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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Hostage to History: Why India-Bangladesh Ties Need a Deliberate Reset, Not Drift

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Hostage to History: Why India-Bangladesh Ties Need a Deliberate Reset, Not Drift

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GS2



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India sent its foreign secretary to a new government's inauguration and restored visas within months, yet that government's first major foreign visit went to China, not India. At what point does patient outreach stop being strategic patience and start being a failure to read the relationship correctly?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

Two governments can send envoys, restore visas and ship diesel, and still not be resetting a relationship if the other government's first flight abroad lands in Beijing. Gestures are not the same as a strategy.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Bangladesh coverage this year tends to be event-driven, an inauguration here, a controversy there, without a framework connecting them. This editorial supplies that framework: **distinguish reactive normalisation, responding to each crisis as it arises, from a deliberate reset, a declared, sequenced strategy that survives the next crisis.** That distinction is directly transferable to any neighbourhood-relations question India faces, Nepal, the Maldives, Myanmar, and is a reliable way to move a GS2 answer from a timeline of events to genuine analysis.

GS Paper 2: India and its neighbourhood relations; effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; **bilateral**, regional agreements.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Neighbourhood First policy	India's stated doctrine of prioritising ties with immediate neighbours	The policy frame against which the Bangladesh relationship is usually assessed
Reactive normalisation vs. deliberate reset	Responding to individual crises versus a declared, sequenced strategy	The editorial's central analytical distinction
Ganga Water Sharing Treaty (1996)	30-year bilateral water-sharing treaty, expiring December 2026	Live, testable current-affairs deadline with direct bilateral stakes
International Crimes Tribunal (Bangladesh)	Domestic Bangladeshi tribunal that convicted Hasina in absentia, Nov 2025	Central to the legal complexity of India's position on Hasina
BBIN framework	Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal sub-regional connectivity initiative	Relevant to the "pragmatic engagement" track the editorial recommends

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Sheikh Hasina's government fell amid a student-led uprising in **August 2024**, after which she has remained in India. An interim government under Muhammad Yunus governed until the **February 12, 2026** general election, won decisively by the **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)** under **Tarique Rahman**, who secured **209 of 297 declared seats** (out of 299 constituencies; two Chattogram seats were withheld by court order) against the Jamaat-e-Islami-led opposition's **68**.

DEVELOPMENT	DETAIL
BNP election victory	February 12, 2026; Tarique Rahman as head of government
India's diplomatic gestures	Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Speaker Om Birla at inauguration; ~45,000 tonnes diesel aid, April 2026; High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi given Cabinet Minister-equivalent status in the Table of Precedence, June 2026; tourist visas resumed June 28, 2026
Rahman's first major foreign visit	Four days in China, June 2026 ; 17 agreements signed; ties upgraded to a "China-Bangladesh community with a shared future"
Hasina's legal status	Convicted in absentia of crimes against humanity, International Crimes Tribunal, November 17, 2025 ; death sentence; verdict flagged for fair-trial concerns by international rights groups
Hasina's New Delhi address	August 4-5, 2026 , second anniversary of the uprising; hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia; India denied organisational involvement; Dhaka issued formal protest and domestic media blackout order
Ganga Water Sharing Treaty	Signed December 12, 1996, 30-year term, expires December 2026 ; renewal talks and joint Farakka Barrage measurements under way

THE ANALYSIS

1. Distinguish the reactive from the strategic in India's own outreach. Sending senior officials to an inauguration, restoring visas, and shipping fuel aid are each individually sound diplomatic moves, but each responded to a specific event or pressure point rather than forming part of a publicly declared, sequenced reset strategy. The absence of a stated roadmap is itself diagnostic: it leaves each gesture vulnerable to being read, in Dhaka, as transactional rather than as part of a genuine long-term commitment.

2. Rahman's China visit is a signal, not necessarily a rejection. A new government's first major foreign trip carries real diplomatic weight, and choosing Beijing over Delhi, alongside 17 agreements and language elevating ties to a "shared future," is a legitimate data point about Dhaka's priorities. But it does not, on its own, prove hostility to India; Rahman's own "not country-specific" framing suggests deliberate hedging across multiple partners, a strategy most regional capitals pursue, rather than exclusive alignment with any one power.

