*Research note*

# India-Bangladesh borders after the July–August 2024 uprising: A future unfolds beyond our conventional knowledge

## AKM Ahsan Ullah[1] (iD)

## Abstract

This study explores the intersection of porous borders, political mobility, and governance through an analysis of the India-Bangladesh border during the July–August 2024 uprising. Drawing on qualitative interviews with border officials, smugglers, affected families, and political figures, it examines how political elites exploited the porous border to evade accountability amidst the collapse of the Awami League government. The findings reveal the entrenched role of *dalals* (middlemen) in facilitating illegal border crossings through bribery, forged documents, and strategic coordination with local authorities on both sides. The study also highlights the complicity of state actors and the socio-political dynamics that sustain these networks, reinforcing corruption and undermining state sovereignty. Theoretical insights from border theory, state sovereignty, and political mobility emphasize how transnational networks blur the boundaries of state authority, allowing elites to evade justice and perpetuate authoritarian practices. By interrogating the dual role of borders as barriers and conduits, the research contributes to a broader understanding of governance, power asymmetries, and the socio-political impact of elite flight in contested borderlands.

## Keywords

authoritarianism, border theory, India-Bangladesh border, political elites, smuggling networks

## Introduction

Spanning approximately 4096 kilometers, the India-Bangladesh border ranks as the fifth longest international border globally and holds profound historical, political, and economic significance for both nations. Traversing five Indian states—West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram—this border has been a focal point of enduring political disputes, cross-border trade,

[1]Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam

**Corresponding author:**
AKM Ahsan Ullah, Geography, Development and Environment, FASS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Jln Tungku Link, Gadong, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam.
Email: akmahsanullah@gmail.com; ahsan.ullah@ubd.edu.bn

irregular migration, and persistent security challenges since the partition of British India in 1947 (Ahsan Ullah and Ferdous, 2024; Ghosh, 2023). Initially delineated with the establishment of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and India, its significance was further amplified following the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, during which Bangladesh secured its independence with critical support from India (Lamb, 2019). This historical backdrop underscores the border's dual role as a site of both cooperation and contention, shaping bilateral relations and regional geopolitics over decades.

Politically, the India-Bangladesh border has been a site of both collaboration and contention, reflecting the complexities of their bilateral relationship. India's pivotal role in independence in 1971 initially fostered strong ties between the two nations. However, persistent issues such as irregular migration and unresolved territorial disputes continue to challenge their relationship (Jones, 2012). A major diplomatic milestone was the signing of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, which successfully addressed the longstanding issue of territorial enclaves, or *chitmahals*, that had rendered thousands stateless for decades. Despite this progress, tensions endure, primarily due to challenges such as unauthorized border crossings, smuggling, and ongoing border security concerns.

Economically, the border plays a vital role, serving as a linchpin for cross-border trade between the two countries. Bilateral trade has shown consistent growth, recently reaching approximately US $10 billion annually (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2021). As one of the largest trading partners of Bangladesh, India engages in the exchange of key goods such as textiles, agricultural products, and heavy machinery. Strategic border checkpoints and land ports, including the Benapole-Petrapole corridor, have emerged as critical trade hubs, underscoring the economic interdependence of the two nations and the border's significance in facilitating regional commerce. Security and migration concerns further complicate border dynamics. Irregular migration remains a contentious issue as there is significant migration from Bangladesh to India and vice versa, fueling political debates over national security and demographic changes in both countries (Rahman, 2023).

## The Bangladesh-India relationship and the border

Relations between India and Bangladesh have been deeply influenced by the political dynamics within Bangladesh, with India demonstrating a clear preference for engaging with the Awami League, particularly under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This alignment is largely attributed to the support of the party for India's regional security priorities (Chowdhury, 2013; Gupta, 2024). However, this close association has drawn criticism for sidelining the broader public interest in Bangladesh. Critics argue that India's backing of the Awami League undermines democratic processes and enables the government's drift toward authoritarianism. India's apparent tolerance of internal repression, electoral irregularities, and human rights violations suggests a prioritization of strategic stability over democratic principles (Majumdar, 2014; Rahman, 2023).

This selective engagement with the Awami League has significant implications for border relations between India and Bangladesh. Under Awami League rule, Bangladesh has rarely voiced its concerns over the frequent killings of Bangladeshi civilians by the Indian Border Security Force, a long-standing grievance among the Bangladeshi public (Dossani, 2024). In contrast, the governments of other political parties, such as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, have been more vocal about the violence on the border and human rights violations. The silence of the Awami League on these issues despite reports of numerous civilian deaths at the hands of the Border Security Force highlights the extent to which border relations between India and Bangladesh depend on

which party is in power in Dhaka. As Smruti Pattanaik (2020) notes, the Awami League government has downplayed border incidents in exchange for political support from India, reinforcing the impression that India prefers stable, compliant neighbors, even at the expense of Bangladesh's democratic aspirations.

The unconditional support for this party has favored the erosion of democratic norms and contributed to the rise of authoritarianism in Bangladesh (Chowdhury and Bikram, 2021). Therefore, three consecutive election victories in 2014, 2018, and 2024, which were widely criticized for irregularities, voter suppression, and fraud, have highlighted this trend. Despite this criticism, India has continued its support for this party (Chowdhury and Bikram, 2021), which has emboldened the Awami League to retain its power, regardless of domestic and international criticism.

India's geopolitical interests—such as water-sharing agreements and concerns over radicalism—have led it to prioritize stability over democracy in Bangladesh, which has inadvertently reinforced the Awami League's authoritarian tendencies (International Crisis Group, 2018; Walker, 2024). Without pressure from India, the ruling party saw little reason to address the demands of the opposition or allow more competitive elections, leading to a systematic suppression of political dissent, media freedom, and civil society (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Transparency International, 2018).

## Objectives and methods

This study examines the mechanisms through which Bangladeshi political elites exploited the porous borders between India and Bangladesh to evade accountability after the collapse of the Awami League government (Curtis, 2025; Nowsher, 2024; **Sujan, 2025**). It examines the intersections between the mobility of the political elite, border security, and the role of dalals (middlemen) in facilitating illegal border crossings. It emphasizes the structural weaknesses in border enforcement and the political dynamics that enable such mobility. The main objectives of the study are to uncover the methods used by political figures to evade prosecution, to understand the role of dalals in this process, and to examine the socio-political impact of this exodus on Bangladesh-India relations.

Research in this area typically utilizes a qualitative method, including interviews, case studies, and document analysis, to examine how borders facilitate elite flight and migration. Common methods include structured interviews with border officials, policy analysts and smugglers, as well as analyzing government documents, media reports, and legal frameworks related to border controls and extraditions. This study prioritized qualitative methods, in particular interviews with people directly involved in border crossings, which provide crucial insights into the informal mechanisms that enable political elites to evade justice.

For this particular research, data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted from August 5 to December 15, 2024. The study focused on 28 dalals or smugglers who were directly involved in facilitating the escape of ousted Bangladeshi political leaders across the India-Bangladesh border. In addition to interviewing the dalals, I spoke with a diverse group of participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of the border dynamics. This included two Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) officials responsible for overseeing border management, one local officer stationed in a border town involved in monitoring activities, and three police officers from districts near the border who were involved in maintaining order during the political crisis. I also interviewed two academics specializing in South Asian border dynamics and migration studies, along with one expert on India-Bangladesh relations and South Asian geopolitics. Additionally, I conducted interviews with four political figures who fled or attempted to flee to India, as well as two families of individuals who were victims of unauthorized crossings or the uprisings. The

respondents were selected through snowballing, a method commonly used to research hidden or hard-to-reach populations. Initial contact was made through local informants who were familiar with border operations. Interviewees then referred others who were involved in similar activities.

