



W O
R I S
G O

AFP

Bangladesh on the Brink

Prepared by

Shashank Khopkar
RISK INTELLIGENCE TEAM

07 AUG 2024

Copyright | WoRisGo 2024

Executive Summary

Sheikh Hasina's departure from Bangladesh was followed by a decision by the military not to impose a curfew during the violent protests. Given the importance of civil-military relations in Bangladesh, the military's influence has decisive impact on political stability.

Under the leadership of General Waker-uz-Zaman, the military pressed for her resignation. The Bangladesh parliament was dissolved on Tuesday, i.e., August 06, 2024, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus has been selected as the head of Bangladesh's interim government, a candidate favoured by the student protesters. The military's position on this transition seems to be supportive.

India is monitoring the situation in Bangladesh, and at an all-party meeting of the Indian government, Jaishankar discussed India's potential impact on the situation that originated in Bangladesh. What policy will be adopted if any other country intervenes in this regard, the matter also arises at the meeting.

For Context: Student protestors took to the streets opposing a 30 per cent quota in government jobs for those who fought in the 1971 India-Pakistan war. Their protests demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took a violent turn, claiming over 100 lives on Sunday, i.e. August 04, 2024, and another six on Monday. About 300 people have been killed and thousands injured in violence that ripped through the protests in Bangladesh.

Background

- Since the 1971 Liberation War, Bangladesh has granted a **30% quota in civil service and public sector jobs to the descendants of those who participated in the movement to free the country from Pakistan.**
- **In October 2018, Hasina agreed to abolish all reservations** amid large-scale protests by students.
- **In June 2024, the high court nullified that decision** and reinstated the quotas after petitions were filed by relatives of 1971 veterans. (*Following this ruling, **56% of government jobs were reserved for specific groups**, including children and grandchildren of freedom fighters as well as women, and people from 'backward districts.'*)
- Post the ruling of the high court, protests have been triggered all across Bangladesh, with students asking why the third generation of freedom fighters is being provided benefits, besides demanding a total merit-based recruitment.
- As a consequence of the protests, **in July 2024, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh scaled back the controversial quota system** for government job applicants. (*The top court **ordered 93% of the government jobs to be allocated on a merit-based system**, while 7% of jobs were left for the relatives of veterans)*
- Of late, the **protests morphed into an anti-government movement**, demanding the resignation of Sheikh Hasina.

The resignation of Prime Minister Hasina on Monday, i.e. August 05, 2024 has created a power vacuum, until the interim government is established. Economic disruptions are already evident, with businesses closing, ongoing curfews and previous internet shutdowns hampering operations. Inflation, particularly in food and retail, is exacerbating economic hardships. Socially, the unrest could result in long-term instability, with risks of spillover effects into bordering regions, impacting both local and international communities.

Timeline of the Protest

- June 5:** Students from six universities staged protests against the Bangladesh High Court ruling of allowing a 30% quota which was abolished earlier.
- June 7–30:** In response, protests spread across the country as resentment grows. Several protesters clash with the police.
- July 1:** University students initiate blockades, disrupting roads and railway lines.
- July 16–18:** Clashes result in six deaths. Schools and universities close nationwide. Police attacks during student funerals prompt a shutdown and internet restrictions. Protests escalate, demanding Hasina's resignation, resulting in 19 more deaths and government buildings torched.
- July 21:** The Supreme Court rules against reinstating job quotas, but the decision does not meet protesters' demands to abolish job reservations for children of 1971 independence fighters.
- July 28 – August 1:** The government restores mobile internet but bans social media. It announces and implements a plan to ban Jamaat-Shibir under the anti-terrorism act.
- August 4–5:** Clashes result in over 90 deaths, including police officers. Protesters march on Dhaka, and six more are killed in police firing. They enter Prime Minister Hasina's palace, leading to her resignation and departure to India. The army chief announces the formation of an interim government led by Professor Salimullah Khan.

