

THE GEOPOLITICS IN THE BANGLADESH ELECTION RESULTS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Bangladesh

To enjoy additional benefits

CONNECT WITH US

January 17, 2024 12:08 am | Updated 12:38 am IST

COMMENTS

SHARE

READ LATER

'Bangladesh's political history around past elections remains problematic and the nature of politics, confrontational' | Photo Credit: AP

Bangladesh held its national elections on January 7, 2024 amidst violence and protests as the polls became embroiled in controversy. The ruling Awami League and allies achieved a resounding victory by getting 225 out of the 300 contested seats. The main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), whose leader and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is imprisoned under allegations of corruption, boycotted the polls, demanding that elections be held under a neutral caretaker government, the constitutional provision of which was abrogated by the Awami League after it came into power in 2009.

Bangladesh's political history around past elections remains problematic and the nature of politics, confrontational. In the previous elections of 2014 and 2018 under the Awami League, the party faced similar allegations of electoral manipulation, irregularities, and violence, drawing criticism from international election observation missions.

Once overlooked on the global stage, Bangladesh has ascended as a rising economic powerhouse in South Asia with 7.1% annual GDP growth in 2022, an economy exceeding \$400 billion, and population of over 165 million. This strategically located nation has been at the centre of a geopolitical tug-of-war, with regional and global powers such as China, India, Russia and the United States vying for influence.

Editorial | [Predictably comfortable: On Sheikh Hasina's electoral win in Bangladesh](#)

As its closest neighbour with shared historical, economic, social and cultural linkages, India harbours deep strategic interests in Bangladesh. Bilateral trade is nearing \$15 billion annually and agreements across a range of issues such as investment, counterterrorism, energy, and river water sharing underscore a close bilateral relationship. Bangladesh is India's crucial partner for balancing China's growing regional economic and diplomatic clout, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure financing. A stable Bangladesh, seen as a counterweight offsetting instability from neighbours such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, keeps India actively invested in its neighbour. It is no surprise that the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi promptly congratulated Sheikh Hasina after her win, committing to fortify the partnership between India and Bangladesh.

The [U.S. has been critical of the Bangladesh government](#) for democratic shortcomings, the suppression of human rights and muzzling press freedom. America's messaging is torn between advancing core strategic interests by maintaining healthy ties with Bangladeshi authorities while upholding democratic values, as echoed in the U.S. Department of State pre-electoral press statement: "We are taking steps to impose visa restrictions on Bangladeshi individuals responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh."

In contrast, Yao Wen, Ambassador of China to Bangladesh — China is Bangladesh's number one trading partner with annual bilateral trade exceeding \$25 billion — stated, "Election is completely an internal issue of Bangladesh...Bangladesh knows the kind of election required." Under its BRI, China has financed over \$10 billion worth of ports, bridges, highways and other critical infrastructure.

Post elections, the U.S. has aligned with other observers in asserting that the elections were neither free nor fair and largely non-participative. On the other hand, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning felicitated the Awami League for its victory, "China congratulates Bangladesh on successfully holding its national election as scheduled and congratulates the Awami League on winning the election".

Moscow has drawn Bangladesh closer through financing one of the nation's largest infrastructure projects, the Rooppur 2,400-megawatt nuclear power plant worth over \$12 billion. With major investments at stake, Russia has taken a keen interest in Bangladesh's election. In a unique act of collaboration, when a Russian ship carrying nuclear materials was denied entry due to U.S. sanctions in late 2022, India intervened to receive the cargo and transported it by road to the construction site. Russia also congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her election victory; Alexander Mantytsky, Ambassador of Russia to Bangladesh, was received at her official residence. In a similar vein, prior to the elections, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova had quipped in 2023, "We have repeatedly highlighted attempts by the US and its allies to influence the internal political processes in Bangladesh".

The 2024 election results have evolved into a geopolitical battleground driven by Bangladesh's increasing economic and strategic heft. Geopolitical considerations make it a little tricky for the U.S. and its allies to conduct normal business with Bangladesh. The extent to which they may take actions remains uncertain. The readymade garment industry is a significant source of foreign exchange earnings for Bangladesh and any restrictions imposed by the U.S. and European Union could pose a serious challenge as they import a significant bulk of Bangladesh's readymade garments.

In 2007, when the opposition BNP tried to manipulate elections, the United Nations issued a stern warning, indicating a potential halt to Bangladesh's involvement in peacekeeping operations; this led to the military-backed caretaker government stepping in to hold elections in 2008 which the then opposition Awami League won. This time, apart from criticism, whether the UN would go any further remains to be seen.

Last but not the least have been surging living costs triggering protests in recent months as the government grapples with the challenges of dealing with soaring energy import prices, diminishing dollar reserves and a weakening local currency. The International Monetary Fund highlighted multiple shocks to Bangladesh's economy in its post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery, aggravated by supply chain disruptions and inflationary pressures due to the Ukraine war. For Ms. Hasina's government, the months ahead are expected to be fraught with challenges, both at home and abroad, as she tries to manage a weakening economy and delicately balance geopolitics with national interests.

Syed Munir Khasru (www.syedmunirkhasru.org) is Chairman of the international think tank The Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance (IPAG) with a presence in Dhaka, Delhi, Melbourne, Dubai, and Vienna

COMMENTS

SHARE

[Bangladesh](#) / [India-Bangladesh](#) / [election](#) / [politics](#) / [corruption & bribery](#) / [economy \(general\)](#) / [China](#) / [USA](#) / [trade policy](#) / [Belt and Road Initiative](#) / [Pakistan](#) / [Afghanistan](#) / [Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#) / [democracy](#) / [human rights](#) / [Russia](#) / [nuclear power](#) / [economic sanction](#) / [European Union](#) / [textile and clothing](#) / [United Nations](#) / [currency values](#) / [Coronavirus](#)

BACK TO TOP

[Terms & conditions](#) | [Institutional Subscriber](#)

Comments have to be in English, and in full sentences. They cannot be abusive or personal. Please abide by our [community guidelines](#) for posting your comments.

We have migrated to a new commenting platform. If you are already a registered user of The Hindu and logged in, you may continue to engage with our articles. If you do not have an account please register and login to post comments. Users can access their older comments by logging into their accounts on Vuukle.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

Crack