The massive student protests began in early July 2024, and we closely monitored the unfolding situation. Initially, our research plan focused on the student-led movement against tyranny. However, following the fleeing of former Prime Minister on August 5, reports emerged of political leaders fleeing illegally to India. As we began data collection, the research focus organically shifted to this emerging phenomenon, shaping the present study. The interviews and analysis were conducted only after the events had unfolded. Therefore, no assumptions were made prior to the events, nor was the study preemptively written. With the interim government now taking strict measures, unauthorized border crossings have slowed down.

Interviews with government officials and policy analysts provided insight into the regulatory and enforcement frameworks, while engaging with affected community members can shed light on the social and economic implications of border dynamics. By triangulating data from multiple sources, the research offered a more nuanced analysis of border governance, power dynamics, and the lived experiences of those navigating these contested spaces.

The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to speak openly about their experiences while answering the main research questions. As the interviews were conducted in the border regions, it ensured that the smugglers felt comfortable talking about their involvement in such high-risk activities. The interviews focused on understanding the logistics of border crossings, the financial and political motivations of the Dalals, and the extent of their co-operation with local authorities and political networks. This methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of the hidden networks that facilitate political escape and illustrates how porous borders can be manipulated by elites to evade justice.

Addressing the ethical considerations in this research is crucial, particularly given the sensitive nature of data collection from participants involved in illegal activities such as smuggling. Hence, the study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the safety, data confidentiality, and informed consent of all participants. Prior to each interview, participants were briefed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Consent was obtained verbally to protect the identities of participants who might be uncomfortable with signed documentation due to the legal implications of their activities. Anonymity was maintained throughout the research process by assigning pseudonyms to all interviewees and ensuring that no identifying information was recorded. Also, pseudonyms were used in reporting findings to prevent attribution, and sensitive details were carefully redacted to mitigate potential risks. Data was securely stored in encrypted digital files, accessible only to the principal researcher, to prevent any potential breaches of confidentiality. The study also avoided questions that could directly incriminate participants, focusing instead on broader patterns of border dynamics and the socio-economic factors influencing their involvement in these activities.

## Theoretical issues

The theoretical framework for understanding the exodus of fallen political figures across borders to escape justice draws on several key theories in political science, international relations, and migration studies. This phenomenon can be analyzed through the lens of state sovereignty, border theory, the political mobility of elites, and extradition dynamics (Anderson, 1996) by looking at how permeable borders allow political elites to evade accountability and showing that borders serve as both physical and symbolic barriers to justice.

This analysis centers on state sovereignty, which defines a state's authority over its territory, with borders regulating the flow of people, goods, and information (Anderson, 1996). However, borders are more than physical boundaries; they are spaces of power and negotiation. The porous India-Bangladesh border demonstrates the limits of sovereignty, especially when officials or elites exploit it to evade justice. As border theory suggests, borders are socially constructed and contested, strictly enforced in some cases but selectively overlooked when elites find legal loopholes (Rumford, 2006). This selective permeability explains how Bangladeshi elites navigate formal sovereignty to escape into India. Elite political mobility theory further explains how wealth, networks, and influence enable elites to flee during regime crises (Gibney and Hansen, 2005). In the Bangladesh-India case, India's geopolitical interests make it a preferred destination for fleeing elites. From a realist perspective, India's reluctance to extradite these individuals highlights a focus on national interests over legal obligations, reinforcing selective border enforcement (Balibar, 2002; Waltz, 1979).

Political exile theory explains how elites use exile to escape persecution, ensure their safety, and potentially reorganize politically in a welcoming environment (Shain, 1989). In Bangladesh, fallen political leaders often cross borders when a regime collapses, using them as escape routes rather than barriers (Curtis, 2025; Nowsher, 2024; **Sujan, 2025**). This aligns with migration theory, especially forced migration, where elites flee not for economic reasons but due to the loss of political protection, leaving them vulnerable to retaliation (Castles, 2003).

These theories, particularly border theory, state sovereignty, and elite mobility, are crucial to understanding how Bangladeshi political elites exploit the India-Bangladesh border to evade justice. The porous and contested nature of the border, as highlighted in van Schendel's (2005) work, parallels the examination of how political elites evade accountability through these regions. The manipulation of borders by powerful actors, as discussed by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) and Scott (2009), complements the examination of the role of smugglers and corrupt officials in facilitating illegal border crossings and highlights how borders can be instrumentalized for political and personal gain.

The ideas from scholars like Anderson (1996), Donnan and Wilson (1999), and Scott (2009) help explain how borders are not just fixed lines but fluid spaces that shape political and social realities, especially in South Asia, where borders are often porous. These theories show how political figures in Bangladesh use border dynamics to escape justice, with state complicity and manipulation playing a key role in enabling such movements.

Traditionally, political studies have focused on what happens within a country—its institutions, government, and political behavior. Border studies, however, look at how state control, movement, and cross-border interactions influence politics. Anderson (1996) points out that borders define a country's power by regulating people, goods, and ideas. The India-Bangladesh border illustrates this, acting as both a barrier and a passage for informal networks. By looking at how smugglers, corrupt officials, and political elites used these border spaces during the 2024 uprising, this study shows that borders are not just controlled by states but are also shaped by those who navigate them, revealing both the power and the weaknesses of state control.

The study of the India-Bangladesh border during political crises underscores how borders are leveraged by regimes to sustain power. Hirschman's (1972) framework of "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" illustrates how porous borders provide an escape mechanism for political elites, reducing pressure for internal reform. This dynamic reinforces authoritarian tendencies by enabling regimes to suppress dissent while ensuring safety valves for the ruling elite.

The India-Bangladesh border is not just a dividing line but a space of interaction that affects both domestic and international politics. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) argue that borders shape

governance by allowing movement and exchanges, not just blocking them. This means that net-works of smugglers, political allies, and other transnational actors can weaken or strengthen state control. The 2024 uprising showed how elites used these border dynamics to move across regions, revealing the complexities of state power in such areas. To fully understand these border dynamics, we need to combine insights from both border studies and comparative politics. Traditional political theories, like realism (Waltz, 1979), focus on state interests, while newer approaches, such as Rumford's (2006) view of borders as negotiated spaces, highlight their evolving nature. A mixed-method approach—using ethnography, case studies, and comparative analysis—helps capture both the local realities of border communities and the broader political structures shaping them. Borders are more than physical barriers; they are shaped by history, politics, and social movements (Newman, 2006). The July–August 2024 uprising along the India-Bangladesh border demonstrated this, as various groups challenged state control and redefined borderland identities. These events show why comparative politics should incorporate border studies, as borders influence state sover-eignty, security, and identity in ways that traditional political analysis alone cannot fully explain.

Moreover, comparative politics provides tools to analyze how border management policies affect governance and political stability. The India-Bangladesh border, shaped by complex histories of partition, migration, and economic interdependence, serves as a case study for understanding how borders impact state-society relations. This perspective aligns with Jones and Johnson's (2016) argument that borders are produced and reproduced through policies and practices that reflect broader political and economic ideologies. By integrating these insights, the study can explore how comparative political frameworks explain variations in border governance and their implications for regional stability.

