



SHARE

Recommendations on Policy Options for India in Dealing with the Current Bangladesh Situation

A Northeast India Perspective



**Society to Harmonise Aspirations for
Responsible Engagement**



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for India in Dealing with
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CHAIRPERSON SPEAKS



Dear Friends,

Our recommendations report on pathways for the Indian state in view of the ongoing Bangladesh situation, keeping the development of the northeastern region of India at the center, is the first endeavour of SHARE. This is a think tank which has been recently established with a view to giving an extra ballast to the development of this region and its promotion nationally as well as within South & Southeast Asian nations. This is an objective of heartfelt and critical importance to our distinguished members who belong to the northeast and/or have deep rooted knowledge and experience of the region.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister of India has said that "Given the Northeast's strategic location, our vision is that the region should be developed as a base for India's growing economic links while also ensuring that the aspirations of the people are fulfilled... We have transformed the Northeast from an 'abandoned region' to an 'abundant region' with over ₹ 5 lakh-crore spent by ministries of the government of India over the last 10 years,"

This thinking has led to rapid improvement in the security situation and to accelerating prosperity of the region. Our efforts towards stronger relationship with Bangladesh

have contributed in a good measure towards achievement of these results. Consequently, the recent developments in Bangladesh have aroused anxiety in the region.

It is apparent that northeastern region and Bangladesh working cohesively can bring about the welfare of both people. Thus, SHARE felt the urgent need to put together its expertise in policymaking, deep experiential knowledge in Bangladesh, and unique reach within the cross-section of Bangladeshi politics to produce the set of recommendations. We have been careful to ensure that the recommendations are implementable and acceptable to all sections and ideologies in the country as it goes through socio-political upheaval. The recommendations are divided into short, medium and long-term so as to ensure a staggered approach to policymaking on New Delhi's part.

It is our sincere hope that the objective of common prosperity shall prevail and guide the entire situation. It is in this direction that some thoughts have been put together, which I am sure would be found useful.

Shre R.K. Mathur

IAS (Retd)

Former Lt. Gov., Ladakh

Former Secy. Defence

Govt. of India

Former Chief Secy.

Govt. of Tripura

Executive Summary

India-Bangladesh ties have witnessed several complexities over the years especially owing to shifting political dynamics in Bangladesh. Over the past decade or so, the bilateral relation between the nations have proven to be one of the strongest. These developments have benefitted India's Northeast (NE) the most.

In this context, the current political instability in Bangladesh has direct repercussions for India's NE. Stability in the neighbourhood has direct import on the security scenario of the NEI.

Against this backdrop, this report ventures to make some implementable, high-yield, and mutually acceptable policy options for the policymakers in New Delhi, systematized from short to long term.

The recommendations in this report are prefaced by three key facts. Firstly, it remains uncertain who is currently responsible for policymaking in Bangladesh.

Secondly, there is palpable anti-India sentiments in Bangladesh at present.

Finally, economic stability and employment generation are the primary parameters on which political leadership in Bangladesh will be judged.

In the short term, the immediate priority for Bangladesh is bringing back peace and stability. Thus, India should leverage its considerable influence among various stakeholder in Bangladesh, including within Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Similarly, ongoing localised trade should be further encouraged especially in relation to the NEI as this ensures that the Bangladeshi consumers will not need to seek alternatives in these troubled times. Finally, India needs to focus on augmenting people to people (P2P) level, including organising sports events in India and encouraging local clubs of Bangladesh to participate in the same.

Bangladesh's medium-term goal would be economic stability in the country. A one billion USD Rupee-based loan from New Delhi would go a long way to stem the inflation and economic downturn in Dhaka, thus fostering a positive image of our country in Bangladeshi psyche. Likewise, imparting skill training to the youth of Bangladesh in Indian skill development institutes is likely to be acceptable even to some of the more extreme elements in Bangladesh. Further, collaboration among MSMEs of the two nations and providing specific grants and lines of credit for the MSMEs of Bangladesh, similar to the ones that India has for its own MSMEs, will have a profound impact on India's image at the grassroot level. Additionally, India's bilateral trade initiatives must be made more visible by industry bodies of the two nations.