The recent protests in Bangladesh are the culmination of long-standing issues such as high inflation, youth unemployment and rising food costs. While the quota system controversy sparked the immediate unrest, economic frustrations have been brewing for years.

Key stakeholders in the Protests

Government and Security Forces

- **Bangladesh Government:** Under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership until her resignation and the government deployed security forces, enforced curfews and shut down the internet.
- **Bangladesh Police and Security Forces:** This includes the police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and the military, using both lethal and non-lethal weapons, leading to numerous deaths and injuries.
- **Chhatra League:** The student wing of the ruling Awami League party, which has been reported to actively attack the anti-quota protesters. Their involvement has escalated the violence, with claims of them being used by the government to suppress dissent.

Opposition Political Parties

- **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP):** The main opposition party, which boycotted the January 2024 national elections of Bangladesh, has been supporting the protests. BNP leaders have participated in and backed the student-led protests.
- **Jamaat-e-Islami:** Another opposition group that has been involved in the protests. Their participation highlights the broader political discontent with the current government. (Awami League government banned-- *Jamaat-e-Islami and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir under anti-terrorism law, on August 01, 2024*)
- **Anti-Quota Student Protesters:** Primarily university students protesting against the reintroduction of quota system for government jobs.

The protests in Bangladesh involved two primary factions. The first faction comprises the government, and the Chhatra League i.e. the affiliated students organization to the party in power. The second faction consists of opposition political parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, along with their student factions. These groups are spearheading protests against the government.

Bangladesh Police Service Association (BPSA) has launched an indefinite nationwide strike to demand the safety of security personnel following alleged targeted attacks on 450 police stations and the killing of several officers on Aug. 5.

Drivers of Instability in Bangladesh

- **Power Vacuum:** The resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has left the country, creating immediate uncertainty and a lack of leadership. Numerous instances of attacks on minority communities, including Hindus and Christians of Bangladesh have been reported. Protesters have vandalized and set fire to several key locations, including the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre and the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhaka.
- **Political Backlash:** Ministers and members of the reigning Awami League party could face significant backlash due to their association with the government. For instance many former Ministers, including former Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, MPs, and other leaders of the Awami League and its affiliates were stopped and arrested at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport while attempting to leave the country. There have also been reports of attacks on the residences of political figures associated with the former government.
- **Martial Law:** The potential imposition of martial law could heighten instability. Historically, Bangladesh has experienced martial law under military rule, notably during the regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Hossain Mohammad Ershad, which were marked by political repression and unrest. Bangladesh also has a history of Martial law, for instance, Mujib was assassinated in a coup by the army in August 1975, four years after Bangladesh's independence. The army controlled politics for the next 15 years.
- **Economic Disruptions:** Protests have caused business closures, curfews and internet shutdowns disrupting daily operations and commerce.
- **Trade Disruptions:** Protests have disrupted rail services and other transportation networks, hindering trade and logistics across the country, affecting the supply chains and mobility.

Establishing a stable interim government, followed by a democratically elected government, is crucial for the country to recover and achieve economic stability.

Bangladesh Under New Leadership

Immediate goals:

- The primary focus of the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus is to stabilize the country by restoring law and order.
- This involves re-establishing public safety, reopening businesses and resuming normal travel and international trade operations which were disrupted during the protests.
- Normalcy began returning after Monday's chaos, but it will take time for law and order to fully stabilize.