3. The Hasina flashpoint shows how a legacy grievance can override structural interest overnight. Whatever India's actual role in organising or merely permitting Hasina's address, the predictable Bangladeshi reaction, formal protest, media blackout, public anger, demonstrates how easily a single event connected to unresolved 2024-25 grievances can dominate the bilateral narrative and crowd out attention to genuinely resolvable issues like the Ganga Treaty renewal.

4. The counter-argument on Hasina deserves serious weight. An in-absentia death sentence from a tribunal whose independence international rights organisations have themselves questioned is not a simple diplomatic inconvenience; it places India in a genuinely difficult position between its own strategic interest in a stable neighbour relationship and any obligation, legal or humanitarian, toward an individual convicted under contested proceedings. This is not merely a case of India failing to manage optics.

5. The clearest evidence for a deliberate reset is the Ganga Treaty's technical-track progress. Renewal talks and joint Farakka Barrage measurements proceeding even amid the Hasina controversy show that pragmatic engagement on hard, structural issues can continue in parallel with political turbulence, if deliberately insulated from it. The editorial's core recommendation, **decoupling** structural tracks from legacy political tracks, is not hypothetical; it is already happening in this one case and could be replicated across trade, connectivity and border management.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

Sheikh Hasina's government fell August 2024 after a student-led uprising; interim government under Muhammad Yunus followed

Bangladesh general election: February 12, 2026; BNP under Tarique Rahman won 209 of 297 declared seats (299 constituencies, two withheld by court order); Jamaat-e-Islami won 68

India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla attended Rahman's inauguration

India resumed tourist visas for Bangladeshi nationals from June 28, 2026, ending a near two-year suspension

High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi (appointed April 27, 2026; assumed charge in Dhaka June 12, 2026) given Cabinet Minister-equivalent status in India's Table of Precedence, June 2026

Rahman's first major foreign visit: China, June 2026; 17 agreements signed; ties elevated to a "shared future" partnership

Sheikh Hasina: convicted in absentia, crimes against humanity, by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal, November 17, 2025; sentenced to death

Hasina's New Delhi virtual address: August 4-5, 2026, second anniversary of the 2024 uprising; hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia

Ganga Water Sharing Treaty: signed December 12, 1996; 30-year term; expires December 2026

WATCH THE TRAP: DO NOT WRITE THAT INDIA "ORGANISED" OR "SPONSORED" HASINA'S AUGUST 2026 ADDRESS. INDIA'S OFFICIAL POSITION WAS NON-INVOLVEMENT IN THE EVENT, WHICH WAS HOSTED BY A PRESS-CLUB BODY; CONFLATING THE VENUE (INDIAN SOIL) WITH ORGANISATION IS A FACTUAL OVERREACH AN EXAMINER MAY SPECIFICALLY TEST.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR reading the relationship as genuinely reset-ready. Both governments have taken concrete, costly steps, India's diesel aid and visa restoration, Bangladesh's continued technical engagement on the Ganga Treaty despite political noise, showing that pragmatic cooperation can proceed even without the harder political questions being resolved first. Reading every friction point as a permanent setback risks missing the steady, if unglamorous, progress on structural issues.

Argument AGAINST premature optimism. A relationship in which the head of government's first foreign trip goes to a strategic rival, and in which a single press event can trigger formal protest and domestic media suppression, has not yet developed the **resilience** a genuinely reset relationship requires. Gesture-based normalisation without a declared roadmap remains vulnerable to being undone by the next controversy, of which the Hasina question guarantees there will be more.

Balanced verdict. The relationship is neither in free fall nor genuinely reset; it is proceeding on two disconnected tracks, real but ad hoc goodwill gestures and real but siloed technical cooperation, without the connecting strategic framework that would make either durable. The editorial's recommendation, a declared, sequenced roadmap that deliberately separates legacy political questions from pragmatic engagement, addresses exactly this structural gap rather than either extreme reading.

