from religious hostility. It emerged from an interlocking system of racial stereotypes, geopolitical anxieties and national-security doctrines. Arabs were often assumed to be Muslims regardless of their actual faith, while Muslims from widely different racial, national and theological backgrounds were collapsed into a single suspect category. Political conflict abroad helped define the boundaries of citizenship at home.

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The other families, including those of Mohammad Ali Chaudry, Shahina and Matin Siraj, and the pseudonymous Omar family, extend this history across different periods and circumstances. Together, their experiences allow Ali to demonstrate that government suspicion did not fall upon one uniform Muslim community. It affected immigrants, citizens, professionals, activists, parents, and children in different ways. What links their stories is how easily religious identity, political expression, and foreign association could be transformed into evidence of questionable loyalty.

The Architecture of the War on Terror

The book's chronological scope shows how measures adopted before 9/11 prepared the ground for what followed. During the 1990s, the legal definition of terrorism expanded, immigration enforcement took on greater national-security significance, and the government gained stronger tools to restrict organizations accused of foreign connections. In each instance, barriers to government intervention were lowered, sometimes even when those targeted had neither committed nor were preparing to commit an act of violence.

Following 9/11, these authorities expanded at breathtaking speed. As Ali documents, mosques were surveilled, informants were inserted into places of worship and community organizations, and immigration violations were used to justify preventive detention. Thousands of Muslim men were interrogated or detained under conditions of limited transparency. Entire communities were encouraged to regard ordinary religious and political activity with suspicion. The presumption of innocence began to give way to an expectation that Muslims must repeatedly prove their loyalty.

Popular culture, political rhetoric, and the national-security priorities surrounding U.S. policy in the Middle East reinforced this climate. Muslims of vastly different backgrounds were frequently represented as a single threatening population. Ali argues that domestic suspicion was also intensified by narratives surrounding the Israel–Palestine conflict, particularly when Palestinian advocacy was portrayed as evidence of extremism rather than protected political expression.

Her account of Shahina and Matin Siraj provides one of the book's most disturbing examples of how counterterrorism practices could help manufacture the appearance of danger. Matin, a vulnerable young man, was befriended by a law-enforcement informant and encouraged to discuss an attack on a New York subway station. He neither obtained explosives nor constructed a bomb, and he

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eventually withdrew from the supposed plan. Nevertheless, he received a 30-year prison sentence.

Ali does not excuse Matin's words or suggest that discussions of mass violence should be ignored. She instead raises a question of proportionality and equal treatment. To what extent did the informant create or amplify the plot? Would a defendant of another background, displaying similar vulnerabilities and lacking a functional weapon, have been treated as representing an existential threat?

Part of the answer lies in the extraordinary power of the terrorism label. Once applied, it can change how judges, juries, journalists and the public understand a defendant. Conduct that might otherwise be regarded as fantasy, recklessness, mental vulnerability or an inchoate criminal conspiracy is transformed into evidence of a worldwide ideology of violence. The individual is no longer judged solely for what he did; he is made to represent an entire religion and a global political threat.

Ali describes a system that becomes almost Kafkaesque. Harsh imprisonment can justify continued imprisonment. Officials may acknowledge that years of solitary confinement intensify a prisoner's anger and hostility, yet that resulting hostility can then be invoked as a reason to maintain the confinement. Punishment produces the behavior used to justify further punishment. Rehabilitation becomes nearly impossible when a defendant is never permitted to escape the identity the government has imposed upon him.

The Damage Beyond Prison Walls

The consequences extend far beyond the prisoner. Families are broken apart. Mothers lose sons, children lose parents, and husbands and wives endure prolonged separation. Equally damaging is what happens within the communities from which the prisoners come. People become reluctant to speak openly about politics. They may avoid mosques, community organizations, or politically active neighbors for fear of attracting FBI attention.

An informant may never discover an actual terrorist cell, but his presence can still damage a community by creating lasting suspicion among friends and worshippers. Surveillance does not merely collect information; it changes behavior. It teaches people to censor themselves and to wonder whether ordinary conversations, religious practices, or political opinions will be interpreted as evidence against them.