Long-Term goals:

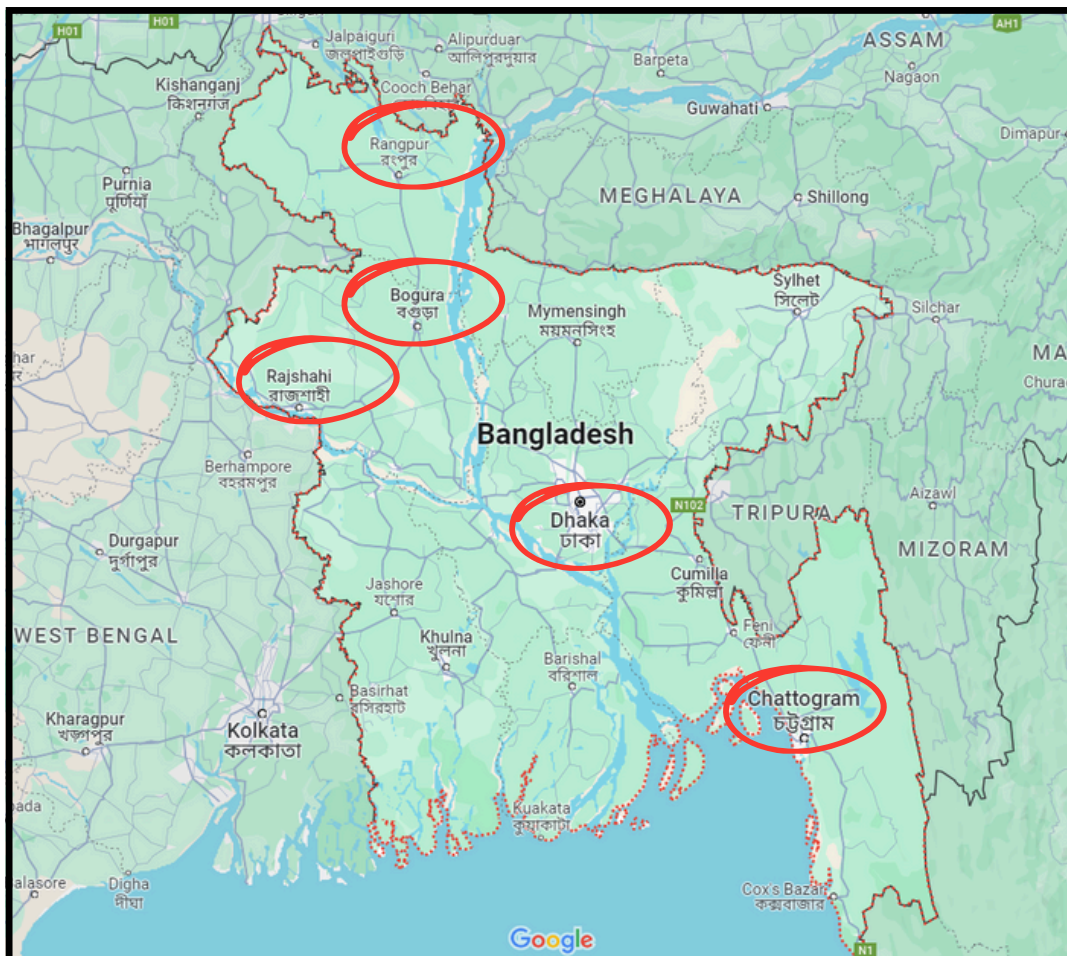
- Addressing the economic challenges that fueled the protests is a priority. The interim government will work on reducing high inflation, addressing food inflation, and tackling unemployment.
- Food price inflation jumped to 10.76% in May 2024. May's general inflation rate was the highest since October last year at 9.93%. It was 9.74% in April.
- Muhammad Yunus, being an economist, is expected to leverage his expertise to implement policies that stabilize and grow the economy.

What role does the military Play?

- The military played a crucial role in Sheikh Hasina's resignation by not enforcing a curfew during protests, leading to her departure. This highlights the military's influence in Bangladesh's political stability and decision-making processes.
- The military has a history of intervening in Bangladesh's politics, having taken control during periods of turmoil, such as under the regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Hussain Muhammad Ershad. While not all-powerful, the military has played a recurring role in governing the country during crises.
- The current political situation in Bangladesh appears to be a harmonious agreement among the military, political elites, and the citizenry. None of the Awami League members are chosen in the interim government.

