

## *Beyond Bangladesh Triumph*

In addition to the power vacuum, numerous challenges persist, as well as the difficulty to establish a political consensus.

**A**fter a 16 years-rule with an iron fist, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been ousted and forced to flee the country following a mass student protest. Many consider the ousting of the Ironlady, as a people's power victory, for an Asian country with a population of over 140 million. Over 300 people are reported dead during the protest. After Hasina's resignation, Waker Uz-Zaman, Chief of General Staff of Bangladesh Army, became in charge and the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Muhammad Yunus, led the interim government.

Sheikh Hasina has been in power since the formation of the Awami League party in 1981, winning four consecutive elections, including the most recent one. Her administration has overseen Bangladesh's economic development. In 1991, during the democratic reform from military rule, alternate rule of Sheikh Hasina and the then-Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, marked a period of stability and economic progress. A decade before the pandemic, Bangladesh experienced rapid development with a seven percent growth rate each year. This led some to consider the nation's progress as the "Bangladesh Model." Bangladesh's history has been marked by turmoil following its independence from Pakistan in 1971. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of Hasina, was one of the leaders in the

battle for independence. However, there was later military interference in the country. Critics argue that Sheikh Hasina's rule was backed by the military and suppressed the opposition. In the January election of this year, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition party, protested the election and accused the election committee of failing to conduct a free and fair election. Their protests were met with dissent and political oppression. As a result, Sheikh Hasina's party once again emerged victorious, and poised ready for her 20-year tenure as Prime Minister.

In contrast, the country was plagued by widespread corruption, with only a few crony elites benefiting. The government controlled the legal system, news media, and law enforcement. Many young people struggle to find suitable employment opportunities. Mass student protests were sparked by the "Freedom Fighter Certification System," which favored the family members and loyalists of independence fighters for government positions. Over time, the system became incredibly corrupt and impossible to reform. This system has been in place for so long that grandchildren of the original independence fighters are now benefitting from it. In June, students protested against this system.

Regardless of whoever is in power, Bangladesh will continue to face numerous challenges. The Economist has highlighted a 'dangerous vacuum' of power in the country. Currently, Bangladesh is experiencing significant internal discord, making it challenging to govern due to factional conflicts and sectarianism. Establishing a political consensus will be difficult, and the decade-long political turmoil cannot be resolved in the short term. The pervasive corruption, the

widening wealth gap, the growth of cronyism, and the ongoing inflation crisis are yet to be addressed.

The present time marks a favorable period where people are feeling inspired. Taking an optimistic view, it is heartwarming to witness the strength and bravery of individuals, including youth, women, and men. Hopefully, the country will come together, setting aside differences. ■

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