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This is why Ali's family-centered storytelling works so effectively. She could have written a conventional institutional history composed primarily of legislation, agencies, court decisions and prosecutions. Instead, she demonstrates how fear passes from one generation to the next. Children learn that their parents' names, the clothing they wear, the mosques they attend and the political causes they support can influence how the state treats them. Families that came to America seeking security discover that citizenship does not always protect them from arbitrary exercises of government power.

Ali also situates these experiences within the broader political environment that encouraged distrust of Muslims. Politicians discovered that warnings about "radical Islam" could mobilize public support. Think tanks, research institutions and advocacy organizations produced reports portraying Muslim civic participation as a covert challenge to American values. Cable news programs gave conspiracy theories a national platform, while Muslim leaders were repeatedly asked to prove Islam's compatibility with democracy.

Such suspicions did not disappear when the George W. Bush-era War on Terror ceased to dominate the national-security agenda. Muslim politicians still face suggestions that their faith makes them less American or potentially dangerous. Wearing a hijab, possessing an Arabic name, or advocating for Palestinian rights can still provoke accusations of divided loyalty. The language has evolved, but the central insinuation remains: Muslims may live in America, but they can never be accepted unconditionally as Americans.

The Limits of Four Family Histories

The book's family-centered method is its greatest strength, but it also has limits. Muslim American history is broader and more internally diverse than any four families can represent. It includes Black Muslim traditions with roots in American history, immigrants from numerous regions, converts from many religious backgrounds, and communities divided by race, class, nationality, theology, and political outlook.

Ali's selected families cannot encompass all those experiences. The book may also leave some readers wanting a fuller discussion of how democratic governments should confront legitimate security threats without criminalizing religious identity or protected political expression. Acknowledging genuine dangers does not invalidate Ali's argument, but examining that tension more extensively might have made her indictment even more persuasive.

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At times, the book's sweeping historical connections also require the reader to distinguish among related but not identical phenomena: anti-Arab prejudice, anti-Muslim hostility, opposition to Palestinian activism, immigration enforcement and counterterrorism policy. These forces frequently overlap, as Ali demonstrates, but they do not always arise from precisely the same motives. Greater differentiation among them could have added analytical precision to an already ambitious narrative.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not undermine the book's central achievement. Seasons of Fury is not a blanket condemnation of law enforcement or legitimate counterterrorism. It indicts policies that use religious identity, political belief, or distorted speech as substitutes for actionable evidence of criminal conduct. The government possesses both the authority and the responsibility to prevent attacks. It lacks the moral authority to treat millions of citizens as presumptive criminals.

Ali's reporting is detailed, her prose controlled and her moral outrage generally disciplined by attention to individual experience. Her strongest passages need no rhetorical exaggeration because the consequences families experience speak for themselves. By moving between intimate family narratives and institutional history, she prevents the reader from regarding surveillance and detention as merely technical instruments of public policy.

A Test of American Citizenship

Ali's larger contribution lies in revealing the connections among events the public may regard as separate overreactions: the surveillance of Arab activists beginning in the 1960s, expanded definitions of terrorism in the 1990s, mass detention after 9/11, informant-driven prosecutions and present-day attacks on Muslim political candidates. In her telling, these developments form a continuous history. Each measure helped normalize the next.

The central question of Seasons of Fury is not whether America honors religious liberty in tranquil times, but whether it will defend that principle when fear makes tolerance politically costly. Liberties that protect the powerful require little courage. Their true value is tested when insecurity encourages the state to turn against an unpopular or distrusted minority. At those moments, the country must choose between evidence and suspicion, restraint and political expediency, and equal citizenship and collective punishment.

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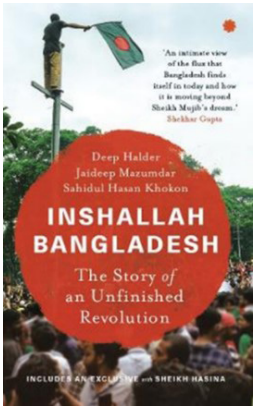
That is why Ali's book matters beyond its account of Islamophobia. It reminds readers that democratic rights are always endangered when difference is treated as inherently threatening. America did not break its covenant with Muslim Americans in one singular moment. It damaged that trust repeatedly through surveillance, selective prosecution, detention, and political attacks extending across decades.