The concept of bordering, as introduced by Paasi (1999), further enriches this integration. Bordering processes highlight how political actors, institutions, and societies actively construct and reconstruct borders to serve specific agendas. Comparative politics, with its focus on institu-tional analysis and political behavior, can unpack how these bordering processes shape and are shaped by electoral politics, policy making, and intergovernmental relations. For example, the pol-itical narratives surrounding the India-Bangladesh border often oscillate between securitization and economic cooperation, reflecting the interplay between domestic political considerations and regional geopolitics.

Integrating border studies into a comparative politics framework calls for an analysis of how bor-ders influence identity politics. Borders often become sites where ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities are contested and renegotiated, as seen in the borderlands of India and Bangladesh. Theoretical contributions by Balibar (2002) on borders as instruments of inclusion and exclusion can provide a comparative lens to examine how state practices at the border influence social cohe-sion and conflict. The India-Bangladesh border, particularly in the aftermath of the 2024 uprising, serves as a powerful case study that demonstrates the necessity of this integration. By examining borders as sites of power, negotiation, and transnationalism, comparative politics can move beyond state-centric paradigms to encompass the complexities of a globalized, interconnected political landscape.

## Authoritarianism and public discontent

The ex-Awami League government in Bangladesh, which was in power from 2009 to 2024, is facing numerous accusations of human rights violations and abuse of power. Over the past 16 years, it has been accused of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, abductions, and rampant cor-ruption, among other things. Reports from human rights organizations and international observers

paint a grim picture of authoritarian governance under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, in which state-sanctioned violence has become a tool for maintaining power. The main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, estimated that 2.5 million members faced politically motivated prosecutions, i.e. 2.5 million cases (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Human Rights Watch and various news sources estimate that thousands of people, including political opponents, have been killed in extrajudicial operations since the Awami League came to power (Hasan, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2021). However, due to government restrictions and media censorship, no outlet has been able to disclose the exact number of victims or provide a comprehensive account of such killings during the Awami League regime. Many of these killings targeted political opponents, activists, and ordinary citizens and bypassed the judicial process. In addition, around 3500 people have been forcibly disappeared without their fate being known, representing a further blatant disregard for the rule of law (Amnesty International, 2023; Bhattacharjee, 2024; NDTV, 2024).

One of the most egregious cases of state violence occurred on May 5, 2023, when security forces violently suppressed protests by Islamic students. After a deliberate media blackout, around 3000 students were killed, showing that the regime used extreme violence to suppress dissent (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In addition to this violence, the AL's governance was characterized by massive corruption. During its tenure, around US$130 billion was siphoned off the country through illegal channels (Ahsan Ullah and Huque, 2019; Wahiduzzaman, 2024). This financial misconduct has paralyzed the economy, exacerbated inequality, and further undermined public trust in state institutions (Transparency International, 2022). The government's consolidation of power also extended to the military, as seen in 2009 when 61 senior army officers were killed, indicating deep political instability and a desire to neutralize perceived threats (Riaz and Parvez, 2021).

The forced resignation and exile of Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha in 2017 was a direct attack on the independence of the judiciary and a sign of the increasingly autocratic tendencies of the Awami League (*Al Jazeera*, 2017), further undermining democratic institutions. The erosion of democracy continued with the violent suppression of opposition protests in July and August 2024, in which around 1600 people, including students, were killed during widespread unrest (Rashid, 2024; Reuters, 2024). The government's violent suppression of dissent emphasizes its desire to maintain power through intimidation and violence (Amnesty International, 2024).

In addition to these abuses, the unsolved robbery of the Bangladesh Central Bank in 2016, in which US$81 million was stolen, has further undermined public confidence as allegations have been made that the government may have been involved in the heist (Hosen, 2022; Rahman, 2023). A recent white paper on Bangladesh's economy, presented to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, estimates that approximately US$234 billion was illicitly siphoned out of the country, with some flows reportedly involving India (*India Today*, 2024). The report underscores significant economic mismanagement during Sheikh Hasina's administration, framing the Yunus-led government as inheriting a severely strained economy. It further claims that an average of US$16 billion was unlawfully diverted from Bangladesh annually during Hasina's tenure, described as a period of "corrupt autocracy." The regime's alleged misgovernance is said to have culminated in a state of economic devastation, coinciding with Hasina's departure following a widespread popular uprising (*Business Standard*, 2024). High-profile cases such as the murder of journalists Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi in 2012 remain unsolved. The case has been adjourned in court more than 112 times and is an example of the general climate of impunity in the country (*Daily Star*, 2023). These events illustrate the systematic dismantling of democratic institutions under the Awami League government, which has been replaced by an increasingly authoritarian regime focused on consolidating power at all costs.

## Borders, powers, and authoritarian regimes

India's steadfast support, particularly on strategic issues, has inadvertently contributed to the erosion of democratic institutions in Bangladesh. This alignment has emboldened political leaders who either assumed that they could retreat across the porous India-Bangladesh border in the face of political unrest or believed their power to be unassailable and perpetual (Kapoor, 2024). Such perceptions foster a culture of impunity, as leaders operate under the assumption that they can secure refuge in India if the domestic political situation becomes untenable. This dynamic, combined with the assurance of regional backing, undermines accountability and weakens democratic governance in Bangladesh (Pattanaik, 2020; Rahman, 2023).

The porous border between India and Bangladesh has played a pivotal role in enabling authoritarian regimes to entrench their power. It offers political elites an escape route to evade legal and political repercussions should their governments collapse. Following the regime's downfall on August 5, 2024, Sheikh Hasina fled the country, leaving behind a political vacuum and triggering widespread unrest. Numerous government officials, MPs, and Awami League leaders also sought refuge in India, facilitated by the permeability of the border.

Theoretical frameworks such as Hirschman's (1972) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* posit that regimes with low barriers to exit are more inclined to suppress dissent (voice), as they anticipate the option of escape if deposed. In the context of Bangladesh, the historically porous border with India has served as a lifeline for the ruling elite, shielding them from potential prosecution for corruption or human rights violations. This "safety net" undermines incentives for fair governance or democratic reform, as leaders are less compelled to engage in democratic processes when an escape route remains readily available. Path dependency theory (Pierson, 2000) further elucidates how authoritarian practices become entrenched when institutional frameworks support their perpetuation. The enduring cross-border networks and informal practices between Bangladesh and India have likely reinforced systemic corruption and authoritarianism by enabling elites to evade legal accountability.

Transnationalism (Faist, 2000) provides additional insights, highlighting how cross-border dynamics between India and Bangladesh blur traditional notions of state sovereignty. The ease of crossing borders reflects deep-rooted socio-political connections that shape governance, empowering regimes to project influence transnationally or seek refuge when their power is threatened. In Bangladesh, the ability of political elites to flee not only erodes public trust but also exposes governance vulnerabilities, illustrating how porous borders can sustain authoritarian practices by enabling leaders to act with impunity. The large-scale exodus of Awami League politicians between July 15 and December 15, 2024 underscores this dynamic. Around 500 Awami League leaders have reportedly entered India illegally with the help of human traffickers, known locally as dalals, operating on both sides of the border. The porous border, which has long been a site of connectivity and contention, plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by both countries.