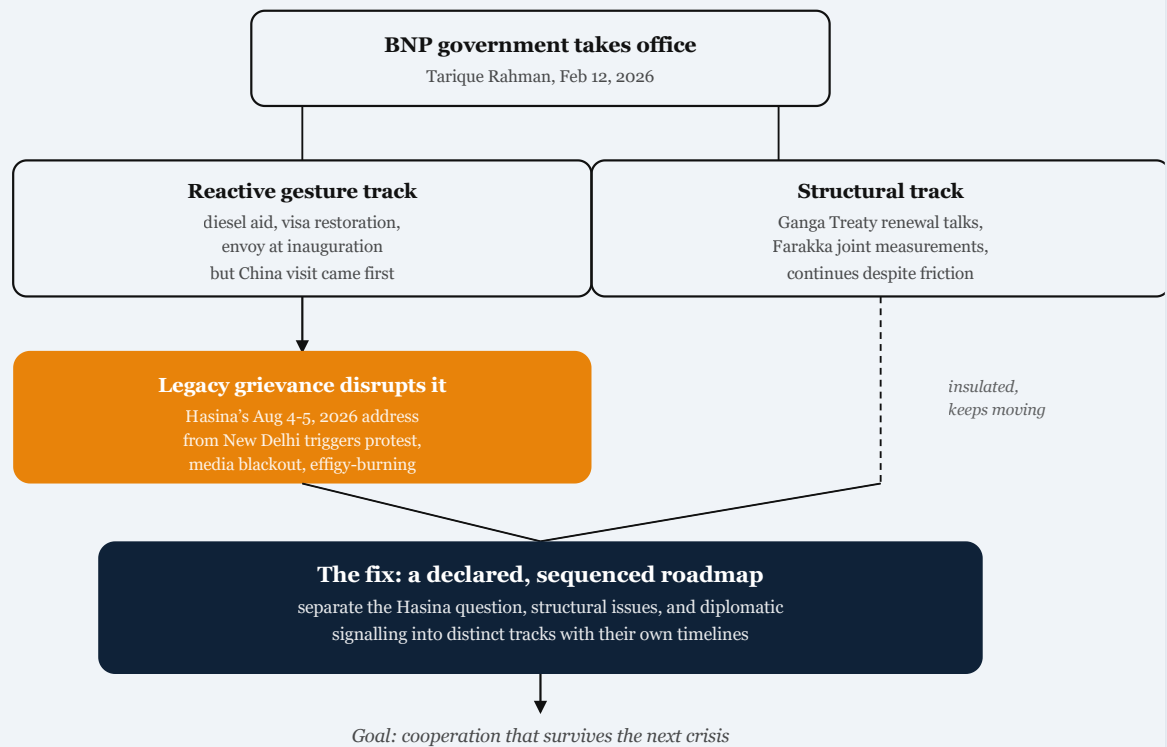
HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable pattern: **when assessing a bilateral relationship recovering from a political rupture, ask whether cooperation is proceeding on a declared, sequenced framework or only in response to individual events.** A relationship built entirely on reaction, however positive each individual reaction is, remains hostage to whichever crisis erupts next, because it has no independent structure holding it steady when that crisis hits.

Apply a three-part test to any post-rupture bilateral relationship. *Is there a publicly declared roadmap with sequenced, trackable deliverables, or only a series of individually announced gestures?* The presence of a roadmap indicates real strategic intent; its absence suggests reactive management. *Are structural, interest-based issues, water-sharing, trade, connectivity, being pursued on a track insulated from unresolved political grievances, or are they getting entangled with them?* Insulation is the marker of a maturing relationship. *Does the smaller partner's diplomatic signalling suggest exclusive alignment, or hedging across multiple powers?* Hedging is normal and does not by itself indicate hostility, and should not be read as a rejection requiring an alarmed response.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Two disconnected tracks since Feb 2026



India-Bangladesh relations are running on two disconnected tracks, ad hoc gestures repeatedly disrupted by legacy grievances, and structural cooperation that continues in parallel; a declared, sequenced roadmap would insulate the second track from the first.

