



RCAS Commentary

Is Bangladesh Headed for Long-Term Stability?

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About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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Sujit Kumar Datta

After more than 15 consecutive years as Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina was forced out of power by the popular quota reform movement. The main factors behind her downfall were stubbornness, arrogance and overconfidence.



▲ Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus signs the oath book as the country's head of the interim government in Bangladesh at the Bangabhaban, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Aug 8, 2024.

As a result of this action, not only were her political achievements destroyed but the very existence of the Awami League, the leading party in the liberation war, was also threatened. Sheikh Hasina took over as Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 2009 and served three consecutive terms. Under her leadership, the country made significant economic progress. She pushed mega projects such as the Mero Rail, the Padma Bridge, the digital transformation and power sector development.

However, staying in power for so long instilled in her a kind of arrogance and overconfidence, eventually leading to her downfall. She believed her opinion was correct and she would not tolerate opposition. Because of this stubbornness and arrogance, she made mistakes in various political decisions, eventually leading to discontent among the people. The crisis was rooted in growing popular unhappiness, allegations of widespread corruption in the government and mass protests against human rights abuses.

Because of increases in the prices of goods, suffering was created in public life, and the dissatisfaction of common people toward the government also increased. In addition, unemployment among educated youth increased, which increased the strength of the movement. All these factors combined this year, and Sheikh Hasina's government faced massive public protests, which eventually forced her to resign.

The primary demand of the quota reform movement is to establish good governance and ensure equal opportunity for all. Satisfying the agitators and implementing their demands will be the government's priority. Time will tell how the interim government led by Dr. Muhammad Yunus will work and reconcile with the agitators. The quota reform movement is a long-standing and complex phenomenon. The solution will depend on effective action by the government and the acceptance of the logical demands of the agitators.

The formation of an interim government under Yunus brought a new turn to the movement. What is to be seen now is how this new government will work and how it will accept the demands of the public. If the new government can take effective steps to ensure good governance and the welfare of the people, it is hoped that the quota reform movement will end soon.

Bangladesh is currently going through extreme political instability. Recently, protests and agitations in the country have gained momentum for various political and social reasons. Two of the main ones are the activities and policies of India and the United States. India-Bangladesh relations have long reflected mixed feelings. Although India has been a strong ally of Bangladesh since its independence, conflicts and tensions have arisen over time on various issues.

The Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system is the central waterway of South Asia. These rivers flow through both India and Bangladesh, and the two have had persistent disputes over water sharing. The two countries have yet to sign an agreement on distributing Teesta River water, causing significant problems for farmers in northern Bangladesh. This dispute over water distribution has led to strong criticism and anger against India and Bangladesh. Incidents involving the deaths of Bangladeshi citizens at the hands of the Indian Border Security Force occur frequently along the border. The frequency of such incidents has stoked anger and resentment toward India from the people of Bangladesh.

The issue of border killings has created a negative attitude toward India among the ordinary people of Bangladesh. Recently, a memorandum of understanding was signed between India and Bangladesh, allowing Indian trains to run from Bangladesh. The agreement has brought mixed reactions from Bangladeshis. The rise of Islam in Bangladesh and the activities of fundamentalist groups have also had a profound impact in the political and social spheres.

The geopolitical position of Bangladesh is critical. Located in the heart of South Asia, the country maintains a complex relationship with India. It has long maintained close ties with China to help reduce India's influence. China has invested heavily in development projects in Bangladesh, and the new government is keen to continue this relationship. Dr. Yunus's government will be able to maintain balance.

China is playing a significant role in Bangladesh's infrastructure development, trade growth and technology development. The new government will achieve substantial progress in the country's development by maintaining relations with China. Various Chinese projects are underway in Bangladesh, including infrastructure development, power projects and road and railway construction. These projects are contributing significantly to Bangladesh's economy and overall development. Dr. Yunus's government can ensure the country's continued development and security by maintaining close ties with the United States and increasing ties with China.

A strategy for reducing Indian influence will be pursued while maintaining relations with China. It will play an essential role in the country's domestic and international affairs. The future of Bangladesh's relationship with China is bright under the new government's leadership.

Dr. Yunus is an internationally recognized personality and is known as the founder of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. If the new government under his leadership can successfully implement political reforms, it can bring lasting stability to Bangladesh. However, this process will be long and challenging. The main challenge before the new government will be to gain the confidence of the country's people and bring back a sense of stability.

The people of Bangladesh are currently waiting for change. They want a corruption-free, transparent and democratic government. However, meeting these expectations will take work. The new government has to face many challenges in the coming days. First, economic health must be restored. Also, the education system, healthcare and human rights situation must be ensured. International powers have significantly influenced Bangladesh's political stability. Powers such as India, China and the United States are keenly interested in the political situation. If these international relations are balanced, the country's internal stability may improve. In particular, the geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China could affect Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina's resignation is a turning point for the country. But whether or not this change will bring lasting stability or usher in further instability depends on the new government's performance and the fulfillment of public expectations. The future of Bangladesh now largely lies in the hands of the new government.

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About Author



Sujit Kumar Datta is the former Chairman and Professor in the International Relations Department at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. He is also nonresident fellow at the Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS), Hong Kong. Dr. Datta graduated with a BA (Honors) and MA degree in International Relations from the Jahangirnagar University and completed his PhD in International Politics from the School of Political Science and Public Administration, Shandong University, China. After that, he had worked at the BRAC Training Division (BTD) as a faculty member. He had joined in the department of International Relations, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh as a Lecturer in January, 2010. Dr. Datta has authored several articles and book chapters in renowned national and international peer-reviewed journals (Web of Science, Scopus indexed).