Most Affected Regions of Bangladesh

- In Bangladesh, army tanks are stationed in Dhaka, with armed security patrolling the tense and largely deserted streets.
- Clashes in Chattogram have left over 172 injured, with significant unrest spreading to neighboring upazilas.
- Rangpur has witnessed the deaths of prominent political figures amid violent protests.
- In Bogura, police used tear gas to disperse student protesters on August 4, adding to the region's volatility.
- Rajshahi saw protesters vandalize and set fire to three police boxes, attack an Awami League office, and clash with police, resulting in significant damage and injuries.



Highlighted districts and surrounding regions in Bangladesh facing unrest and instability: Dhaka, Chattogram, Rangpur, Bogura, and Rajshahi.

Disruptions in Bangladesh

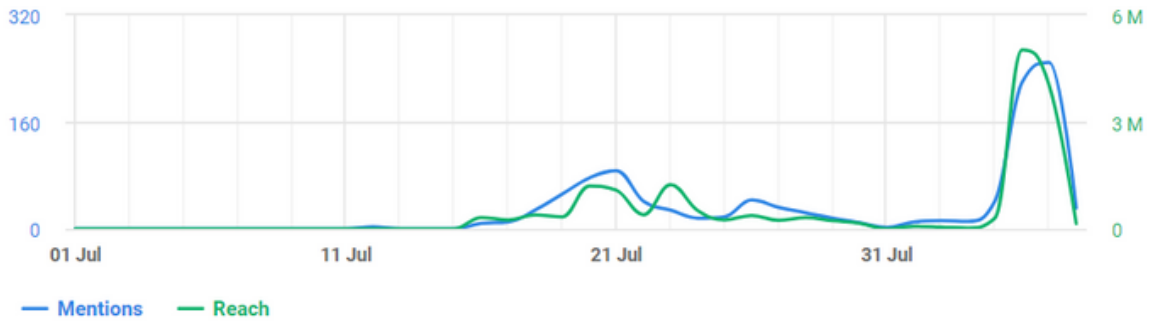
Date	Area Affected	Disruptions	Impact
August 7, 2024	Bijoy Sarani intersection, Dhaka	Traffic disruptions	Reduced mobility, heightened security presence
August 6, 2024	Dhaka	Train services suspended	Commuter and logistics disruptions
August 6, 2024	Dhaka, Savar, Dhamrai, Uttara, Habiganj, Jessore, Khulna, Barisal, Lakshmipur, Kushtia, Satkhira, Sreepur of Gazipur	100+ lives lost in the protests	Widespread violence, destruction of property, injuries, and social disruption.
August 6, 2024	Joshor District	Zabir International Hotel attack	24 people killed, property destruction
August 6, 2024	Dhaka (Dhanmondi)	Home of Rahul Ananda looted and burnt	Cultural and personal loss, destruction of property
August 6, 2024	Shariatpur (Dhanuka Manasa Bari temple)	Temple ransacked, idols destroyed, CCTV damaged	Cultural and religious damage, increased community tension
August 6, 2024	Dinajpur (Centre Cremation yard)	Cremation yard vandalised	Disruption to religious practices

