

With Hasina sentenced to death, what next for Bangladesh

This week, Bangladesh's ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death on two counts by the country's three-member International Crimes Tribunal. Here's what the ruling means for the beleaguered leader and Bangladesh politics.

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The ruling also casts a shadow on the Awami League, which Hasina led. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Bangladesh's ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death on November 17 for crimes against humanity during the unprecedented protests in July-August 2024. Hasina,

78, has been living in India since August 5, when she fled the country ahead of the imminent collapse of her 16-year-old government.

The three-member International Crimes Tribunal led by Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder sentenced Hasina to death on two counts: the killing of six unarmed protesters in Dhaka's Chankharpul on August 5 last year and the shooting of six student protesters in Ashulia the same day.

Five of the six student protesters in Ashulia were burned after their death, while the sixth was allegedly set on fire while still alive.

Besides this, Hasina was sentenced to imprisonment until natural death for making inflammatory remarks and ordering the use of deadly weapons against protesting students. She was also found guilty of ordering the extermination of student protesters through the use of helicopters, drones, and lethal weapons.

Former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal was also awarded the death penalty, while former inspector general of police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who became a state witness, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

Asaduzzaman is a fugitive while Mamun is in custody and has pleaded guilty. Mamun is the first accused to become a state witness since the tribunal was set up in 2010.

The verdict on Hasina has evoked reactions across the Bangladesh political spectrum and society, and has major implications for the upcoming elections expected in February 2026.

Hasina's fate

Hasina, who ruled the country with an iron fist for about 16-and-half years, has been living in India since that fateful day on August 5.

Predictably, she called the ruling against her "biased and politically motivated". "I am not afraid to face my accusers in a proper tribunal where evidence can be weighed and tested fairly," she said.

This is the first substantive verdict on her crackdown on protests, in which 1,400 people — mostly young people — were killed.

Her flight to India meant she escaped the wrath of a rampaging mob that ransacked her residence, office and Parliament.

While Hasina brought development to Bangladesh, her legacy was marked by corruption, nepotism and allegations that she silenced detractors, transforming her image into an authoritarian, corrupt and arrogant leader.

The verdict seals her fate for the near term and further fuels anti-Hasina sentiment. It also means she cannot return to Bangladesh in the foreseeable future, ruling her out of the country's political processes.

Awami League's future uncertain

The ruling also casts a shadow on the Awami League, which she led. Since her departure, she hasn't put in place any leadership structure that can steer the party.

Her critics argue that this indicates she's unwilling to hand over the party to a younger, relatively untainted rung of leaders in Dhaka, and is instead hoping her son Joy and daughter Putul will take over.

What is clear to many is that, given her current unpopularity, this approach does her more harm than good. It also erodes her remaining goodwill among party cadres, who feel abandoned to face the daily ignominy of insults and harassment in Bangladesh.

Party leaders also believe that with the Awami League banned from the elections currently, the party's best bet is to mount a domestic campaign to be allowed to participate in the polls. They believe that even though they would have to face the anti-incumbency vote, they could still retain some vote share and eventually reclaim their position.

However, this strategic calculation appears to be lost on Hasina, with party leaders still trying to persuade her.

Yunus's move

Nobel laureate and chief advisor of the interim government — effectively the interim PM — Prof [Muhammad Yunus](#) came to office in August 2024 from Paris, where he was visiting for the Olympics as an advisor on sustainability. With the streets of Bangladesh still in complete chaos, Yunus tried to bring order.

The tribunal's ruling, he said, provided important, though limited, justice for the thousands affected.

“The courts of Bangladesh have spoken with a clarity that resonates across the nation and beyond. The conviction and sentencing affirm a fundamental principle: no one, regardless of

power, is above the law,” he said. “This verdict recognises their suffering and confirms that our justice system will hold perpetrators accountable.”