## The Bangladesh-India border: Geography and porosity

India's geographical proximity makes it a logical refuge for Bangladeshi politicians during periods of political instability. Stretching from West Bengal in the north to Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya in the northeast, the border traverses diverse terrains, including rivers, forests, and agricultural land. This geographical complexity, coupled with logistical challenges, renders effective border control a persistent challenge. Despite sustained efforts to secure the border, issues such as smuggling, human trafficking, and unauthorized crossings remain prevalent. While official checkpoints are

monitored by the Border Security Force on the Indian side and the BGB on the Bangladeshi side, unofficial routes remain highly active. These unofficial crossings are often facilitated by entrenched local networks of human traffickers and smugglers, who exploit the porous nature of the border to enable cross-border movements (Jones and Ferdoush, 2018). The socio-economic and cultural ties between border communities further complicate enforcement, as these connections enable undetected crossings, particularly when financial incentives are at play.

*Political ties and the role of India.* Hasina's government has earned the favor of New Delhi, particularly that of the Bharatiya Janata Party, through important measures such as cracking down on so-called insurgent groups that have long been a concern for India. Analysts say the relationship was based on the fact that Hasina's demand from India was to keep her in power, and that in reciprocity India can get anything it needs, meaning this relationship has disproportionately favored India's strategic interests, with minimal reciprocal concessions. A notable example is India's access to transit corridors through Bangladesh and the use of Bangladeshi ports such as Chittagong and Mongla to facilitate trade with the north-eastern states. These significant concessions were granted without India making corresponding demands, reflecting an unbalanced partnership. This dynamic has been publicly recognized by Prime Minister Hasina herself. She once said, "India can never forget what I have given them" (*Bangla Tribune*, 2018), underscoring the extent to which her government has prioritized maintaining favorable relations with India, sometimes at the expense of national interests. This has drawn criticism within Bangladesh, where many view these concessions as compromising sovereignty without receiving commensurate benefits in return (Pattanaik, 2020; Rahman, 2023).

## Findings

A considerable number of former ministers, MPs, government officials, and executives allied with the Sheikh Hasina administration orchestrated their escapes through clandestine networks of dalals, operating across the porous India-Bangladesh border. These dalals not only facilitated covert crossings but also enabled the evasion of border security and intelligence agencies. This arrangement allowed political figures to flee the country undetected, though dependence on such informal networks carried significant risks. In several instances, escape plans were exposed, leading to arrests and public humiliation.

The operations of these dalals exploited weak border enforcement, particularly in remote areas with minimal oversight. Reports suggest that former officials paid substantial sums for services that included forged documents, safe houses, and secure passage into India (Rahman, 2023). While dalals have historically been involved in cross-border migration and human trafficking, their collaboration with high-ranking political figures represented a notable expansion of their activities. This dependence on illicit networks highlights the pervasive corruption under the Awami League's tenure, where entrenched patronage systems allowed unlawful practices to thrive. Law enforcement and officials often turned a blind eye in exchange for personal gains, further entrenching systemic corruption (Thapa, 2023).

*Negotiation between smugglers and the smuggled.* The negotiation process between smugglers and the smuggled, usually fallen political elites, is a highly strategic and calculated affair. According to several dalals interviewed, the smugglers first set the terms of the journey, including financial compensation, routes, and methods of crossing the border. The political figures who wish to

flee, referred to as "clients," are assessed on the basis of their political importance, with higher risk individuals receiving a higher fee.

One smuggler said: "The more famous the person is, the higher the risk for us. So, we charge more. The price can be between US$50,000 and US$100,000 for a high-ranking politician, and we ask for half the money up front" (Smuggler 1). Payment is usually made in stages, with an initial sum—around 50–60% of the total cost—paid before the crossing. This advance payment covers important logistical arrangements, including bribes for border officials and securing safe routes.

Smuggler 5 explained the process:

> We only make the arrangements after we have received half of the money. If they don't pay the rest after crossing the border, we have ways and means to deal with them. Sometimes we inform the border officials to detain them before they are safe. (Smuggler 5)

If payment is not finalized after crossing the border, a betrayal often occurs where the smugglers tip off the authorities, leading to the arrest of the political figures. This method not only ensures that the smugglers receive full payment but also protects their network from detection, securing future operations.

*Indian-Bangladeshi smuggler coordination.* Coordination between smugglers on both the Bangladeshi and Indian sides of the border is a key factor in the success of these clandestine operations. These smuggling networks are well organized and include trusted agents who organize the safe transport and accommodation of fleeing political figures. Smuggler 9 explains the meticulous coordination involved: "We communicate with our people in India via encrypted messages. As soon as the person crosses the border, we inform them, and they take care of everything on that side" (Smuggler 9). This cross-border co-operation is crucial to ensure that the refugees are not detected once they reach Indian territory. The smugglers on the Indian side play a crucial role in providing safe houses, organizing transportation, and in some cases obtaining fake identity documents that allow political figures to move freely within India and evade the authorities. The seamless coordination between actors on both sides reflects the deep-rooted networks that facilitate these illegal escapes and emphasizes the complexity and sophistication of such operations.

*Payment methods and bribes.* The smugglers who carry out these operations usually receive their payments through informal channels, including cash transactions and the use of hundi, an informal remittance system widely used in South Asia. Bribery plays a central role in the successful execution of these escapes, as both Bangladeshi and Indian border officials are paid to overlook illegal border crossings and ensure that patrols are not deployed at certain sections of the border. One border official admitted:

> Yes, some of us are paid to look the other way. We know who is crossing the border and when, but the price they pay us depends on how sensitive the situation is. It can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars for each border crossing. (Border Guard 1)

These bribes are often negotiated directly by the smugglers, who use their relationships with border officials to secure co-operation.

Smuggler 3 illustrated the extent of this coordination:

We know which border officials to talk to and we have an agreement. We give them a share of the revenue and they make sure our customers cross the border safely. Without this, it would be impossible to do our job. (Smuggler 3)

This realization underlines the entrenchment of corruption in the system and highlights the complicity of local authorities in enabling such illegal activities.

The politicians who crossed the Bangladesh-India border paid the smugglers large sums of money, ranging from US$5000 to US$500,000 depending on political rank, influence, and wealth (Louis, 2024). Although these figures may seem exaggerated, they reflect the corrupt political climate in Bangladesh under the Awami League, where money laundering and financial misconduct were rife. During Sheikh Hasina's 16-year tenure, an estimated US$150 billion was channeled out of the country through illegal channels (*Daily Star*, 2024).

This financial windfall for traders is a direct result of the wealth these politicians have amassed during their time in power. Corruption scandals, kickbacks from development projects, and embezzled international aid funds have contributed to the personal wealth of many politicians (Griffith Asia Institute, 2024). As a result, paying large sums of money to traffickers for safe passage out of the country was likely only a minor financial burden for these individuals. These transactions highlight the extent to which political power in Bangladesh is intertwined with personal enrichment.

*Routes, vehicles, and crossings.* The physical process of crossing the border between India and Bangladesh varies greatly depending on location and risk. Smuggler 8 emphasized the strategic considerations that guide these operations: "There are at least 10 main routes that we use to cross the border, and each of them has its own challenges. Some are heavily guarded, while others are more relaxed. We study the situation before making a decision" (Smuggler 8). The most common routes for political figures are crossing rivers, using boats, or navigating through rural areas with minimal government surveillance, each of which presents unique logistical challenges.