TAKEAWAY BOX

A relationship survives its next crisis only if it has a structure independent of the crisis. India and Bangladesh have gestures and grievances in abundance; what they still lack is that structure.

*Hasina government fell **August 2024**; BNP won Bangladesh's **February 12, 2026** election under **Tarique Rahman** (209/297 declared seats); India's outreach included **FS Vikram Misri**, **Speaker Om Birla**, **diesel aid**, **HC Dinesh Trivedi** (Cabinet-rank), **visa resumption from June 28, 2026**; **Rahman's China visit, June 2026**, **17 agreements**; **Hasina convicted in absentia by the International Crimes Tribunal, November 17, 2025**; **her New Delhi address, August 4-5, 2026**; **Ganga Water Sharing Treaty (1996) expires December 2026**.*

when a neighbouring country's convicted former leader is present on your soil, does your government owe that country deference in managing her public activity, or does protecting free expression and asylum principles take precedence, and how should that balance be struck without becoming hostage to either side's domestic politics?

UPSC has repeatedly tested India's neighbourhood-first policy, river-water sharing disputes, and the effect of a neighbour's domestic political change on bilateral relations; this editorial supplies the current, specific instance, the BNP transition, the Hasina question, and the Ganga Treaty deadline, that a strong 2026 answer on India-Bangladesh relations needs.

"India-Bangladesh relations since Dhaka's political transition have been managed through reactive gestures rather than a deliberate strategic reset." Critically examine this statement and suggest a framework for a durable bilateral relationship.

Sources: *The Indian Express, PIB, Ministry of External Affairs, Press Information Bureau*

Source: Hostage to History: Why India-Bangladesh Ties Need a Deliberate Reset, Not Drift — Ujjayari.com | Free
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● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The editorial's argument is that India-Bangladesh relations, roughly two years after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in August 2024 and six months after the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's February 2026 election victory, remain captive to legacy political grievances, Hasina's continued presence and public statements from Indian soil, Dhaka's memory of the interim and pre-election period, and Delhi's caution toward a BNP government that has simultaneously courted China, rather than settling into the pragmatic, interest-based relationship both governments say they want, and that only a deliberate diplomatic reset, not the incremental, reactive normalisation seen so far, can break this pattern.



SUPPORTING

- Positive steps have been real but limited and reactive rather than strategic: India despatched Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's February 2026 inauguration, sent roughly 45,000 tonnes of diesel to Bangladesh amid a fuel shortage in April 2026, appointed senior political figure Dinesh Trivedi as High Commissioner with Cabinet Minister-equivalent status in the Table of Precedence, and resumed tourist visa services for Bangladeshi nationals from June 28, 2026, ending a nearly two-year suspension, each a response to a specific pressure point rather than part of a declared, forward-looking reset strategy.
- Dhaka's own signalling has been mixed in a way that undercuts any assumption of straightforward realignment toward India: Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's first major foreign visit after taking office was a four-day trip to China in June 2026, during which the two countries signed 17 agreements and elevated ties to a 'China-Bangladesh community with a shared future,' even as he described Bangladesh's foreign policy as 'not country-specific' and guided by national interest alone.
- The most acute recent flashpoint illustrates how legacy grievance actively displaces pragmatic engagement: Sheikh Hasina's virtual address from New Delhi on August 4-5, 2026, marking the second anniversary of the uprising that toppled her, drew a formal protest from Dhaka, a media blackout order citing an International Crimes Tribunal restriction, and public effigy-burning, even though India stated it was not involved in organising the event, which was hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia.
- Structural, interest-based issues that both sides say they want to resolve are being crowded out by this grievance cycle: the Ganga Water Sharing Treaty of 1996, with a 30-year term,

expires in December 2026, and while technical-level renewal talks have begun, including joint river-flow measurements at the Farakka Barrage, the treaty's renewal is proceeding without a broader trust-building framework that would make the eventual agreement politically durable on either side.



