

How India will handle the Hasina imbroglio

■ By Prabhu Dayal
 Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death in absentia on 17 November 2025, by the country's International Crimes Tribunal. The tribunal found her guilty of crimes against humanity for her role in a deadly crackdown on student-led protests in July and August 2024, which led to her government's fall. However, there is significant controversy whether Sheikh Hasina received a fair trial. She and her supporters claim the trial was a "farce," "rigged," and politically motivated. Hasina was tried and sentenced to death in absentia because she is living in exile in India and defied court orders to return to Bangladesh.



She said that she would only face her accusers in a "proper tribunal". Hasina has defied the International Crimes Tribunal's decision, claiming that the ruling, linked to the student-led protests, was "biased and politically motivated." She acknowledged the government had lost control of the situation at the time but maintained that the unrest did not amount to a "pre-meditated" assault on civilians.

Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party, which has been banned from the upcoming elections, described the tribunal as a "kangaroo court" used for political vengeance by opponents in the current interim government led by Muhammad Yunus. Sheikh Hasina's lawyers submitted an appeal to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, citing "serious concerns about the lack of fair trial rights and due process".

Thus, the fairness of the trial is highly contested, with her supporters and international observers highlighting significant

concerns. Bangladesh has formally requested India to extradite Sheikh Hasina after she was sentenced to death. India has acknowledged the request but has not yet commented on whether it will agree to the extradition.

India has said that, as a close neighbour, it remained committed to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh and would continue to engage constructively with all stakeholders toward that end. India faces a significant diplomatic challenge and is expected to handle the situation by prioritizing its strategic interests rather than immediately complying with Bangladesh's extradition request. India's Ministry of External Affairs has said that officials will examine the legal grounds.

Article 6 of the India-Bangladesh extradition treaty states that extradition may be refused if the offence is considered to be of a "political character". Hasina and her party have called the charges "biased and po-

litically motivated". Article 8 allows for refusal if the requested state believes the accusation was not made in "good faith in the interests of justice" or if an extradition would be "unjust or oppressive".

There are significant concerns among observers about the fairness of the trial process in Bangladesh. India can argue that the case falls under these exceptions, despite the charges of murder and genocide. India may prefer to delay a final decision until the political situation in Bangladesh stabilizes, buying time to navigate the complex diplomatic landscape.

Any extradition request would have to be processed through the Indian legal system, where Hasina could challenge the move in court, a process that would likely be lengthy. Ultimately, an extradition is seen as highly improbable, as New Delhi is expected to prioritize its legal and diplomatic autonomy over complying with a politically sensitive request. Thus, India

could refuse to extradite Sheikh Hasina due to legal complexity, political considerations, and human rights concerns.

The final decision will depend more on geopolitical considerations than solely on legal obligations. Sheikh Hasina is important to India because she was a consistent and crucial ally for regional security and strategic interests during her long tenure as Bangladesh's Prime Minister. Under Hasina's rule, the Bangladeshi government launched a nationwide crackdown on anti-India insurgent groups and terrorist outfits that previously used safe havens in Bangladesh to operate in India's northeastern states.

This robust security cooperation was a major strategic benefit for India. Hasina's government maintained a strong, pro-India stance, in contrast to the more Pakistan-aligned and often anti-India posture of the rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party

(BNP). She fostered a conducive environment for resolving long-standing bilateral issues. Her administration facilitated significant improvements in connectivity, including re-establishing road and rail links that had been severed after 1947. This boosted trade and transit opportunities, including allowing India to ferry goods to its landlocked Northeast region using Bangladeshi territory.

The two countries signed the historic 2015 Land Boundary Agreement and resolved their maritime boundary dispute during her time in office, which stabilized the border and eased tensions. India viewed Hasina as a key partner in regional geopolitics, especially in the context of great power rivalry (e.g., US-China competition) in South Asia.

Her tilt towards India provided a counterbalance to other influences in the region. India's decision to shelter her underscores her continued symbolic and strategic importance to the country's security and foreign policy establishment. India's refusal to extradite Sheikh Hasina would likely strain bilateral ties with Bangladesh's current interim government but would not necessarily cause a complete breakdown of relations.

In the short term, relations are likely to remain tense and complex, heavily dependent on how India handles the extradition request and whether the political situation in Bangladesh stabilizes ahead of the scheduled elections. The long-term future hinges on the outcome of the 2026 elections and the nature of the government that emerges, as well as the path towards national reconciliation.

(The writer, a retired IFS officer, served as India's Ambassador to Kuwait and Morocco and as Consul-General in New York.)



India at Johannesburg: Why This G20 Summit Matters



■ By Jayanta Roy Chowdhury
 When Prime Minister Narendra Modi touches down in Johannesburg later this week for the G20 Leaders' Summit, he enters not just another multilateral gathering but a scene charged with geopolitical significance.