Smuggler 6 elaborated further on the use of vehicles:

We usually use vans or lorries to get people to the border areas. Then they cross the border by boat or on foot, depending on the route. Some use public buses, but this is risky if they are well-known personalities. (Smuggler 6)

Boat crossings across rivers such as the Padma or the Meghna are particularly common, especially at night when visibility is poor and more discreet movement is possible.

Coordination between the smugglers on both sides of the border is essential to the success of these operations. Smuggler 4 explains: "As soon as they reach the Indian side, they are handed over to our people there. They know the safe houses and how to continue to India without being detected" (Smuggler 4). This transnational network ensures seamless communication and co-operation, provides clients with temporary shelter, and secures their onward journey to India. Such coordination underlines the well-organized nature of these smuggling operations, which ensure that political figures are not detected and reach their final destination safely.

*Arrests and failed escapes.* The dalals played a crucial role as mediators in facilitating the illegal border crossing for political figures who wanted to flee Bangladesh by providing them safe passage and ensuring that they were not arrested. A well-known example is the case of Judge Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, who was apprehended at the border while trying to flee to India. The

widespread use of such informal channels underlines the desperation of the former Awami League elites and the erosion of the rule of law after their fall from power. Despite the meticulous planning of the smugglers, not every escape attempt is successful. Several political figures have been arrested in their escape attempts, often due to failures in coordination or last-minute betrayals. Border Guard 2 said: "We have caught a few high-ranking personalities trying to cross the border. It's not always easy, but sometimes we get tips. Sometimes the smugglers themselves inform us when something goes wrong" (Border Guard 2).

Smuggler 7 continued: "If the customer refuses to pay the agreed money after the crossing, we have no choice but to inform the authorities. It's a risky business and we can't afford to lose money" (Smuggler 7). Such scams are usually due to financial disputes where the customer pays too little or refuses to pay the balance after the successful crossing to India.

Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, a former Bangladesh High Court judge, had close ties to the Awami League government and faced allegations of political bias in several high-profile cases (*Al Jazeera*, 2019). Following the collapse of the regime (Curtis, 2025; Nowsher, 2024; **Sujan, 2025**), he became the target of legal investigations and public outrage due to his controversial judgments and alleged complicity with the government's authoritarian practices. In a dramatic twist, Judge Manik was arrested at the Bangladesh-India border when he tried to flee after enlisting the help of a dalal to stage his escape. Like many other political figures, he saw India as a safe haven where he could evade prosecution. However, his arrest at the border highlighted the risks involved in relying on informal channels and middlemen to evade the authorities.

The interviews with key stakeholders—including border enforcement officials, local police, academics, political elites, and affected families—offer valuable insights into the multifaceted dynamics of the India-Bangladesh border during the July–August 2024 uprising. The excerpts reflect the intersection of systemic weaknesses, geopolitical maneuvering, and socio-economic inequalities that shaped the border's role as both a barrier and a conduit during the crisis.

> The border is a double-edged sword. On one hand, we are tasked with strict enforcement, but on the other, we face immense pressure from local political networks. During the uprising, the volume of unauthorized crossings was unprecedented. We had cases where individuals carrying fake documents or large sums of money attempted to bribe their way across. Some succeeded because the system is not foolproof. (BGB Official 1)

> The political crisis strained our capacity. We witnessed not only an increase in smuggling activities but also high-profile political figures crossing into India. In some instances, the coordination between border personnel on both sides appeared suspiciously smooth. This raised questions about systemic complicity. (BGB Official 2)

> We knew the uprising would have spillover effects on the border. Our priority was to prevent violence and maintain order, but it was evident that some individuals had planned their escapes well in advance. Certain crossings were clearly facilitated by external networks beyond our control. (Local Officer)

> The unrest created chaos not only in urban centers but also along the border districts. Our primary role was to contain the situation locally, but we often found ourselves chasing rumors of high-profile escapes. There was a significant disconnect between law enforcement and border management during that time. (Police Officer 1)

The smugglers had the upper hand during the crisis. They exploited the situation, knowing we were overwhelmed with maintaining order. The fugitives didn't just rely on luck; they had substantial financial and political backing to orchestrate their escapes. (Police Officer 2)

We intercepted a few individuals attempting to cross illegally, including one prominent politician. However, many seemed to have used unofficial routes and contacts within the system to evade us completely. (Police Officer 3)

The India-Bangladesh border has always been a porous one, shaped by history, politics, and economics. The 2024 crisis added a new layer of complexity, showing how political instability amplifies existing weaknesses in border governance. It's a case study of how borders can be both barriers and enablers. (Academic 1)

The mass movement of political elites across the border highlights the intersection of privilege and mobility. Unlike economic migrants or refugees who face severe risks, these elites had access to well-established networks that helped them escape, often at the cost of eroding state sovereignty. (Academic 2)

India's role during the uprising was subtle but strategic. By tacitly allowing these crossings, it signaled its willingness to prioritize geopolitical stability over strict border enforcement. This dynamic reflects broader trends in South Asian geopolitics, where borders are instruments of power negotiation rather than rigid boundaries. (Expert on India-Bangladesh relations)

The situation in Dhaka became untenable. I had no choice but to leave. Arrangements were made quickly, but the journey was harrowing. Crossing the border was like walking a tightrope—one misstep and everything could have gone wrong. (Political Figure 1)

The smugglers were incredibly organized. They knew the routes, the officials to approach, and how to handle payments. It felt like being part of an underground system that has existed for years but thrives in times of political instability. (Political Figure 2)

My brother was shot while trying to cross the border during the unrest. He wasn't a smuggler or a criminal —he was just trying to escape the violence. The authorities have yet to provide any accountability for his death. (Family member of victim 1)

We lost everything in the chaos. My father was detained by border security, and we haven't heard from him since. The system is cruel to ordinary people but somehow lenient to those with power and money. (Family member of victim 2)

The interview results reveal the dual role of the India-Bangladesh border as both a zone of enforcement and a site of vulnerability. Border officials and police highlight the unprecedented strain on their capacities during the crisis, pointing to the systemic challenges of managing a porous border. The comments from the BGB officials and police officers underscore the complexity of balancing enforcement with navigating political pressures and resource constraints. Notably, BGB Official 2's observation of "suspiciously smooth" cross-border coordination implicates institutional complicity, aligning with the study's findings on how political and financial influence often override formal enforcement mechanisms.

The experiences of local officers and police reinforce the notion that the border is not just a geographical demarcation but a contested political space. The chaos during the uprising exposed long-standing governance gaps, particularly the disconnect between law enforcement and border management. Police Officer 2's remark about smugglers exploiting the situation, supported by substantial financial and political backing, highlights how crises amplify existing vulnerabilities. This aligns with Academic 1's conceptualization of the border as both a barrier and an enabler, shaped by historical and socio-political forces.

Moreover, the observations by academics and the geopolitical expert draw attention to the broader structural and transnational dimensions of the crisis. Academic 2's emphasis on the intersection of privilege and mobility captures the stark inequalities that define border dynamics. While political elites leveraged established networks to escape, ordinary individuals, as illustrated by the accounts of affected families, faced life-threatening risks and systemic neglect. The geopolitical expert's insight into India's tacit allowance of crossings reflects the strategic considerations that often prioritize stability over strict enforcement, further illustrating the border's role as a site of power negotiation.

The testimonies of political figures who fled across the border and those of victims' families emphasize the human dimension of the crisis. Political Figure 2's description of the smugglers' organized operations corroborates findings on the entrenched informal networks that facilitate mobility during times of instability. In stark contrast, the accounts from victims' families highlight the unequal treatment at the border, where power and privilege dictate outcomes. These narratives underscore the dual standard of border governance, reinforcing the study's conclusions about the intersection of systemic inefficiencies, power asymmetries, and human vulnerability.