Long term, Bangladesh will have to gradually focus on its foreign policy especially towards South Asia. New Delhi will always be an irreplaceable partner for Dhaka. Thus, both nations will have to find ways to address core concerns and make mutual respect and cooperation the cornerstones of

the relationship. Sea-land connectivity projects will remain India's core interest pertaining to the NE states. Frank bilateral talks regarding redlines must be held. From India's perspective, inimical forces like radicals or IIGs cannot be ceded operational ground in Bangladesh. There cannot be any scope of repatriating Hasina to Bangladesh either. Also, the two countries should work towards strengthening multilateral forums in the region. India should also work with friendly nations like Japan, who already have huge stakes in Bangladesh. Finally, India should build on the existing defence cooperation agreements with Bangladesh as the Bangladesh Army is a critical stakeholder in the country.

In conclusion, the solution, as with most crisis situations around the world, is to address the issue at its core. In this instance, the priority remains the people of Bangladesh in general and its youth in particular. Therefore, while New Delhi waits for political and economic stability to return to Dhaka, addressing the aspirations of the youth is important. The two countries have everything to lose if they pursue a zero-sum game a lot to gain if they adopt a win-win approach.

Bangladesh and Northeast India

India-Bangladesh ties have witnessed several complexities over the years especially owing to shifting political dynamics in Bangladesh. However, over the past decade or more, the two neighbours have developed cordial relationship, making them one of the strongest bilateral partners. These developments have benefitted India's Northeast (NE) the most. In fact, Northeast India (NEI) and Bangladesh are much more than just next-door neighbours. Geographically contiguous, they are natural markets for each other.

Several trans-border railway links have been restored/reopened in recent years. Since April 2017, the Siliguri-Parbatipur link has enabled Numaligarh Refinery to send petroleum products directly to Bangladesh since. The Haldibari-Chilahati railway route, opened in December 2020 is another such link which facilitates beneficial connectivity in the region. The Agartala-Akhaura railway line which has been formally inaugurated is expected to cut down travel distance between Agartala and Kolkata from 1650 km to 550 km providing vital access to the region to several Bangladesh

sea ports once operational. The Maitri Setu on the Feni River directly connects Sabroom in South Tripura to Ramgarh in Bangladesh, and is only 80 km from the Chittagong port. A roadway connecting Shillong and Dhaka is also awaiting completion. Furthermore, several new power projects are on the verge of completion in Northeast India which will significantly alleviate Bangladesh's power-deficit.

These developments have benefitted India's Northeast the most.

Bangladesh has also signed an agreement providing full access to the Chittagong and Mongla port to India for transit and shipping cargo between the Northeastern states and the rest of India through Bangladesh. Once in motion, it will significantly improve regional connectivity. Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is Bangladesh's second biggest trade partner and largest export destination in Asia, with approximately USD 2 Billion of Bangladeshi exports to India in 2022-23. In 2022-23, the total bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh was USD 15.9 billion. There are twenty-Six Integrated Check-Posts and Land Custom Stations that facilitate exchange of goods between India's North East and Bangladesh.

Current Context

While the above history remains true, the ouster of Sheikh Hasina is a culmination of long-standing perception of malice in democratic governance on the one hand and a sense of deprivation of the youth from the economic gains that the nation has achieved, on the other. On 5 August, 2024, the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League (AL) government in Bangladesh was forced to resign, plunging the nation into chaos. The exit of Sheikh Hasina in response to widespread protests and demonstrations has changed the status quo ante in the country. As a close neighbour that shares more than 4000 kms long border with Bangladesh, India is likely to have implications especially in the NE.

In the wake of the popular uprising against Hasina, Bangladesh seems to be wavering into a period of uncertainty. Despite the swearing in of an interim administration of advisors, over a week of the absence of law and order and a stable administration has left only uncertainty. Vandalism, looting and witch hunting of the ousted AL cadres and soft targets like minorities appear to be the order of the day. The police may have returned to duty stations but are bound to be a demoralized force given that it may have lost hundreds of its officers to mob violence and retribution. The Army is unwilling to take full control preferring to observe from the sidelines. The Chief Advisor and Nobel Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus on his part has made sincere appeals to end the violence and a return to order. He has also appealed to those involved to stop engaging in attacks against Hindus and other minorities. There

is uncertainty about where the country is headed or who are the new power wielders.

Political instability in Bangladesh has direct repercussions for several development projects in India's NE. Memories of the Chittagong Arms haul of 2004 in Bangladesh, which is considered one of the biggest confiscations of illegal weapons in South Asia till date and was probably destined to destabilise Northeast India, still remain fresh in Indian psyche. Assam's Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has expressed concerns about potential infiltration and the possibility of resurgence of Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs). The Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Manipur have also voiced their apprehension of a possible refugee crisis in Assam and Tripura if the situation in Bangladesh is not resolved soon. Leaders in Tripura have also voiced concerns over attacks on minorities. Bangladesh is the main market for products like coal, limestone and bamboo from Meghalaya, as such the NE state has expressed concern over the situation in Bangladesh.