This is the fourth consecutive G20, or Group of 20 of the world's largest economies, which is being held in the Global South, a fact that subtly but unmistakably underlines the centre of gravity in world affairs.

For India, which has spent the past decade positioning itself as both a bridge and a counterweight in an increasingly fractured international order, the stakes for the November-end meeting could not be higher. Modi is slated to speak at all three summit sessions, confer with several leaders on the margins, and join the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) meeting, a format that carries echoes of an older, more idealistic era of South-South cooperation.

However, Johannesburg is not about nostalgia. It is about power. It's about which countries get to influence the rules by which the world will function in this 21st-century landscape defined by climate shocks, digital flux, and resource insecurity.

The G7 or the 'Rich Man's Club' used to define most of the rules by which the world's economic order was run till a Wall Street-crash induced recession forced the larger G20 to take on the task of defining global economic order.

The non-G7 members of the G20, who represent the global South now account for a third of the world's economy as against 15 per cent share of global GDP they accounted for at the turn of the century. And they want more heft in determining the way the world is run.

"Global financial architecture is still in a time warp, the voting rights and shareholding in multilateral financial institutions do not reflect the new economic realities of our planet," pointed out Bhaswati Mukherjee, former In-

dian Ambassador to the European Union.

The world economy may no longer be in free-fall, but debt distress continues to be bane for many developing nations, especially across Africa. An old debt architecture, designed in the Bretton Woods era, collides with new creditors and opaque lending practices, creating friction and distress in many African and other Third World countries.

Beyond the summit floor, Modi's participation in the IBSA Leaders' Meeting serves as a reminder that India still sees democratic multilateralism among developing nations as a vital counterweight to China-led forums.

India wants IBSA to be more than a nostalgic relic, to function as a strategic coalition that can shape debates on development, trade, climate, and governance. India along with South Africa and Brazil also seeks a more equitable system, one that lowers the temperature on the Global South's debt vulnerabilities and expands access to development financing for poorer nations.

Delhi is betting that, with the African union now a full G20 member, a diplomatic breakthrough through India vocally championed during its 2023 presidency, the moment is ripe to take advantage of this political shift and turn it into institutional practice.

More African voices at the table could force the G20 to treat development challenges as sys-



temic failures rather than occasional emergencies.

If the G20 is to be a steering committee for the world, India is arguing, the world must be more fully present in it and the forum should have a voice in trade flows and supply chains.

Economist Rahul Ahluwalia, Director, Foundation for Economic Development, told UNI,

that India "should pursue as many comprehensive bilateral trade agreements as possible with fellow G20 members", arguing that such partnerships would deepen economic integration and open new avenues for growth. Climate politics within the G20 has become a delicate balancing act.

In Johannesburg, India is expected to push for more predictable climate financing, technology transfer, and recognition that development and decarbonization must advance together. The subtext is clear — the political cost of energy transitions cannot fall hardest on countries that contributed least to the crisis.

"This meeting gives us a chance to refocus the world on burning issues such as climate change, food supplies and resilient supply chains," said Mukherjee, who also pointed out the G20 should take into account the "looming famine which Sudan is facing."

Few issues carry as much long-term weight as the competition

for critical minerals. These obscure-sounding commodities, lithium, cobalt, rare earths, are the skeleton of clean energy systems and digital economies. India depends heavily on single-source imports, especially from China, a vulnerability that policymakers increasingly view with unease.

Delhi's hope at the Johannesburg summit is to secure G20 endorsement for a Critical Minerals framework, aiming to bring about rules for transparent mining, diversified supply chains, and value addition in developing countries rather than extraction-driven exploitation.

Ahluwalia said, "India must also prioritise building resilient supply chains so that no single country such as China can exercise disproportionate control over critical minerals or other essential inputs needed by the global economy."

This is one issue where the West as well as the Global South may well be in agreement, except perhaps the two largest economies of the world who control most of the critical mineral production in the world. Artificial

intelligence, its governance, risks, and opportunities, will remain another battleground for influence.

The world has drifted into regulatory fragmentation. The United States focuses on innovation and risk mitigation; Europe on rights and strict oversight; China on state-directed control. Delhi is consequently pushing for a new framework emphasising transparency, safety, and equitable access.

A global architecture that is neither Silicon Valley laissez-faire nor Beijing-managed centralization fits neatly with India's desire to shape emerging techno-governance regimes.

India's argument is that healthcare algorithms should not privilege rich countries; training data should not encode Global North biases; and developing nations must participate in global standard-setting, not merely comply with it.

Whether this will come about or merely remain a paper dream, is of course something which only time will tell.