Disruptions in Bangladesh

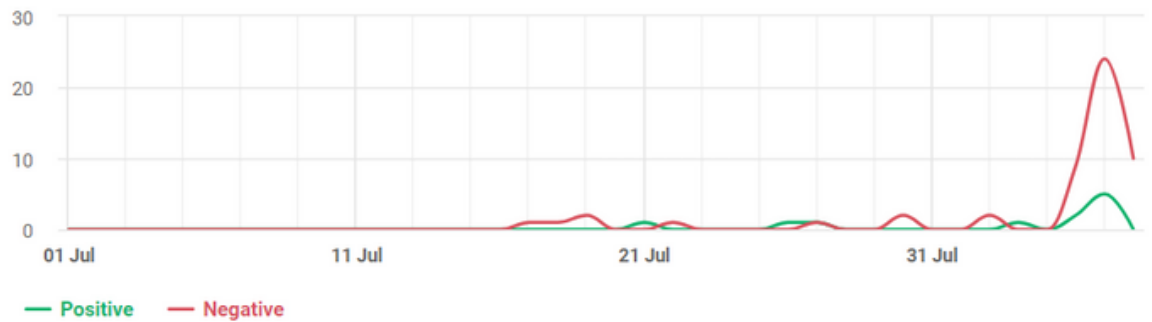
Date	Area Affected	Disruptions	Impact
August 6, 2024	Dinajpur (Parbatipur upazila)	Five temples attacked	Religious sites damaged, cultural impact
August 6, 2024	Chiribandar upazila	Hindu homes attacked and vandalised	Loss of property, increased insecurity among residents
August 6, 2024	Bochaganj upazila	Several Hindu families' homes attacked and set on fire	Loss of property, forced displacement
August 6, 2024	Patuakhali (Kuakata)	Temple attacked and set ablaze, homes vandalised	Cultural and personal loss, destruction of property
August 6, 2024	Barishal (Gouranadi upazila)	Clothing store vandalised and looted	Economic damage, loss of livelihood
August 6, 2024	Barishal city (Katpatti, Chawkbazar, Bazar Road)	Sharp weapons brandished openly	Increased fear and insecurity among residents
August 6, 2024	Bogura (Palpara village, Gabtali upazila)	Haystacks set ablaze in Hindu homes	Damage to property, increased fear among the community

Social Media Analytics: Bangladesh Protest

Mentions and Reach, Bangladesh Protest



Sentiment Analysis, Bangladesh Protest



Social Media Assessment

Recent social media conversations have centred on protests in Bangladesh, initially focused on student quota reforms but evolving into wider demonstrations against the government. The situation then escalated to widespread violence and clashes between protestors and authorities.

Key Metrics:

- Total mentions: 1,067
- Social media mentions: 863 (80.9%)
- Non-social media mentions: 204 (19.1%)
- Social media reach: 11 million
- Non-social media reach: 5.5 million

Reach and Engagement: The protest garnered substantial attention across platforms, with social media playing a dominant role in disseminating information. The total reach of 16.5 million (11M social, 5.5M non-social) indicates widespread awareness of the events.

Platform Impact: Social media platforms were crucial in spreading awareness, with a reach double that of traditional media channels. This underscores the importance of social networks in modern protest movements and political discourse.

Sentiment Analysis: Sentiment surrounding the protest was predominantly neutral:

- Neutral: 93%
- Positive: 2% (11 mentions)
- Negative: 5% (53 mentions)

While slightly skewed towards negative, the overwhelmingly neutral tone suggests either a reluctance to express strong opinions publicly or a complex situation that many find difficult to categorize simply as positive or negative.

Engagement Rate: Despite high reach, the engagement rate was low at 7% for sentiment-expressing mentions. This indicates that while many were exposed to information about the protests, few felt compelled to express strong opinions publicly.

Conversations reportedly revolved around:

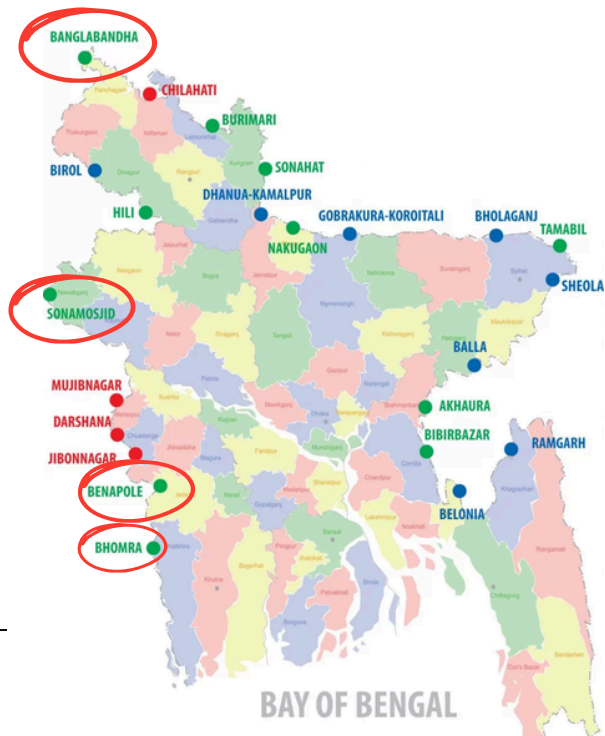
1. Student quota protests
2. Allegations of authoritarianism
3. Reported violence and political instability
4. Concerns about communal clashes
5. Potential economic impacts of the ongoing crisis