Left with few options, India has to make the best of a bad situation. It has to engage with those in power – or those behind power – in Bangladesh. In doing so, it has two core concerns, that Bangladesh's territory not be used in any manner inimical to its interests and the safety of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh as conveyed by Prime Minister Modi to Chief Advisor Yunus in his congratulatory message. For both countries, it is important to continue to work on enhancing trade, connectivity and developmental ties that are mutually beneficial. India has to articulate that it does not engage in partisan pursuits, and its foremost priority lies in cultivating and sustaining close relations with Bangladesh, its immediate neighbour.

There is uncertainty about where the country is headed or who are the new power wielders.

Recommendations

India has a vested interest in a stable, secure and prosperous Bangladesh. Against this backdrop, the following implementable and high-yield policy options are suggested.

These policy recommendations are generated through serious deliberations within the Executive Committee of SHARE which has seasoned Bangladesh and NEI experts including our Chairperson, Shri Radha Krishna Mathur, Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Shri Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta, Lt. Gen. Rana Pratap Kalita (retd.), Shri Nazeeb Arif, Dr. Samudra Gupta Kashyap, Shri Subimal Bhattacharjee, among others. While Shri Mathur has served the Government of Tripura for over 15 years and was the Chief Secy. of Tripura before taking up positions in New Delhi, Shri Shringla is one of the most liked Indian High Commissioners to Bangladesh. Shri Mahanta, as the Director General of Police (HoPF) of Assam and Lt. Gen. Kalita as the GoC-in-C, Eastern Command have been close observers of Bangladesh's ties with NEI throughout their careers. Similarly, Shri Arif has been engaged in sub-regional economic relations with Bangladesh as the former Secretary General and CEO of

... it is still unclear whether this government will have the authority to make decisions especially regarding Bangladesh's foreign affairs.

Indian Chamber of Commerce. Dr. Kashyap is the author of one of the most significant books on Northeast India-Bangladesh relationship and Mr. Bhattacharjee is a renowned Bangladesh watcher. Given this well-rounded pool of expertise, we believe that the recommendations put forward by SHARE may find resonance both in New Delhi and Dhaka, thus generating the necessary goodwill in both countries which is critical for the future relationship.

The recommendations are prefaced by three key facts. Firstly, it remains uncertain who is currently responsible for policymaking in Bangladesh. Although an interim government has taken charge of the country, it is still unclear whether this government will have the authority to make decisions especially regarding Bangladesh's foreign affairs. As it is not an elected government, the interim administration may encounter significant challenges related to both its capacity and jurisdiction.

Secondly, there is palpable anti-India sentiments in Bangladesh at present. This is demonstrated through the recent 'India Out' Campaign and the attacks on minorities in the aftermath of the collapse of the Hasina government. Vandalising of the iconic statue of the surrender of Pakistan Army inside the Shaheed Memorial Complex at Mujibnagar and the desecration of the Indian Cultural Centre and temples also demonstrate clear anti-India sentiments. In fact, one of the reasons behind the anger against Sheikh Hasina was her perceived closeness to India. The extent of anti-India sentiment among the masses can also be gauged by the recent conversation

between SHARE members and a Bangladeshi diplomat where the diplomat mentioned that even natural calamities like a landslide is blamed on India's external intelligence agency on social media in Bangladesh.

Finally, economic stability and employment generation are the primary parameters on which political leadership in Bangladesh will be judged. Discontent amongst the youth in this context was also at root of the student protest. Without cordial ties with New Delhi, it will be difficult for Dhaka to grow its GDP and build on the economic progresses of Hasina government.

Additionally, it is the view of SHARE that development in India's Northeast is contingent on a stable, secure and friendly Bangladesh. One of the reasons why the region has been able to begin its journey towards development is the strict actions taken by the AL on the IIGs and radicals in Bangladesh. As such, it is imperative that anti-India sentiments are tackled through policy interventions, especially among the masses.

It is the view of SHARE that there is potential to begin afresh with the new government by supporting it on its key priorities.

In this report, we provide actionable and mutually acceptable policy recommendations which would help protect India's national interests while addressing the aspirations of a young and burgeoning Bangladesh as it works towards shaping a new destiny for itself. The recommendations are systematised in terms of time frames from short to long term recommendations.