## Discussions

The study has profound implications for comparative political science and governance in border regions. These implications extend beyond the immediate case of political elite flight and reveal structural and theoretical insights into border governance, state sovereignty, and transnational power dynamics.

*Borders as sites of negotiation and power dynamics.* Drawing on border theory, particularly Rumford's (2006) and van Schendel's (2005) frameworks, borders emerge not merely as static demarcations but as fluid, contested spaces where state sovereignty is negotiated and often compromised. The India-Bangladesh border exemplifies this dynamic. While officially a tool for regulating movement and enforcing state authority, it simultaneously facilitates informal networks that enable elite mobility. This dual functionality challenges traditional notions of borders as impermeable barriers, suggesting a need for comparative political science to incorporate a nuanced understanding of borders as dynamic interfaces of legal and extra-legal governance.

This study highlights the selective permeability of borders—a concept central to border theory. While stringent for vulnerable populations like refugees and labor migrants, these boundaries are manipulable by elites through wealth and influence, as theorized by Anderson (1996). Such findings underscore the need for comparative frameworks to address disparities in how borders function across socio-political hierarchies, thereby enriching the discourse on governance in border regions.

*State sovereignty and transnational governance.* The ability of Bangladeshi elites to exploit the porous border during political crises illuminates the limitations of state sovereignty in the face of transnational networks. As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) argue, borders often operate as sites of both

inclusion and exclusion, shaped by broader geopolitical and economic imperatives. India's strategic tolerance of these movements, driven by political alliances and regional interests, illustrates how sovereignty is often subordinated to transnational governance dynamics. This aligns with realist theories in international relations (Waltz, 1979), which prioritize state interests over normative principles like justice and accountability.

Comparative political science may thus account for the role of transnational actors and networks in shaping governance at borders. These actors—smugglers, corrupt officials, and complicit states—undermine the binary view of state control versus anarchy, presenting a hybrid model where governance emerges from negotiated power relations.

*Elite mobility and authoritarian resilience.* The phenomenon of political elite flight, facilitated by border porosity, underscores the interplay between authoritarian governance and mobility. Hirschman's (1972) framework of "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" provides a critical lens to understand how authoritarian regimes manipulate borders to suppress dissent and secure their survival. The assurance of escape routes diminishes the incentive for rulers to address internal dissent or reform governance. This dynamic is evident in the reliance of the Awami League on India as a geopolitical ally and sanctuary, revealing how borders can reinforce authoritarian resilience by providing an exit for embattled elites.

Moreover, the role of dalals in coordinating these escapes exemplifies the fusion of political and criminal networks, a theme explored in Shain's (1989) work on political exile. Comparative analyses of governance in border regions must therefore consider how authoritarian regimes exploit border dynamics to extend their influence and evade accountability, shaping power asymmetries within and across states.

The findings advocate for a reconceptualization of border governance frameworks to incorporate the fluid and transnational nature of borders. Governance in border regions must address the complicity of state actors, the role of informal networks, and the socio-economic factors that sustain these dynamics. Drawing parallels with other contested borders—such as the US-Mexico border or the Mediterranean crossings in Europe—this study contributes to a broader understanding of how governance in border regions is shaped by global inequalities and power hierarchies.

The study shows that the porous nature of the border between India and Bangladesh, coupled with corrupt local authorities, contributed to the political elite's ability to evade justice. The negotiation process between politicians and smugglers was highly structured, with payments often split into several stages. Smugglers facilitated the physical crossing of the border through well-established informal networks that relied on bribes to border officials and used various means of transport such as vans, lorries, and boats. The choice of route and mode of transport was based on the level of risk involved. These operations were carefully coordinated, with Indian and Bangladeshi smugglers working closely together to ensure the safe passage of their clients. However, the escape attempts often failed when the financial agreements were not honored. The smugglers betrayed their clients to the authorities when payments failed to materialize.

While this article critically examines the Awami League government's role and India's influence in Bangladesh's governance, it is important to acknowledge alternative perspectives. Some scholars and policymakers argue that India's involvement is driven by regional security concerns, economic cooperation, and historical ties rather than direct political control (Baruah, 2022; Ganguly, 2023). The Awami League and its supporters contend that their actions were necessary to maintain stability, curb "extremism," and sustain economic growth (Riaz, 2024). Some analysts argue that opposition forces, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and other political actors, have exploited

the unrest to advance their own agendas, at times aligning with groups that have historically undermined democratic processes.

Some observers point out that political violence and repression are not unique to the Awami League government but have been part of the broader political history of Bangladesh. Previous governments, including military regimes and civilian administrations, have also faced accusations of extrajudicial killings, suppression of dissent, and electoral manipulation (Ahmed, 2021; Fair, 2023). A comparative approach that contextualizes the Awami League's actions within this historical pattern can provide a deeper understanding of the current crisis. While this does not justify any human rights violations, it highlights the cyclical nature of political repression in Bangladesh and raises critical questions about the structural factors that enable authoritarian governance.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, despite facing internal divisions, has actively condemned state-led persecution, political killings, and restrictions on civil liberties. Islamist groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami have also mobilized against the government, framing their opposition in terms of religious and political repression (Bashar, 2023). Civil society organizations, student groups, and international human rights bodies have consistently raised concerns about disappearances, custodial torture, and media censorship, pushing for accountability (Amnesty International, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024). While opposition parties have highlighted these issues, some critics argue that their own track records on human rights and governance are not without controversy.

The political alliances in Bangladesh have often been fluid and strategic rather than ideologically rigid. For instance, the Jatiya Party, despite positioning itself as an opposition force, has largely acted in alignment with the Awami League over the past 16 years, often supporting key parliamentary decisions and policies. Similarly, Jamaat-e-Islami, which is traditionally viewed as an adversary of the Awami League, has also engaged in pragmatic political maneuvering. It notably supported the Awami League during the 1986 elections under General Ershad's regime and again in 1991 when strategic interests aligned. These historical precedents suggest that power dynamics in Bangladesh are shaped by shifting alliances rather than fixed ideological divisions, complicating a simplistic binary of Awami League dominance versus opposition suppression.

It is important that in the analysis I acknowledge the limitations of the opposition, particularly the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Despite facing systematic suppression, persecution, and political marginalization by the ruling party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party has struggled over the past 16 years to present a compelling, pro-people agenda that could mobilize mass support. Its political strategies have often been reactive rather than visionary, relying heavily on anti-Awami League rhetoric without articulating a concrete alternative economic or governance model (Riaz, 2023). While repression undeniably plays a role in constraining opposition movements, effective political mobilization requires more than just resistance; it necessitates a forward-looking program that resonates with the electorate. Thus, while state-sponsored suppression is a significant factor, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's inability to present itself as a strong alternative also contributes to the political imbalance in Bangladesh.

This study aligns with multiple theoretical frameworks, notably border theory and the concept of political mobility among elites. By integrating these perspectives, it offers an understanding of how borders shape not only geographic divisions but also the movement and strategies of political elites, who often navigate across these boundaries for personal or political gain. These frameworks provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of power, identity, and mobility in border regions. Porous boundaries illustrate the limits of state sovereignty where powerful individuals can exploit weak enforcement mechanisms to evade accountability (Rumford, 2006). The findings also support the concept of elite political mobility (Gibney and Hansen, 2005), which emphasizes how financial resources and political influence enable elites to evade justice by crossing international borders.