COUNTER

Some caution on India's part is not simply legacy grievance but a reasonable hedge against genuine uncertainty: Sheikh Hasina was convicted and sentenced to death in absentia by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal on November 17, 2025, for crimes against humanity connected to the 2024 crackdown, a verdict international rights groups have themselves flagged for fair-trial concerns, which makes any Indian decision on her status, extradition, or public activity a genuinely difficult one rather than a simple failure of diplomatic will, and Dhaka's own outreach to China does not preclude a substantive relationship with India, most major regional capitals hedge across multiple partners simultaneously.



WAY FORWARD

A deliberate reset requires decoupling three tracks that are currently entangled: the Hasina question, which should be handled through quiet legal and diplomatic channels rather than public events that predictably inflame Dhaka's domestic politics; structural bilateral issues, the Ganga Treaty renewal, Teesta water-sharing, land border management, and connectivity frameworks such as BBIN, which should be pursued on their own technical and economic merits with fixed timelines regardless of the political temperature; and diplomatic signalling, where India should treat Dhaka's China outreach as evidence for continuous, high-frequency engagement rather than a lens through which to view a single crisis. A publicly declared, joint roadmap with sequenced deliverables on trade, connectivity and river-water sharing would give both sides a pragmatic track to point to that does not depend on resolving the harder political questions first.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

'India-Bangladesh relations since Dhaka's change of government remain hostage to legacy political grievances on both sides, and require a deliberate diplomatic reset rather than continued drift.' Critically examine this statement with reference to recent developments in bilateral ties, and suggest a framework to decouple pragmatic engagement from domestic political narratives. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India-Bangladesh relations have moved through several inflection points since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in August 2024: an interim administration, a Bangladesh Nationalist Party election victory in February 2026 that brought Tarique Rahman to power, and a series of Indian outreach gestures met with a China-first diplomatic instinct from Dhaka. An Indian Express editorial argues the relationship remains hostage to legacy political grievances on both sides and needs a deliberate reset rather than the reactive normalisation attempted so far.

BODY

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, won a decisive victory in the general election held on February 12, 2026, securing 209 of the 297 declared seats (results for two Chattogram seats were withheld by court order out of 299 constituencies), comfortably crossing the 151-seat majority mark, against Jamaat-e-Islami's 68 seats. Prime Minister Modi congratulated Rahman and invited him to visit India, and New Delhi sent Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Speaker Om Birla to his inauguration, later sending roughly 45,000 tonnes of diesel amid a Bangladesh fuel shortage in April 2026 and elevating its High Commissioner, Dinesh Trivedi, to Cabinet Minister-equivalent status, alongside resuming tourist visas from June 28, 2026, after a near two-year suspension.

These were substantive gestures, but Rahman's own first major foreign engagement was a four-day visit to China in June 2026, where the two countries signed 17 agreements and upgraded ties to a 'shared future' partnership, and he has publicly framed Bangladesh's foreign policy as 'not country-specific,' leaving India's outreach without a clear reciprocal signal. The relationship's most visible recent strain came from a legacy-grievance flashpoint rather than a substantive policy dispute: Sheikh Hasina, in India since fleeing Dhaka in August 2024 and convicted in absentia of crimes against humanity by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal on November 17, 2025, delivered a virtual public address from New Delhi on August 4-5, 2026, on the second anniversary of the uprising against her, prompting a formal Bangladeshi protest, a domestic media blackout order, and public effigy-burning in Dhaka, despite India's stated non-involvement in organising the event.

Meanwhile, genuine structural issues that both governments have an interest in resolving, principally the Ganga Water Sharing Treaty of 1996, which expires in December 2026 after its 30-year term, and the long-pending Teesta water-sharing question, are being negotiated at a technical level even as the wider relationship oscillates between outreach and outrage over legacy political questions.

CONCLUSION

The path to a durable relationship requires India and Bangladesh to deliberately separate what can be resolved on pragmatic, interest-based terms, water-sharing, trade, connectivity, border management, from what remains a genuinely difficult, slower-moving legacy question, the political and legal status of Sheikh Hasina, so that progress on the former is not repeatedly derailed by flashpoints connected to the latter. A publicly sequenced bilateral roadmap, rather than reactive gestures following each crisis, would give both governments a shared, durable frame that survives the next controversy rather than being reset by it.

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