Short Term Recommendations

The immediate priority for Bangladesh is bringing back peace and stability. While India has a limited role in this regard,

mobilising international support for the interim government can be one of India's priorities. Considering the inaction of the police and inability of the army to assume full control, India should use its considerable influence among various stakeholders in Bangladesh and urge them to work with the interim government. This should include having back-channels with opposition parties, most importantly, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Such dialogue is likely to be one of India's core interests especially with regards to tackling a possible refugee crisis in the NEI. Post the crackdown on IIGs in Bangladesh, the country's perception among the populace of NEI has improved considerably. An influx of religiously or politically persecuted refugees will reverse this development. India should however practice caution in this regard, given past experiences.

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Similarly, ongoing localised trade should be further encouraged especially in relation to the NEI. The Chief Minister of Meghalaya has stated that Bangladesh is a bigger market for the produce of the state as compared to the rest of India. Geography plays a key role in this context. A similar scenario exists in Tripura and several districts of Assam. The Border Haats which are non-operational since COVID should be operationalised immediately. Also, the net of such Border Haats should be expanded manifold. Encouraging unorganised trade at a local level will also ensure that the Bangladeshi consumers can continue to depend on their traditional supply

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lines instead of seeking alternatives in these troubled times. Additionally, it will enable Indian farmers to continue to leverage on the market across the border. A contrary move by New Delhi would further fuel anti-India sentiment at a grassroots level.

Finally, India needs to focus on building bridges of connectivity at a people to people (P2P) level. While physical connectivity has been a hallmark of India Bangladesh relations, it is time we focus on winning hearts and minds of the Bangladeshi populace with further rigour. Organising sports events in India and encouraging local clubs of Bangladesh to participate may be a quick and implementable project to encourage P2P connectivity. Border regions of both the countries share a common interest in sports like football, cricket and volleyball, friendly matches can be organised under the watchful eyes of the BSF without compromising the security of the borders. Additionally, such events will provide the youths of Bangladesh a portal to channelise their energy instead of engaging in street violence.

Medium Term Recommendations

Bangladesh's medium-term goal would be economic stability in the country. The post COVID impact on the country's economy has been crippling from which it has not been able to overcome till date. Inflation and unemployment are rampant. Thus, the leadership would require to come up with strong economic policies. In this regard, India can play a crucial role given its deep investments in Bangladesh and its

bilateral trade frameworks. The Rupee based loan which has been piloted earlier this year needs to be given impetus and such mechanisms should be encouraged in order to provide economic support for Bangladesh. A one billion USD Rupee-based loan from New Delhi would go a long way to stem the inflation and economic downturn in Dhaka. This will also have a positive impact on Bangladesh's perception of India.

Countries with a large young population aspire for employment and education. India's current Union Budget focuses on skilling and employment generation. Inclusion of

A one billion USD Rupee-based loan from New Delhi would go a long way to stem the inflation and economic downturn in Dhaka.

students and early professionals from its eastern neighbour into the ambit of such programs is recommended. Imparting skill training to the youth of Bangladesh in Indian skill development institutes is likely to be acceptable even to some of the more extreme elements in Bangladesh. Given India's large capacity, including the Industrial Training Institutes, providing skilling and employment-oriented training to deserving youths from Bangladesh would help foster close ties with Bangladesh. Similarly, preferential treatment to scholars and students from Bangladesh in Indian educational institutions will send a positive message to the youth – the primary stakeholders in Bangladesh today. Institutes like the Asian University should be reinvigorated in this regard. Visiting fellowships in premier Indian think tanks would help develop an unbiased view of India among tomorrow's policymakers and influencers in Bangladesh. In this regard, SHARE would be happy to lead the

Imparting skill training to the youth of Bangladesh in Indian skill development institutes is likely to be acceptable even to some of the more extreme elements in Bangladesh.

way and contribute to this national cause in all ways possible.

Further, collaboration among MSMEs of the two nations and providing specific grants as well as lines of credit and schemes for the MSMEs of Bangladesh, similar to the ones that India has for its own MSMEs, will have a profound impact on India's image at the grassroots level. Such small-scale projects can help aid Bangladesh' economy as this will lead to quick infusion of loans and grants to a very large base of the working class. Along the same line, a mechanism to incubate forward looking startups in Bangladesh should be developed by India. Frameworks like Startup India can be calibrated to include promising startups of Bangladesh. Even at a regional level, initiatives like Startup Assam, Startup Tripura, PRIME Meghalaya, etc. can be expanded to include Bangladeshi startups. Supporting Bangladesh's economic stability at the grassroots level will help India garner goodwill which is important for close bilateral ties.