Repairing the damage will require more than ceremonial appeals to tolerance. It will require Americans to stop viewing Muslims as perpetual visitors who must continually demonstrate their loyalty. They must instead be recognized as citizens whose rights are not peripheral concessions but essential measures of what the United States claims to represent.

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Inshallah Bangladesh: A Chronicle of Upheaval with an Unfinished Argument

Ghulam M. Suhrawardi



Inshallah Bangladesh: A Chronicle of Upheaval with an Unfinished Argument
Author Halder, Deep

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The Story of an Unfinished Revolution by Deep Halder, Jaideep Mazumdar, and Sahidul Hasan Khokon is an ambitious attempt to recount the events that rocked Bangladesh in 2024. The authors offer what they claim to be "the full chronicle" of the groundswell of protests that eventually upended the 15-year rule of Sheikh Hasina. Tracking the movement's origins from the student protests against job quotas in Dhaka University to its crescendo as a mass movement against Hasina's continued rule, the book documents how the "reign of terror" that began in 2009 ultimately came to an end in a surreal, humiliating escape from Dhaka. Drawing from the on-the-ground reporting, eyewitness accounts, and interviews of political leaders, Inshallah Bangladesh attempts to capture a year of unrivalled socio-political upheaval.

In many ways, the authors hit the nail on the head. Bangladesh in 2024 was, and remains, a country teeming with young job-seekers, politically disaffected, weary of dynastic succession, and barely able to hold its own over breakneck demographic growth. Corruption and political violence, coercion and impunity had, by the time

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of Hasina's resignation in July 2024, reached levels that could no longer be ignored by the regime's supporters. The combination of joblessness, an increasingly cynical youth, and the lack of political space to demand accountability created a public tinderbox that only needed a spark. That "spark", the authors make clear, came in the form of a student movement against quotas that channeled, and added to, a long-standing frustration with an authoritarian, personalistic regime.

In documenting this frustration and the ferment that would finally become an all-consuming revolt against dynastic politics, Inshallah Bangladesh provides an important account of the key events of 2024. The reporting on the flight from the power of Hasina, the confusion at Ganabhaban, her initial decision to resist, then later concede, the pleas of the chiefs of the army and air force, an Indian emissary's veiled threats, the last-minute dash to the helipad, is told with a narrative flair that many history books about Bangladesh will perhaps never possess. The scenes of rage and chaos in Dhaka in August 2024, the unravelling of the "cult of Hasina" are here, as are the visceral accounts of a public fed up with corruption, repression, and impunity.

At the same time, this focus on drama detracts from a fuller analysis of the socio-political rot, the state-sponsored violence, and years of impunity that, it must be said, created the conditions for this kind of an explosion. The excesses of protesters, the vandalism of public property, attacks on police, and alleged opportunists of the change of regime are detailed in the book. Yet, it is as if they happened in a vacuum and not as a response to enforced disappearances, custodial killings, political trials, impunity, and state-sanctioned violence over the years. It is this absence, or perhaps selective amnesia, that limits the authors' claim of "full chronicle".

The most obvious limitation is the framing by Deep Halder, one of the co-authors of this book, which betrays his ongoing faith in India's civilizational benevolence and role as Bangladesh's perpetual guardian. His 2018 book, Being Hindu in Bangladesh, is perhaps the most eloquent work on India's covert role in Bangladesh from its birth to this day. In Inshallah Bangladesh, he and the other co-authors continue to evince the same pro-India bias. It is an India, we are reminded at regular intervals, that has ensured Hasina's safe exit, offered her personal security, and that singlehandedly seeks to stabilize the teetering country that Sheikh Hasina ran for over a decade.