Yunus has held on to the office with the stated objective of political, judicial, legal and constitutional reforms before the elections. He has fashioned himself as the [Nelson Mandela](#) of Bangladesh, a leader seeking to end violence, although political parties and the Army have been growing impatient with him for delaying the elections.

With the date now set, this verdict comes as a shot in the arm, projecting him as the person who delivered justice to the people of Bangladesh.

BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh

The main Opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, said it believes justice has been served through the International Crimes Tribunal’s verdict sentencing deposed Prime Minister [Sheikh Hasina](#) to death for crimes against humanity committed during the July-August Uprising.

“After a long judicial process, following international standards, the International Crimes Tribunal has delivered its verdict against Awami fascist Sheikh Hasina and her two accomplices. This verdict has ensured justice,” said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

The BNP has been pushing for early elections, hoping to gain from the anti-Hasina sentiment sweeping the country. Out of power for nearly two decades and facing court cases, detentions and the flight of leaders to other countries, including India, the BNP has been urging Yunus to hold elections and hopes to gain maximum advantage.

It remains to be seen how the party chief and former prime minister [Khaleda Zia](#) arranges for her son Tarique Rahman — who has been on a self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom since 2008 — and anoints him the party’s prime ministerial candidate.

Jamaat-e-Islami’s approach has been noteworthy. The conservative party has been gaining ground in Bangladesh, winning student union elections — the best barometer of their approval ratings among the educated youth.

The party, which swept the Dhaka University Central Students’ Union (DUCSU) in September, has urged India to return ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been living in the country since August 5 last year, to Bangladesh.

Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar said: “If one claims to behave as a good neighbour, if one aspires to maintain friendly relations, this is their foremost responsibility [to ensure Hasina’s return].”

That statement puts the focus back on India. For Jamaat, the best-case scenario will be to emerge as an influential political force in the next election and then either partner with the BNP or, in the Awami League’s absence, become the main Opposition in Parliament.

The students’ party

For the student protesters who led the anti-Hasina movement, this court verdict could come as a much-needed boost. After their National Citizen Party’s drubbing in the September university elections, the students hope the ruling will help them regain lost ground among the youth, who appear to have become disillusioned with them.

Soon after the court verdict, the NCP demanded the immediate execution of the death sentence handed down to former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, calling for her return from India “without delay”.

Calling the tribunal’s verdict “historic”, convener Nahid Islam said it “will mark a milestone in Bangladesh’s history”. He also demanded that the execution be carried out within a month, once again putting the spotlight on India.

India’s role and approach

New [Delhi](#) has said that even as India remains committed to the best interests of the people of the neighbouring country, it will engage constructively with all stakeholders.

The Ministry of External Affairs said: “India has noted the verdict announced by the ‘International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh’ concerning former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina”.

“As a close neighbour, India remains committed to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh, including in peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in that country. We will always engage constructively with all stakeholders to that end,” the MEA added.

Significantly, the ministry has not condemned the verdict but has merely “noted” it, and has framed its response in terms of commitment to the “people of Bangladesh” — distinct from the Bangladesh government authorities.

It has also invoked “inclusion” — effectively a reference to ensuring the Awami League’s participation in the polls — signalling that it is not withdrawing support from Hasina.

Delhi has given Hasina shelter — just as it did for six years after her father Sheikh Mujib’s assassination in 1975. It has also not capitulated despite repeated calls for extradition from Bangladesh’s political class and government.

Despite this, it does not want to actively intervene in what it sees as an “internal affair” of Bangladesh.

Although there has been no official response to the extradition request, legal provisions allow denial on the grounds that it is “political” in nature or by raising concerns about the fairness of the trial.

It is unlikely that Delhi will review its approach and hand her over, given that it views her as a friend and partner in India’s bilateral relations with Bangladesh, especially considering the crackdown on radicalism and anti-India activities during her tenure.

Delhi’s strategic calculus is also based on the assessment that handing Hasina over would not change the attitude of the current Bangladesh establishment or political class towards India.

In these circumstances, Hasina could find a safe space in India.

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