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News: Bangladesh Riots

- Recently, Bangladesh has been witnessing huge riots, which also caused the Prime Minister to resign and flee.
- The current wave of protests erupted after the High Court division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh reinstated the civil service quota system, nullifying the Prime Minister's executive order that abolished it.
- Initially established to benefit descendants of freedom fighters, women, underrepresented areas, and ethnic minorities, Bangladesh's government job quotas have faced criticism over the years for being outdated and susceptible to misuse.
- Due to the current crisis, the trade between India and Bangladesh via land ports has come to a standstill. The Border Security Force (BSF) has also increased vigilance along the India-Bangladesh border in response to concerns over potential spillover effects from the unrest in Bangladesh.
- The violence led to the torching of several government buildings as religious minority buildings also.

Background

History

- The Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), along with other central and provincial services, was established in Pakistan after 1947 India-Pakistan partition. Back then, quota provisions for public service recruitment were established through an executive order, which was later solidified under the 1956 constitution.
- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman introduced the job quota system in 1972 as recognition of its freedom fighters. This was soon after the 1971 war of Independence against Pakistan. According to local media, a movement began demanding the cancellation of this system, and it has continued on and off ever since.
- Cut to 2018, there was a 56 per cent reservation in government jobs in Bangladesh. Of this, 30 per cent of jobs were reserved for descendants of freedom fighters, 10 per cent for women, and 10 per cent for residents of backward districts, 5 per cent for people from minority groups, and 1 per cent for people with disabilities. This was marked by massive protests at various educational institutions, with many demanding quota reforms.
- In 2018, the Bangladesh government halted the job quotas. It reportedly scrapped all forms of quotas. The move was aimed at ensuring the recruitment

of meritorious and qualified individuals for positions in grades 9 to 13 (formerly known as first and second-class jobs) in government jobs.

- However, quotas for third and fourth-class posts (grades 14 to 20) remained in effect.
- Now-ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina decided in 2018 that if no candidate from the relevant quota is found, those positions would be filled from the merit list.
- The protests began in July with students demonstrating against the controversial quota system that allocated government jobs following the High Court order to restore 30% jobs for descendants of freedom fighters.
- This has faced wide criticism from people as around 32 million young people are out of work or education out of 170 million people in Bangladesh.
- Agitated students wanted the 30% reservation quota to be cut down, and protests led to clashes with security officials and pro – government activists in July 16th.
- This led to curfew and internet shut down also.
- Adding fuel to the protest, recently resigned Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also labeled those protestors as Razakars (who collaborated with Pakistan army during the 1971 war of Independence).

- Riots claimed lives of around 300 people which urged the apex court to interfere. It is reported that the Supreme Court has reduced the quota from 30 percent to 5 percent, with 93% of jobs to be allocated in merit.
- The remaining 2% of jobs shall be reserved to members of ethnic minorities, transgenders and differently abled persons.
- Even though the decision was welcomed, it was not enough to quell the unrest.
- Those who are protesting in Bangladesh want the entire quota system to be replaced with merit-based system. They argued that the system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Sheikh Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement. They even demanded Hasina's resignation as PM.
- Sheikh Hasina also commented the protesting students as terrorists which led the students to demand her resignation.
- Amid the protests, Sheikh Hasina has resigned and army has decided to form an interim government. Hasina has fled to India and is now reported to flee to United Kingdom.

Impact on India

- India and Bangladesh share 4,096-km long border, which is most shared by both India and Bangladesh with any of its neighbours.

- Bangladesh shares border with India's West Bengal (2216.7 km), Assam (263 km), Meghalaya (443), Tripura (856) and Mizoram (318 km).
- Bangladesh is India's 25th largest trading partner, with the size of the bilateral trade at \$12.9 billion.
- Among South Asian countries, Bangladesh is our largest trading partner, while India is the second largest trading partner for Bangladesh.
- The trade is dominated by exports, with Bangladesh being India's eighth largest export partner.
- In FY24, India's exports to Bangladesh contracted 9.5 per cent to \$11 billion.
- India has provided duty free quota free access to Bangladesh on all tariff lines except tobacco and alcohol under South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) since 2011.

India-Bangladesh ties under Sheikh Hasina rule

- Bangladesh, under Sheikh Hasina's rule, became an important ally of India.
- Bangladesh not only shares the longest border with India (among other neighbouring countries), but also has rich historical ties including language, trade relations and culture.
- Under Hasina's rule, India-Bangladesh diplomatic ties strengthened as the two countries intensively worked on improving railway, road, and inland water

connectivity, boosting security and border management, amplifying defence cooperation, and cooperating in the power and energy sector.

- Indian had also entered an Extradition Treaty with Bangladesh in January 2013 (during Hasina's rule) to address the security concerns of each other and strengthening mutual trust.
- Bangladesh under Hasina, also suppressed the insurgents, terrorists and separatists.
- Bangladesh is also a key destination for Indian auto exports, alongside African and Latin American countries.

Regional ties

- India and Bangladesh's geographical locations complement each other and present an opportunity for both to further develop their connectivity links and economies.
- In 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina launched three India-assisted development projects, two of which are expected to boost trade and improve connectivity with the Northeastern states, including the deep – sea Matarbari port.

