

Why Sheikh Hasina returning to Bangladesh works for India

Whether the former prime minister succeeds or fails at reviving her political career, either way would benefit India



Former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina- AFP
[Hindol Sengupta](#), Aug 07, 2026,

The logic is simple. Former Bangladeshi prime minister Sheikh Hasina now wants to return to her home country from India where she has been in exile since 2024 when protests around economic hardship and authoritarian rule, inflamed by Islamists, toppled her 15-year government.

This is a critical moment for India, and indeed Bangladesh. The removal of Hasina, seen to be a friend of India, and hard on issues of radicalism and terrorism in Bangladesh, was a geopolitical blow to India's neighbourhood policy. That she was assisted in her flight to India, and continued to stay there in exile, caused constant friction between the two countries as subsequent Dhaka administrations led by both Muhammad Yunus (interim caretaker

government), and then Tarique Rahman (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), continued to complain loudly about this.

To the current dispensation in Dhaka, Hasina's presence in a secure location within India has been the ultimate political dog-whistle. Almost every domestic failing of the Rahman administration— whether climbing inflation, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, or factional street violence — could be conveniently blamed on the spectre of Hasina, supposedly plotting a counter-revolution with the backing of India's intelligence apparatus. By seeking to return, Hasina is about to strip Dhaka of its favourite scapegoat, and in doing so, she is handing New Delhi a multi-pronged strategic victory.

There is a recognition, also, in Delhi that Islamist control of Bangladeshi politics is at an all-time high, including the ability to mobilise on the streets, and perhaps even operate across the border. Bangladeshi Islamists are determined to eliminate Hasina who they hate for capital punishments given to some of the worst and most radical Islamists who committed war crimes during the 1971 revolution for freedom from Pakistan during her term in power. There is no guarantee that there would not be a desperate attempt to harm her even when in India. This is not a scenario any Indian administration wants to see unfold.

For the last two years, hosting the ousted leader has been a profound moral obligation for India, but an undeniable diplomatic albatross. New Delhi could not simply abandon a steadfast ally who, for a decade and a half, crushed anti-India insurgencies, eradicated Northeast terror camps from Bangladeshi soil, and championed rail and riverine connectivity projects that bridged India's mainland with its restive northeastern states. However, gratitude in geopolitics has a strict expiration date. Her continued exile in India effectively paralysed New Delhi's ability to conduct transactional, pragmatic diplomacy with the new political reality in Dhaka. Tarique Rahman's BNP, heavily reliant on Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamists factions, utilised India's protection of Hasina as absolute proof of Indian hostility.

By stepping on a plane back to Dhaka, Hasina absolves India of this diplomatic paralysis. The strategic beauty of her return lies in the fact that New Delhi wins regardless of her ultimate political fate.

Let us examine the first possibility: Hasina returns and actually manages to revive her political machinery. The Awami League, battered, bruised, and hunted since the summer of 2024, is not entirely decimated. It retains deep, historical roots in the Bangladeshi bureaucracy, the military apparatus, and the vast rural heartland, and a significant vote share. If Hasina succeeds in rallying her base, surviving the inevitable legal onslaught from the BNP, and re-establishing herself as a formidable opposition figure, India instantly regains its most trusted lever of influence in the country. There is a palpable sense that even though the League has been banned from Bangladeshi politics, no truly democratic process in that country can happen without its participation.

A resurgent Awami League would force the BNP to temper its flirtations with radical Islamists and its creeping, transactional overtures to Beijing. The mere presence of a powerful, pro-India opposition leader in the Jatiya Sangsad (parliament) would act as a natural check on policies inimical to New Delhi's security interests. Furthermore, a successful political revival would expose the fragility of the coalition that ousted her. The 2024 protests, though genuinely fuelled by democratic backsliding, were eventually hijacked by forces that care little for liberal democracy. If Hasina can capitalise on the current administration's inability to tame the economy, proving that she was not the sole architect of Bangladesh's financial woes, she validates India's long-held assertion that her governance was the anchor of stability in an otherwise volatile delta.

But what if she fails?

What if her return culminates in immediate incarceration, a series of humiliating political defeats, trial capital punishment, or simply the cold realisation that the Bangladeshi electorate has irrevocably moved on? Counterintuitively, this scenario is equally, if not more, beneficial for India's long-term strategic posture.

If Hasina returns and fails to revive her political career, the 'Hasina question' that has plagued India-Bangladesh relations since 2024 is finally resolved. New Delhi would no longer be viewed as the stubborn patron of a deposed autocrat. With Hasina out of the equation, the Awami League would be forced into a painful but desperately necessary generational transition. The party's crippling dependence on the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman bloodline has been its greatest vulnerability. A post-Hasina Awami League would have to democratise internally, paving the way for younger, more modern leaders who share the party's foundational secular and pro-India ethos but are untainted by the authoritarian excesses of the 2014-2024 era. India could then quietly cultivate relationships with a rejuvenated political force, one that commands legitimate democratic respect.

Moreover, her political failure would strip the BNP and its Islamist allies of their unifying boogeyman. Without the looming threat of a 'Delhi-backed Hasina restoration', the ideological fault lines within the ruling coalition would inevitably fracture. The Tarique Rahman administration would be forced to govern entirely on its own merits. When faced with the harsh realities of climate change, debt servicing, and economic stagnation, Dhaka will inevitably realise that alienating its largest neighbour is geopolitical suicide.

Stripped of the Hasina baggage, New Delhi can engage Dhaka with cold, transactional clarity. India can resume infrastructure, trade, and energy diplomacy without the awkwardness of harbouring Hasina. The border management issues, the Teesta water sharing dialogues, and the transit agreements can be negotiated state-to-state, rather than being held hostage by the ghosts of 2024.

It is rare in international relations that a single, highly volatile event offers a win-win outcome for a regional power, but Hasina's repatriation provides exactly that. For two years, India has played a tedious waiting game, absorbing the anti-India vitriol emanating from Dhaka, and carefully calibrating its responses to avoid pushing Bangladesh entirely into the embrace of China or Pakistan.

Sheikh Hasina's departure from Indian soil is the circuit breaker this strained relationship so desperately needs. Whether she returns to the roar of millions or the harsh clatter of prison doors, Hasina is doing India a profound favour. By leaving, she allows New Delhi to close a contentious chapter and open a new one. If she triumphs, India regains a trusted friend at the helm. If she falls, India sheds a diplomatic liability and gains the ultimate freedom to reshape its Bangladesh policy for a new era. The logic is indeed simple, and for New Delhi, the outcome is undeniably favourable.

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