Risk Assessment

Trade and Mobility Disruptions

Probability
High
Impact
High

- Though some businesses have resumed as the curfew was lifted, uncertainty remains about when normalcy will return. Economic activity continues to be significantly impacted.
- Trade between India and Bangladesh through land ports at **Petrapole, Gojadanga, Mahadipur, and Fulbari in West Bengal has been affected due to the non-operation of Bangladeshi customs and a three-day holiday declared by Bangladesh, from 05 August to 07 August, except for essential services.**
- Some passenger movement has been reported but turnout remains low.
- Most evident disruptions have been caused on the Petrapole Land port. Trade through Petrapole in North 24 Parganas district, the largest land port, remains halted as the Benapole customs in Bangladesh remained non-functional.
- Security at the land ports has been increased in response to the situation.
- India's access to **Chattogram and Mongla ports**, granted by Bangladesh under Hasina's leadership, facilitated movement of cargo and reduced the time and costs associated with transporting goods to India's northeastern states and West Bengal. This advantage is now at risk.

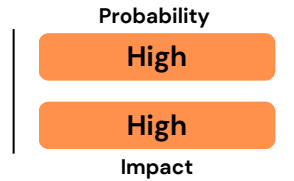


Disrupted Ports as Reported

Note: Benapole Land Port (Bangladesh) – Petrapole Land Port (India); Bhomra Land Port (Bangladesh) – Ghojadanga Land Port (India); Sonamasjid Land Port (Bangladesh) – Mahadipur Land Port (India); Banglabandha Land Port (Bangladesh) – Fulbari Land Port (India)

Risk Assessment

Border Region Impacts



India shares a 4,096 km border with Bangladesh, including 2,217 km in West Bengal. The Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura stretches of the border are 262 km, 318 km, and 856 km respectively. Any unrest in Bangladesh could spill over into India with repercussions felt in West Bengal, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura. Many of these states are already considered vulnerable as they have witnessed violent insurgencies, and insurgents have previously used Bangladeshi territory as a base for operations. For example, ULFA insurgents had set up bases in Bangladesh and used those to launch attacks in India.

Hasina's government has been responsive to security concerns in India's northeast, a sensitivity not shown by previous military or BNP governments. Her departure raises concerns about a possible resurgence of insurgencies. The instability in Bangladesh could lead to a surge in illegal migration into India. As Bangladeshi citizens flee the violence, many might cross the porous borders into the northeastern states and West Bengal. This influx of migrants can strain local resources, disrupt social harmony, and pose security challenges.

Measures Taken by Northeastern States:

- **Assam:** Assam has issued a high alert across all its districts sharing borders with Bangladesh, especially Cachar, Dhubri, Karimganj, and South Salmara-Mankachar.
- **Meghalaya:** Meghalaya has imposed a night curfew along its 444 km border with Bangladesh from 6 pm to 6 am.
- **West Bengal:** The state has also heightened its alert status.
- **Mizoram:** Heightened its border security measures, particularly in the districts of Lawngtlai, Lunglei, and Mamit.