Additionally, India's bilateral trade initiatives must be made more visible. This would require the strengthening of existing trade platforms while developing newer ones. Collaboration of industry bodies of the two nations should be formalised and the output of such collaboration should be visible to the masses in Bangladesh.

Long Term Recommendations

As Bangladesh returns to normalcy with a stable economy, the country will have to gradually focus on its foreign policy

especially towards South Asia. New Delhi will always be an irreplaceable partner for Dhaka. In addition to close economic partnership and long-term connectivity projects, Bangladesh's geography makes it impossible for them to ignore India. Thus, both nations will have to find ways to address core concerns and make mutual respect and cooperation the cornerstones of their bilateral relationship. From India's perspective, sea-land connectivity through Bangladesh addresses a key strategic challenge for its NE region.

From India's perspective, sea-land connectivity through Bangladesh addresses a key strategic challenge for its NE region.

New Delhi and Dhaka must engage in frank bilateral talks where redlines must be communicated. Export of radicalisation to NEI and West Bengal are absolutely unacceptable for India. India's stand must be clearly communicated with the leadership in Bangladesh. Considering India's global standing as an emerging global power, it is India's moral obligation to stand by Bangladesh in times of crisis. Further, premised on the assumption that the former Prime Minister chooses to stay in India over the longer term, that Hasina is not going to be a pawn in bilateral engagements should be clearly stated.

The two neighbours should also work together to strengthen multilateral forums such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiatives

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etc. While bilateral engagements are critical, such regional groupings will provide platforms for synergistic policy formulations on issues like climate change, which has regional implications. India should also work with friendly nations like Japan, who already have huge stakes in Bangladesh to usher broad-based prosperity for both Bangladesh and India's NE through large-scale projects in connectivity and infrastructure. The India-Japan Intellectual Conclave is a standout exhibit in this context.

Finally, India should build on the existing defence cooperation agreements with Bangladesh. Though the Sampriti Exercise has been ongoing for some time, it was only in 2023 that the first Bangladeshi officer was commissioned from Indian Military Academy. Bangladeshi officers have been commissioned from academies of Pakistan, Malaysia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America for a longer period. While the recently signed MOU between the military staff colleges of the two nations is a positive step, it has to be jettisoned to the next level quickly. This is important since the Bangladesh Army is a critical stakeholder in the political and policy making circle of the country.

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Conclusion

*I*n conclusion, there are four key conundrums in the Indo-Bangla relationship according to SHARE. Firstly, there is the short-term issue of Sheikh Hasina's long-term presence in India. While she has taken refuge in India in the past, the geopolitical context of 1975 cannot be compared to the current situation. While it is important to protect our friends not irking the new political authority in Dhaka is important as well. There is no conceivable scenario where India could repatriate the former Prime Minister to her home country, in case she is convicted in absentia. This is an important message to leaders around the globe that India is a reliable global power.

Secondly, while Dhaka may not be keen on discussing security matters, it is important to note that development - which would be their focus- cannot be achieved without security. Bangladesh cannot move ahead in its remarkable economic journey continuing the trend of the last 15 years without peace and stability in the country. Without this precondition, Bangladesh will find it extremely difficult to attract any investment to its shore. Exhibits in this regard can be found in Pakistan and Myanmar.

Further, connectivity is a key pillar of Indo-Bangla engagements. The vast spectrum of road, rail, inland water or even air connectivity projects that the two nations have embarked upon are a testament in this regard. However, such

connectivity also exposes India's Northeast to potential security concerns as these portals may be misused by anti-India elements to enter the region and wreak havoc. Historically, anti-India forces have used Bangladesh as a launchpad to destabilize the NEI.

From India's perspective, while India would want to pursue a national policy, in reality, the relevance of India's Northeast in the context of Bangladesh remains disproportionately high. This is especially true when one considers how anti-India policies in Bangladesh has an almost exclusive impact on the NEI. Thus, New Delhi has to factor the voices emanating out of its NE states while formulating its policy towards Dhaka.

Keeping the above factors in mind, India should also form a nuanced perspective of Bangladesh's political landscape. The AL of today is a pale shadow of yesteryears. It is well known that opposition forces have infiltrated the AL across levels, including in its highest echelons. Similarly, there are pro-India or at least pragmatic elements within the BNP who would want to have a positive working relationship with India. In a conversation with several senior BNP leaders post 5 August, they expressed disappointment at how there seems to be a general perception within Indian policymaking circles that the party is inherently anti-India. This is a clear signaling on their part indicating their willingness to work with New Delhi if they come to power in Dhaka.