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Halder misses here, or chooses to ignore, the ubiquity of the Indian intelligence establishment in Bangladesh and the penetration of its agencies into the state apparatus during Hasina's reign. Some Bangladeshis will indeed speak favorably of these institutions and point out that their presence prevented a full-blown civil war or the collapse of the state. What Halder does not register, or at least chooses to elide, is why so many Bangladeshis, from the left to the right, secularists to Islamists, firmly believe that New Delhi effectively owned Dhaka for over a decade, and that it was these preferences, rather than any national interest, that influenced political and electoral outcomes.

Halder misses another opportunity when he inexplicably allows the idea that the revolts and anti-Hasina movement of 2024 were a CIA plot to stand unchallenged in the text, reiterating the words of one former Bangladeshi cabinet minister in the magazine Swarajya that it was "a perfect CIA plot". The suggestion, by implication, is that Bangladesh is but a chessboard, that foreign powers are responsible for its ups and downs, rather than an actor in its own right. This is doubly ironic because Hasina's government had used precisely the same language in 2024 in dismissing all criticism, and only in 2024, as an effort at regime change rather than a response to ground realities.

The book's other blind spot, though not uncharacteristic of such narratives, is its treatment of Bangladesh's political class and, by extension, of civil society and organized politics. On the one hand, it is all too ready to catalog the excesses of the protesters and sympathizers of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), to harp on the toppling of statues and the violence, coercion, and financial inducements meted out by BNP activists, particularly in rural areas. It does so even while acknowledging, albeit perfunctorily, the abuses committed by the Awami League (AL) and its allies over the past decade.

In particular, Halder notes that policemen were stripped and beaten during the revolt. Still, he omits mention of the innumerable cases of enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killing, and torture reported by civil society groups, media, the United Nations, and human rights groups during the years of AL's political and electoral dominance. This is not to suggest that these crimes were "excusable" or proportionate to the transgressions of the protesters in 2024. They were neither, and it is telling that the book does not pause to consider why the abuses of a ruling party, even if, as this book shows, they were committed by Hasina's political opponents as well, were not

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merely episodic but systemic and, to an extent, institutionalized in Bangladesh over the past decade.

Equally illuminating is the book's treatment of Dr. Muhammad Yunus. After Hasina's resignation, it was her accusation that Yunus had met with US President Donald Trump and agreed to engineer her downfall. The book quotes her without comment. In any other setting, this would be a laughable charge, but the authors take this, perhaps unintentionally, as an article of faith and go on to note that Yunus a secularist, nationalist, and a Bangladeshi whose face is inextricably linked to the struggles against military dictatorship and crony capitalism had been, to their surprise, the "wrong opponent" and a potent, effective political symbol for the anti-AL forces.

Halder, however, doesn't stay with this analysis and, to his credit, eventually does a U-turn to note that the return of BNP and the recent elections have created a political vacuum that can be filled by the Islamists, whose electoral gains since 2009 are detailed, albeit without much historical context. The author does not go as far as to declare the coming of Bangladesh's "Taliban", but his references to the growing influence of Islamists, their road to power, and how Bangladesh can avoid this "nightmare" will be recognizable to many readers of Indian political journalism on Bangladesh. In fact, the book reinforces a trope that is as old as Bangladeshi scholarship in India: the ever-present fear of Bangladesh's Talibanization.

The book repeatedly reminds its readers that an upsurge of Islamist forces is a threat not just to Bangladeshi secularists and the middle class but also to Hindu minorities and, most importantly, to New Delhi's strategic interests. But such warnings and reminders are an incomplete narrative, because the great majority of the Bangladeshis who took to the streets in 2024 were not Islamists, were not working with any foreign power, were not seeking to harm Hindu minorities, and were not working to further India's interests. These Bangladeshis were acting, as Bangladeshis often have, for reasons that have been unstated or unacknowledged in this book: to demand jobs, accountability, justice, and an end to political repression, and to vent their fury at the dynastic politics that prevented them from having a say in the future of their country.

The authors are also too quick to rely on familiar tropes and worn-out arguments, such as Hindu victimhood, Islamist threat, and Indian kindness, rather than to meaningfully engage with the structural and political roots of Bangladeshi resentment towards India. The passages in this book that focus on the recent controversy over the activities

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of ISKCON in Bangladesh and the arrest and beating of its activist Chinmoy Krishna Das in Satkhira are an example. The book does not go into the deeper historical or political reasons for Bangladeshis' wariness of certain transnationalist groups, many of which have strong links to Indian political and strategic establishments. This, too, is an example of the authors' reluctance to engage with a more political and structural critique of India's role in Bangladesh.