Risk Assessment

Political and Economic Implications for India

Probability
High
Impact
High

With Sheikh Hasina currently in Delhi, India, security has been significantly heightened to prevent any potential backlash from Bangladeshi nationals or other groups viewing India's asylum offer as interference. India provides Hasina with comprehensive logistical support as Hasina pursues asylum in the UK.

Security concerns in Delhi: The Delhi Police has increased security at the Bangladesh High Commission, S Radhakrishna Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi. More barricades have been placed outside the commission and the number of police personnel deployed there has been increased.

Change in Government in Bangladesh: Opposition party lead, Khaleda Zia has been released and may again aim for power.

- Ms Zia, the key opposition leader who heads the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The potential rise of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami poses significant concerns for India.
- Historically, these parties have not been as friendly towards India as Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami have been associated with anti-India sentiments and could strengthen the "India Out" campaign, which calls for a boycott of Indian goods and a reduction in diplomatic ties with India

Trade Relations: Under Hasina's tenure, bilateral trade reached \$14 billion in the 2023-24 fiscal year, with India exporting \$12 billion worth of goods, including cotton, petroleum products, and cereals, while importing about \$2 billion. Thus, the robust trade relations can come under threat along with the FTA, that is in pipeline. Thus, the robust trade relations can come under threat along with the FTA that is in the pipeline.

Connectivity Projects: Projects like the Akhaura-Agartala cross-border rail link and Khulna-Mongla Port rail line are crucial for trade and connectivity. Disruptions in these projects could severely impact India's access to its Northeast region, which relies on these transit routes

Probability

High

High

Impact

Possible Refugee Influx:

- Hundreds of Bangladeshi refugees have gathered in no man's land near the Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal, pleading for shelter in India. (500 refugees wait on no man's land seeking shelter in India amid Bangladesh protests).
- High likelihood of refugee influx persists, as there were reports of persecution of minorities, including Hindus and Christians. They might seek refuge in India.
- Reports further state that refugees from Bangladesh swam across the Nagar River to reach the no-man's land, seeking shelter in India. BSF has been turning the refugees away.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah had assured him that the borders were well-guarded, to prevent any "illegal" movement.
- Indian political leaders, that is, the state government of West Bengal and the Centre, are divided on the issue.

Probability

High

Medium

Impact

Transport Disruptions- Air travel

- Flights Resumed: Flights to and from Dhaka are set to resume on Wednesday following the temporary suspension due to the unrest in Bangladesh.
- Possible Delays: Some flights may experience delays. Travelers should check for the latest updates.

Probability

High

High

Impact

Transport Disruptions- Rail

- Significant disruptions in passenger and freight rail services, including the international rail link with India, suspended until further notice. Heightened security and potential border closures may impact land port movements.
- Train services to Bangladesh continue to remain cancelled indefinitely.

Probability

High

Medium

Impact

Business and Utility Disruptions

- Persistent due to official holidays announced till 07 August, internet outages and employee access issues.
- Internet and Financial Services: Mobile and broadband mostly restored, but financial service disruptions, including transactions, may occur.
- Diplomatic facilities might suspend or limit services due to large rallies.

Probability

Medium

High

Impact

Protests and Civil Distress

- It will likely remain until the interim government restores law and order inside the country



Prepared by

Shashank Khopkar
RISK INTELLIGENCE TEAM



worisgo.com



risk.services@worisgo.com



1800-572-
8600

Prepared at the Risk Assessment and Analysis Centre, Bangalore

@COPYRIGHT - WoRisGo

Terms of use: The business continuity, compliance and security risk advisory contained above is based on analysis of information in public domain and our expertise in the domains. For certain verifications, we have also depended on due diligence with officials wherever necessary or feasible. The analysis and information are provided on an as-is basis with no liability. Various organizations may arrive at different outcomes, business continuity plans and other decisions based off on these inputs. Our analysis is just one of the several data points towards enabling such decisions. This analysis should be consumed in the context of your organization's risk appetite, business practices, governance policies and bearing other situational and relevant factors in mind.