Matarbari Port

- Matarbari Port is an under-construction sea-port on the shores of Bay of Bengal, located at Matarbari area of Chittagong division, Bangladesh.
- Construction of the port began in the late 2010s with the construction of a Captic Jetty for the Matarbari Power Plant, and later the Government of Bangladesh undertook a project to build a full-fledged commercial port.
- After construction, it will be Bangladesh's first deep-sea port.
- It is estimated that the cost for the construction of the port in the first phase will be ₳177.77 billion to ₳200.00 billion including the approach road.
- It is reported that Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), granted a \$750 million loan to the Bangladesh government for the Matarbari development.
- The port consists of an artificial harbour, and its navigable channel is surrounded by Breakwaters.
- The harbour has a depth of 16 m (52 ft) and able to accommodate panamax and capsized ships.
- The port has a navigable channel about 14.3 km (8.9 mi) long and 350 m (1,150 ft) wide with a depth of 16 m (52 ft), which is the deepest among ports in Bangladesh.

Significance of the Development of the Matarbari Port

- **Matarbari Port Boosts Economic Ties:** The Matarbari port is expected to enhance economic ties and open up development prospects for India's northeastern states, including Tripura.
- **Strategic Northeast Development Plans:** Japan, Bangladesh, and India are strategically working to draw manufacturing to the Northeast.
- This joint effort aims to establish a robust industrial value chain in South Asia, focusing on exports to the Indo-Pacific markets.



DEALING WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD

India-Bangladesh trade



GLOBAL VOICES

"WE ARE OBVIOUSLY DEEPLY CONCERNED BY THE VIOLENCE WE'VE SEEN IN BANGLADESH... WE HOPE THAT SWIFT ACTION IS TAKEN TO ENSURE THAT DEMOCRACY PREVAILS"

British PM Keir Starmer's spokesperson

"IT IS IMPORTANT THAT BANGLADESH CONTINUE ON ITS DEMOCRATIC PATH"

German Foreign Ministry spokesperson

"HASINA'S RESIGNATION PROVES THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE"

Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party's exiled acting chairman Tarique Rahman

- From the reports, it is clear that the decision of Hasina to resign, is going to impact economically for India.

Political impact

- Soon after Hasina's resignation, Bangladeshi President Mohammed Shahabuddin ordered the release of prisoners from the protests, as well as former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.
- Moreover, Bangladesh Army General Waker-uz-Zaman reportedly said he is holding talks with major political parties, including Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).
- This may be of concern for India as Hasina's resignation may pave the path for the main opposition BNP, which is largely viewed as "anti-India". Zia is the chief of BNP.
- When Khaleda Zia ruled Bangladesh, the country had a rocky relationship with India. During her tenure, India faced challenges related to cross-border terrorism.

Illegal migration

- Illegal migration is another challenge along the India-Bangladesh border. "The Indo-Bangladesh border is marked by a high degree of porosity and the

checking of illegal cross border activities and illegal migration from Bangladesh to India have been major challenges," said the annual report of the Union Home Ministry for 2021-22.

- As per the 2001 Census, Bangladeshis form the largest group of migrants in India, followed by Pakistanis.
- Large influx of such migrants across the boundary has posed serious socio-economic-political problems for the people of Indian states bordering Bangladesh with serious implications for its resources and national security.
- The issue was further complicated when the Rohingya refugees originally from Myanmar started infiltrating into India through Bangladesh.
- Also, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) that is expected to deter future migrants from Bangladesh from entering India illegally has also triggered a major concern in Bangladesh.
- Illegal migrants from Bangladesh have also been arrested in many cases where the migrants, who come under the pretext of being from West Bengal or Assam and as citizens of India.
- It is estimated that a large number of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants live in Kerala under the pretext of being from West Bengal and the Kerala police has been finding it difficult to identify as they often mingle with migrants from other states and disappear into the crowd.

- It is estimated that about 20 million (2 crore) citizens of Bangladesh have crossed into India illegally in the last two decades alone and had even led to events like Assam Movement.
- In Kerala, this migration happens due to the high wages and quality living conditions.

Drug Smuggling & Trafficking

- There have been many incidences of cross border drug smuggling & trafficking. Humans (especially children & women) are trafficked & various animal & bird species are poached through these borders.

Sharing of River Waters

- India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. The Ganga Waters Treaty signed in 1996 for sharing of waters of river Ganga during lean season (January 1-May 31).
- Most recently, the Kushiyara Pact was signed that will benefit people in Southern Assam and the Sylhet region in Bangladesh.

Tourism

- According to the Ministry of Tourism, Bangladesh accounted for the largest share of foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2020, including tens of thousands of people who come to the country for medical treatment.

Terrorism

- The borders are susceptible to terrorist infiltration. A number of outfits are trying to spread their tentacles across India, such as Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).
- JMB is listed as a terror group by Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and the United Kingdom.
- Recently, The National Investigation Agency has filed a charge-sheet against 6 members of the JMB in a special court in Bhopal.

Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh

- At present, Bangladesh is an active partner in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (India is not a part of BRI).
- Also, Bangladesh imports Chinese military equipment, including submarines, in the defense sector that is major concern for India's National Security.

Way forward

- The students union, named **Students against Discrimination** has requested Nobel Laureate and economist Dr. Muhammad Yunus to serve as the Chief Advisor to the interim government in Bangladesh. It is reported that Dr. Yunus has accepted the request.
- Dr. Yunus also accused Hasina of sabotaging her father's legacy.
- The students also urged the President Mohammad Shahabuddin to quickly establish the interim government and reveal the name of additional members.
- The United States and European Union have urged restraint and the need for speedy transition, while the United Nations Secretary General has called for a thorough investigation into the violence.
- The United States has issued a 'Level 4: Do Not Travel' advisory for Bangladesh and advised American citizens against traveling to Bangladesh and also recommended 'non – emergency' US government employees and their families leave Bangladesh.