Inshallah Bangladesh is a riveting read in many ways, and the authors should be commended for an account of tumultuous events that is even-handed when it comes to the problems of the Hasina regime and the post-Hasina transition. It is right to note that Bangladeshis were pushed to a point where Hasina's excesses were no longer tolerable, and this did, in considerable measure, contribute to the upsurge in violence. The authors' documented frustration with dynastic politics is real. But this does not fully explain the ferocity with which ordinary Bangladeshis, not just activists or opposition figures, rose up in anger against the AL government or the anti-Hasina agitators, and the book offers a less than full account in this regard.

Nor can the anger, popular or elite, be reduced to Islamists, proxies of foreign powers, or opportunistic forces. The protests and the upsurge in violence against the Hasina regime did, as the book acknowledges, happen and could not have been as ferocious without long-term causes. This is one reason it is a stretch to see Bangladesh's revolution as "unfinished". The book notes that Bangladesh's democratic transition remains "unsettled," but fails to mention that this, in itself, is a historical anomaly. No other post-colonial state in Bangladesh's region and in its geostrategic context has ever made a peaceful transition of power in such a fractious setting.

It is also the authors' last contribution to what this book, and the literature about Bangladesh produced in India, really is: an effort not at dispassionate understanding or at reciting the complex history of a country and its people but at molding the regional perception of the country and the political changes within it. In using old templates of repeated arguments, it eludes an incomplete, skewed, and, to an extent, inaccurate understanding of Bangladesh, one that is limited by an outsider's view of Bangladesh and its people, and one that may not survive the full brunt of the country's democratic transition that the authors write of.

The authors will, in time, be best remembered for their claim to have fully and accurately chronicled the revolutions of 2024: they haven't. They have, in some ways, provided us with the propaganda

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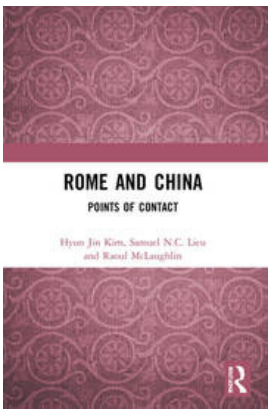
narrative that Bangladeshi popular opposition to dynastic politics, mobilized in pursuit of legitimate political grievances, is, in fact, proxy foreign policy. This is why it is up to Bangladeshis, alone, to understand, debate, and defend their own revolution, unfinished as it may be.

Ghulam M. Suhrawardi is the Publisher of South Asia Journal. The article appeared in the December 6, 2026 online edition of the South Asia Journal.

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Rome and China: points of contacts

Punsara Amarasinghe



Rome and China: points of contacts
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The interest in Silk Routes and Eurasia in the academia seems to be a rejuvenated one in the scholarship as there have been ample publications since the celebrated work authored by Peter Frankopan's "The Silk Roads: The New History of the World" in 2015. If one asks what elevates "China and Rome: points of contacts "for a review above the dozens of other works, my answer can encapsulate in one phase: "the novelty". Indeed, the work authored by Hyun Jin Kim, Samuel N.C.Lieu and Raoul McLaughlin is a stimulating work for the reader to glimpse at the interconnectivity between two great powers in the antiquity, namely Rome and China. As it was acknowledged by Hyun Jin Kim in his concise introduction, the very objective of the edited volume reaches beyond the parameters of the scholarship in the past by adopting a wider Eurasian perspective. (p.1).

The first chapter begins by providing an abridged account in the topographical and trade contact between imperial Rome and Han China. The chapter tries to examine the challenges that encompassed

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the physical distance between China and Rome as the real setback between the two empires.