Moreover, the broader geopolitical relationship between India and Bangladesh influenced the dynamics of these escapes, with India's strategic interests often taking precedence over democratic accountability. This dynamic is well captured by realist theory (Waltz, 1979), which assumes that states prioritize their national interests even if this leads to the reinforcement of authoritarian tendencies in neighboring countries.

## Conclusions

This study offers a critical examination of the dynamics surrounding the India-Bangladesh border, particularly during periods of political upheaval, as exemplified by the 2024 uprisings. The porous nature of the border, historically a symbol of socio-economic and cultural interconnectivity, emerges as a double-edged sword—both enabling and undermining state authority. The findings underscore how political elites exploited weak enforcement mechanisms, relying on networks of dalals to orchestrate their escapes. The negotiation process between smugglers and elites, marked by sophisticated logistical planning and high financial stakes, illuminates the depth of systemic corruption and the complicity of local authorities. This dynamic reflects the selective permeability of borders, a concept central to border theory where access is mediated by wealth, influence, and political power.

The theoretical engagement of the study enriches the discourse on borders as contested spaces. Drawing on Hirschman's work, the research demonstrates how the availability of escape routes emboldens authoritarian regimes to suppress dissent, knowing elites can flee if deposed. Similarly, Pierson's path dependency theory explains how entrenched corruption and informal cross-border practices perpetuate authoritarian governance. By tying findings back to these theoretical frameworks, the study contributes to an understanding of border governance. The juxtaposition of formal state mechanisms with informal networks highlights the hybrid nature of border enforcement, where legality and illegality coexist. This duality is not unique to South Asia; parallels can be drawn with other contested borders, such as the US-Mexico boundary or Mediterranean crossings, where systemic inequalities and transnational networks similarly shape governance. The novelty lies in its focus on the political elite as actors within migration dynamics, a perspective often overshadowed by studies on economic migrants or refugees. It reveals how privilege and mobility intersect, demonstrating that borders function differently depending on an individual's socio-political status.

The research underscores the importance of regional cooperation in addressing cross-border challenges while cautioning against policies that prioritize geopolitical stability over democratic accountability. The insights are particularly pertinent in a world increasingly defined by authoritarianism, forced migration, and transnational crises. The findings advocate for reimagining border governance frameworks to address the complex interplay of corruption, privilege, and state complicity.

The study has significant policy implications, particularly in the areas of border governance, migration control, and regional security. Addressing the vulnerabilities of the India-Bangladesh border requires stronger institutional mechanisms to prevent political elites from exploiting cross-border networks to evade accountability. Strengthening cooperation between the two countries, including better intelligence sharing and stricter enforcement of extradition agreements, could help close these loopholes. The US-Mexico border and Mediterranean crossings in Europe share some similarities with the India-Bangladesh border but also exhibit key differences. Like the India-Bangladesh border, the US-Mexico and Mediterranean migration routes are shaped by socio-economic disparities, political instability, and informal networks of smugglers facilitating illegal

crossings. However, while migration across the US-Mexico border and the Mediterranean is primarily driven by economic hardship, violence, and asylum seeking, the India-Bangladesh border —particularly in the context of the 2024 uprising—was used as an escape route for political elites fleeing accountability. Unlike the Mediterranean route, which is heavily securitized with EU border control measures, and the US-Mexico border, which has extensive surveillance infrastructure, the India-Bangladesh border is characterized by weak enforcement, corruption, and cooperation between local authorities and smugglers, allowing elite mobility. Future research should explore how political instability in one country affects its neighbors through elite mobility, border security, and informal economies. By situating the India-Bangladesh border within a broader framework of transnational governance and border politics, this study contributes to understanding how fragile democratic contexts enable cross-border political maneuvering, reinforcing regional power asymmetries.

## ORCID iD

AKM Ahsan Ullah [ID] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1441-141X

## Funding

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## References

Ahmed T (2021) *Democracy and Authoritarianism in Bangladesh: A Historical Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ahsan Ullah AKM and Ferdous J (eds) (2024) *Governance, Migration and Security in International Relations*. Singapore and Netherlands: Springer.

Ahsan Ullah AKM and Huque AS (2019) Demoralization-led migration in Bangladesh: A sense of insecurity-based decision-making model. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 5(4): 351-370.

*Al Jazeera* (2017) Bangladesh's Chief Justice Sinha forced into exile. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/12/bangladesh-chief-justice-sinha-forced-into-exile (accessed 12 November 2024).

*Al Jazeera* (2019) Bangladesh's justice system under fire: The case of Justice Manik. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/10/bangladesh-justice-manik (accessed 10 September 2024).

Amnesty International (2023) Bangladesh: Human rights violations persist amid crackdown on dissent. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/08/bangladesh-human-rights-crackdown (accessed 16 December 2024).

Amnesty International (2024) Mass protests and government crackdowns in Bangladesh: A timeline. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/2024/07/10/protests-crackdowns-bangladesh (accessed 1 January 2025).

Anderson M (1996) *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World*. London: Polity Press.

Balibar É (2002) *Politics and the Other Scene*. New York, NY: Verso.

*Bangla Tribune* (2018) 'India will never forget what we did for them'. *Bangla Tribune*, 30 May. Available at: https://en.banglatribune.com/national/news/3763/'India-will-always-remember-what-we-did-for-them' (accessed 5 October 2024).

Baruah D (2022) *India-Bangladesh Relations: Strategic Alliances and Political Realities*. Washington, DC: Carnegie India. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/events/2024/10/roundtable-discussion-on-india-bangladesh-economic-relations?lang=en (accessed 28 July 2024).

Bashar I (2023) *Islamist Politics in Bangladesh: Challenges and Responses*. London: Routledge.

Bhattacharjee K (2024) Sheikh Hasina involved in forced disappearances. *The Hindu*, 15 December. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/hasina-involved-in-forced-disappearances-says-bangladesh-inquiry-commission/article68986255.ece (accessed 23 February 2025).

*Business Standard* (2024) $16b siphoned off from Bangladesh every year during AL rule: White Paper. Available at: https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/16b-siphoned-bangladesh-every-year-during-al-rule-white-paper-1007021 (accessed 21 December 2024).

Castles S (2003) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. London and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chowdhury MS and Bikram B (2021) Bangladesh–India relations: Strengthening historical ties. *Strategic Analysis* 45(6): 565–572.

Chowdhury MH (2013) Asymmetry in Indo-Bangladesh relations. *Asian Affairs* 40(2): 83–103.

Curtis J (2025) *Bangladesh: The fall of the Hasina government and recent political developments*. London: UK Parliament Commons Library, 23 January. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10096/ (accessed 1 March 2025).

*Daily Star* (2023) Sagar-Runi murder: Court delays 112 times in 12 years. Available at: https://www.thedailystar.net/news/2023/04/20/sagar-runi (accessed 22 September 2024).

*Daily Star* (2024) Time to bring back smuggled money [Editorial]. *The Daily Star*, 8 August. Available at: https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/editorial/news/time-bring-back-smuggled-money-3671721 (accessed 2 February 2025).

Donnan H and Wilson TM (1999) *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation, and State*. London: Routledge.

Dossani R (2024) Nurturing and destroying democracy: The two sides of Bangladesh's ousted Awami League. RAND Corporation, 6 August. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/08/nurturing-and-destroying-democracy-the-two-sides-of.html (accessed 22 February 2025).

