

When Bangladesh turmoil rubs northeast India



Comments 0



Nava Thakuria 19 May 2025 13579 views

The current interim government of Bangladesh, led by Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus, remains busy pursuing the final reports by a number of reform commissions with their proposals and subsequent discussions with the political party representatives. Even after nine months of its formation in Dhaka, the situation across the south Asian nation continues to be murky. Needless to mention that a sense of joy and expectation surfaced among nearly 170 million Bangladeshi nationals, when the caretaker government was constituted following a massive student-led uprising compelled sitting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign and flee (to India) on 5 August last year. Enjoying the overwhelming popularity, Prof Yunus also termed the July-August 2024 rebellion (popularly called as Monsoon Revolution) as the second freedom movement and the octogenarian banker turned social business preacher opined how a new Bangladesh was possible with important reforms in various sectors.

The government maintains its optimism about the exercises and lately declared that the country will go for the next general elections latest by June 2026, even though some political leaders are demanding the polls by December this year. Amid political confusions and continued deterioration of the law & order situation across the Muslim majority nation, the country recently witnessed an uproarious situation after a commission (dedicated for the welfare of women) submitted its suggestions advocating more freedom & benefits to the Bangladeshi better halves. A number of Islamist parties, which are now gaining more ground across the densely populated country, surrounded by India, Myanmar and the Bay of Bengal, hit the streets with a massive participation of agitators.

Recently, the authorities banned all kinds of activities for Awami League (the party which was instrumental in the freedom movement giving birth to sovereign Bangladesh out of Pakistan) under a revised anti-terrorism law. Later the Bangladesh Election Commission suspended the registration of Awami League, which ruled the country since 2009 (till August 2024), making it almost clear that the deposed premier Hasina may not be able to participate in the up-coming polls. It was followed by a dramatic escape of former Bangladesh President Mohammad Abdul Hamid to Thailand to avoid legal procedures in his home country. The former lawmaker belonging to the suspended party has been co-accused in a murder case and he was under police investigation along with many Awami League top leaders.

Often controversies relating to the integrity of northeast India also surfaced in Bangladesh. The recent one involved Prof Yunus as he recently commented that there should be an 'integrated economic plan' for Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and North-east'. He also underlined the potential of cross-border collaboration in various sectors like hydropower, healthcare, tourism and road connectivity. But his comments on the integrated economic plan invited strong reactions from various corners in India. Citing his earlier China visit, where Prof Yunus pursued Beijing for taking a position in making Bangladesh as a key regional partner for production, logistics and trades, the critics expressed annoyance that he unnecessarily brought India's far-eastern parts under a probable economic roadmap for the advantage of Beijing.

Mentioning northeast India as 'Seven sisters', Prof Yunus argued that the landlocked region has 'no way to reach out' to the ocean bypassing Bangladesh, even though he avoided mentioning about the under-construction Kaladan multi-modal riverine project, designed to connect Sittwe port in western Myanmar with northeast India for trade related activities. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma denounced the statement of Prof Yunus as offensive and condemnable as it endorses the vulnerability narrative for Siliguri corridor (popularly known as Chicken's Neck) to connect North-east through the land route. Tipra Motha chief Pradyut Debbarma also criticized Prof Yunus for the provocative statement, saying that North-east is not dependent on anyone for its growth. Deputy leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi and former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh also termed the Yunus statement as irresponsible.

Responding to the controversy, a close aide of Prof Yunus in Dhaka, clarified that he made this observation through the lens of a cross border economic perspective and it has nothing to do with politics or integrity of any nation. Prof Yunus was simply trying to make his point for creating economic opportunities for dwellers of the entire region. He emphasized that the region needs to 'build things, produce things and market things'. If Nepal (currently supplying 40 megawatt power, whereas over 2,500 Nepali students pursuing higher education in Bangladesh) and Bhutan share adequate electricity, the country would enhance the production quality for the products meant for global markets, stated the Bangladeshi individual, adding that China can also be a useful market for those products, which are usually cheaper even after maintaining the international quality.

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