The general content in the chapter is akin to a more descriptive analysis trying to provide more historical and chronological details about the dynasties, kingdoms, provinces that impeded Rome and China from connecting each other, but, it further unfolds the several attempts made by Hun dynasty in making contacts with Roman empire, which were mostly sabotaged due to the military engagements that China faced from other rivals' powers in Central Asia. One of the most important findings that emanates from the first chapter is that its especial emphasis on how human contacts affected on building the relationship between two empires. In particular, the chapter unfolds how Han authorities learnt about the sophistication of Rome through their contacts with Iranian and Indian merchants which paved the path for Chinese to develop their curiosity on Rome. Rome's maritime link with India dates back to the epoch of Augustus and the coins, relics of the vessels excavated by the maritime archaeologists recently prove that there was a considerable Roman presence in Indian Ocean albeit Indian mainland never fell under the orbit of Rome.

However, regardless of all these elaborations, the first chapter suffers from one major pitfall as it fails to observe how any possible link could have emerged between Roman and Chinese merchants. The works of South Asian scholars such as DPM Weerakoody and Osmund Bopearacachi suggest that the Romans and Chinese maintained certain commercial acquaintances as traders from both states visited Sri Lanka known as Taprobane by the Romans in the Anuradhapura period. Authors seem to have not given any attention to those two non-Western scholars, who came up with crucially important findings.

The astute analysis provided by Kim in the second chapter regarding the expansion of Xiongnu Huns as a mighty tribe is vitally relevant in understanding how it became a threat to both Romans and Hans. The rise of the Huns was a real geopolitical calamity for both empires, which altered their domination over Eurasia through a series of onslaughts. The second chapter aptly describes the geopolitical outcomes that erupted from the Hun invasions by installing their quasi-feudal system, firstly in the Germanic tribes and then in the Roman provinces, which ultimately laid the foundations of the new political order of the European Middle Ages.

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Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to describe the next chapter as the culminated one in the whole volume as it properly elucidates the diplomatic and commercial encounters through the silk routes for the attainment of commercial profits. The chapter gives equal importance to both Chinese and Byzantine sources in presenting the heroic adventures and bizarre moments in the silk routes, which makes the reader's mind with awe.

On the other hand, authors make a more intellectually persuasive effort beyond a mere fascination by tracing more complex historical incidents such as the emergence of Gokturk Khanate and the cunning diplomacy practised by the Sasanians in Persia. Especially, authors depict the rise of Gokturks as an unparalleled development of world history as it created a unified and coherent political system for the Eurasian steppe from the frontiers of China and this novel political unification gave birth to a new Eurasian network to connect the economies of China as a connecting point. Besides the Eurasian connecting point, chapter draws another analysis on the state of Indian Ocean network that provided a strong connecting juncture for Romans and Chinese in the eve of late antiquity. The case of Sri Lanka has been well captured by the authors as a midpoint meeting place and central market for Indian Ocean commerce.

The chapter quotes Byzantine merchant Cosmos ' "Christian Topography", which suggests that the island nation was frequently visited by Roman, Chinese and Persian ships.

The last chapter of this compelling work is devoted to exploring the links developed by the Nestorian Christians and Manichaeans as a solid connecting point between the two empires. Authors acknowledge the legacy left by both religious movements as enduring ones that lasted beyond all the attempts of the Tang and Song dynasties and would persist in China as a minority religion. The cardinal question that this book presents to its readers is whether Sino-Roman relations survived in the annals of human history and the obvious answer that this work shows is all the official contacts initiated by the Roman imperial government and Han China were transitory and finally faded into oblivion.

Notwithstanding the official contacts largely ended up in failure, the sustained contacts based on the Eurasian mainland paved the path for significant geopolitical changes. For instance, this work takes the influx of Eurasian Huns on the northern borders of the Roman empire as a turning point in European history as it detached Western Europe from the Mediterranean based Roman rule. In my view, the

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biggest contribution made by this work "Rome and China: Points of Contacts" lies in its careful analysis focused on those sustained contacts that lasted between two ancient world powers for the entirety of Eurasia. In his concluding remarks, Lin raises some challenging questions on the entangled, obscured contacts that existed between Rome and China as pertinent ones to be re-examined in the modern Western approach to fathom China as those questions would be valuable lessons.

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