Fair C (2023) *Political Violence and Electoral Manipulation in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Faist T (2000) *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ganguly S (2023) *The Geopolitics of South Asia: India's Role in Regional Stability*. Washington: Brookings Institution.

Ghosh S (2023) *Bordering in South Asia*. California: University of California Press.

Gibney MJ and Hansen R (2005) Asylum policy, national security, and political refugees: Explaining the United States' delay in offering safe haven to European Jews during World War II. *International Migration Review* 29(1): 5–34.

Griffith Asia Institute (2024) Why accurate reporting on money laundering matters: The case of Bangladesh. Griffith Asia Insights, 23 September. Available at: https://blogs.griffith.edu.au/asiainsights/why-accurate-reporting-on-money-laundering-matters-the-case-of-bangladesh/ (accessed 29 December 2024).

Gupta R (2024) Political turmoil in Bangladesh: Hasina's fall, the rise of an interim government, and regional dynamics. *Asia Society*, 28 August. Available at: https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/political-turmoil-bangladesh-hasinas-fall-rise-interim-government-and-regional-dynamics (accessed 19 December 2024).

Hasan M (2024) Bangladesh's one-party rule poses dilemma for liberal democracies. *Asialink*. Available at: https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/insights/bangladeshs-one-party-rule-poses-dilemma-for-liberal-democracies (accessed 11 January 2025).

Hirschman AO (1972) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Hosen MA (2022) The Bangladesh bank heist: Unresolved and unpunished. *Journal of Cybersecurity* 15(1): 10–24.

Human Rights Watch (2019) Bangladesh: Election abuses need independent investigation. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/15/bangladesh-election-abuses-need-independent-investigation (accessed 12 July 2024).

Human Rights Watch (2021) Where no sun can enter: A decade of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/08/16/where-no-sun-can-enter/decade-enforced-disappearances-bangladesh (accessed 23 June 2024).

Human Rights Watch (2023) Bangladesh: Government crackdown on Islamic school students. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/10/bangladesh-crackdown-islamic-school-students (accessed 12 June 2024).

Human Rights Watch (2024) Bangladesh: Escalating crackdown on opposition and free speech. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/bangladesh (accessed 14 January 2024).

*India Today* (2024) Is part of $234-bn booty laundered during Hasina regime in India? Available at: https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/bangladesh-white-paper-economy-names-india-money-siphoned-muhammad-yunus-sheikh-hasina-2643373-2024-12-02 (accessed 22 January 2025).

International Crisis Group (2018) Bangladesh's polls: Will democracy win? Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/bangladesh-polls-will-democracy-win (accessed 19 July 2024).

Jones R (2012) Spaces of refusal: Rethinking sovereign power and resistance at the border. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102(3): 685–699.

Jones R and Ferdoush MA, eds. (2018) *Borders and Mobility in South Asia and Beyond*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Jones R and Johnson C (2016) Border militarisation and the re-articulation of sovereignty. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41(2): 187–200.

Kapoor S (2024) What does Sheikh Hasina's resignation mean for India-Bangladesh relations? *Al Jazeera*, 12 August. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/8/12/what-does-sheikh-hasinas-resignation-mean-for-india-bangladesh-relations (accessed 8 March 2025).

Lamb A (2019) Boundaries of Bangladesh: History, politics, and geopolitics. *South Asia Review* 45(3): 315–330.

Louis YM (2024) *The binary trap after Bangladesh's unrest*. Washington: Lowy Institute. Available at: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/binary-trap-after-bangladesh-s-unrest (accessed 28 February 2025).

Majumdar AJ (2014) Making sense of India–Bangladesh relations. *India Quarterly* 70(4): 327–340.

Mezzadra S and Neilson B (2013) *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ministry of Commerce and Industry (2021) Brief on India-Bangladesh bilateral relations. Available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Bangladesh2024.pdf (accessed 14 November 2024).

NDTV (2024) Sheikh Hasina involved in enforced disappearances: Bangladesh Commission. NDTV, 15 December. Available at: https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/sheikh-hasina-involved-in-enforced-disappearances-bangladesh-commission-7251207 (accessed 3 December 2024).

Newman D (2006) The lines that continue to separate us: Borders in our "borderless" world. *Progress in Human Geography* 30(2): 143–161.

Nowsher N (2024) Awami League: From progressive politics to fascism. *The Daily Star*, 17 August. Available at: https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/awami-league-progressive-politics-fascism-3679516 (accessed 20 December 2024).

Paasi A (1999) Boundaries as social practice and discourse: The Finnish-Russian border. *Regional Studies* 33(7): 669–680.

Pattanaik S (2020) India-Bangladesh relations: Strategic partners or tactical allies? *Journal of Asian Studies* 44(3): 233–245.

Pierson P (2000) Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics. *American Political Science Review* 94(2): 251–267.

Rahman T (2023) Cross-border fugitives: The role of dalals in facilitating the escape of political elites from Bangladesh to India. *South Asia Review* 50(1): 105–123.

Rashid H (2024) The student-led movement and the downfall of the Bangladesh government. Australian Institute of International Affairs. Available at: https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-student-led-movement-and-the-downfall-of-the-bangladesh-government/ (accessed 2 February 2025).

Reuters (2024) More than 1,000 killed in Bangladesh violence since July, health ministry chief says. Reuters, 30 August. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/more-than-1000-killed-bangladesh-violence-since-july-health-ministry-chief-says-2024-08-29/ (accessed 28 December 2024).

Riaz A (2023) Pathways of democratic backsliding in Bangladesh: Authoritarian consolidation and the opposition's dilemmas. *Journal of Contemporary South Asia* 31(4): 567–583.

Riaz A (2024) *Bangladesh's Political Landscape: A Crisis of Democracy?* Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Riaz A and Parvez S (2021) Anatomy of a rigged election in a hybrid regime: The lessons from Bangladesh. *Democratization* 28(4): 801–820.

Rumford C (2006) Theorizing borders. *European Journal of Social Theory* 9(2): 155–169.

Scott JC (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Shain Y (1989) *The Frontiers of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Sujan MA (2025) After the bloodshed: Can Bangladesh's Awami League resurrect itself? *Al Jazeera*, 27 January. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2025/1/27/after-the-bloodshed-can-bangladeshs-awami-league-resurrect-itself (accessed 20 March 2025).

Thapa SB (2023) Corruption and its implications for politics in South Asian countries. *Pragyan: A Peer-Reviewed Multidisciplinary Journal* 4(1): 157–169.

Transparency International (2018) *Bangladesh: Corruption in the Election Process*. Bonn: TI.

Transparency International (2022) Corruption perceptions index: Bangladesh's economic decline due to illicit financial flows. Available at: https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/articles/commentary/6630 (accessed 23 March 2025).

van Schendel W (2005) *The Bengal borderland: Beyond state and nation in South Asia*. London: Anthem Press.

Wahiduzzaman AKM (2024) How can Bangladesh recover assets stolen during Awami League rule? *The Diplomat*. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/how-can-bangladesh-recover-assets-stolen-during-awami-league-rule/ (accessed 22 November 2024).

Walker T (2024) *"India out": What this campaign means for South Asian neighbours*. Washington: Lowy Institute. Available at: https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-out-what-campaign-means-south-asian-neighbours (accessed 17 January 2025).

Waltz K (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.