Other disturbing developments in Bangladesh which have missed the headlines are also worrisome for India's Northeast. On 6 August, an armed mob attacked the high-security prison in Sherpur, freeing more than 500 inmates while another jailbreak was orchestrated in Gazipur resulting in the escape of 209 prisoners. Among those who escaped was the

Among those who escaped was the India *Amir* of Ansarullah Bangla Team, ... Ikramul Haque alias Abu Talha who was arrested in Dhaka in 2023 based on intelligence input from Indian agencies

India *Amir* of Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), Ikramul Haque alias Abu Talha who was arrested in Dhaka in 2023 based on intelligence input from Indian agencies. Another escapee was Niyamatullah, the commander of a module busted in Kolkata. It is still unclear whether the *Amir* of Jamaatul Muslimeen, Abdul Amin and Zakaria Mondul, the leader of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB) have also escaped in these prison breaks as they were also in these high-security jails.

This is an exceptionally alarming situation especially for Assam and Tripura where several modules of ABT and JMB have been busted in recent times. Between 2022 to 2023, over 60 members of ABT have been arrested from these states of which more than 30 were from Bangladesh. This should ring alarm bells within India's internal security and law enforcement apparatus.

The solution, as with most crisis situations around the world, is to address the issue at its core. In this instance, the priority remains the people of Bangladesh in general and its youth in particular. Therefore, while New Delhi waits for political and economic stability to return to Dhaka, addressing the aspirations of the youth is important. Their dreams are not different from those of India's youth - education, skilling and career opportunities. It is important to note that the two countries have everything to lose if they pursue a zero-sum game a lot to gain if they adopt a win-win approach. Therefore, the recommendations given above are submitted for consideration.

SHARE MEMBERS



RK Mathur

Former Lt. Governor of Ladakh,
Former Defence, MSME & Defence Production
Secy. of India

First Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh from 2019 to 2023. He was also the Chief Information Commissioner prior to heading the UT of Ladakh. He served the Govt. of Tripura for about 15 years and was the Chief Secy. of the state before joining Government of India. His contribution to the modernization of the Indian Armed Forces is widely recognized both nationally and internationally. In Tripura, several path breaking initiatives were taken by him.

Amb Harshvardhan Shringla

Chief Coordinator for India's G20 Presidency,
Former Foreign Secretary of India

Former Indian Ambassador to Thailand & the USA and High Commissioner to Bangladesh where he was critical in promoting India's Neighbourhood First and Look East policies. He was a key pillar in the success of India's G20 Presidency where he took the G20 to India's hinterlands, including NEI. He has carved a niche for himself in developing strategic alliances, thereby putting India firmly on the global map





Lt. Gen RP Kalita (Retd)

Former General Officer Commanding,
Eastern Command, Indian Army

Lt. Gen. Kalita, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (retd) has served for four decades the Indian Army in almost all its operational spectrums ranging of counter insurgency operations (COIN), to leading a Mountain Brigade, an Infantry Division and a Corp. in NEI before taking charge as GOC-in-C, Eastern Command. He has had two tenures with the UN to Sierra Leone and Sudan. He is widely respected for his doctrinal depth on strategic affairs.

Bhaskar J Mahanta

Former DGP Assam, (HOPF)
Chief Information Commissioner Assam



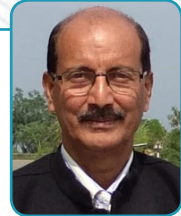
A highly decorated officer, he is widely acknowledged for the pivotal role he played in ushering peace in Assam. Along with his expertise in COIN, he has been a key player in transforming Assam Police into a citizen-centric, service-delivery force. His work in developing and implementing rehabilitation programs for victims of violence has been universally appreciated, including by UNICEF. He is also a national award winning filmmaker.



Nazeeb Arif

Executive VP & Head of Corp. Communications,
ITC Limited

With nearly four decades of experience, in business and industry, he has promoted subregional economic co-operation that puts NEI at its core. He is a recipient of the prestigious United States Asia Environmental Partnership – Environmental Leadership Award. Before joining ITC, he was the Secretary General & CEO of the Indian Chamber of Commerce. He is known to be a champion of sustainable development in the business world.



Samudra Gupta Kashyap

Historian & Chancellor, Nagaland
University

A widely acclaimed scholar and journalist, Dr Kashyap has to his credit four decades of reporting NE to the outside world. Author of several books primarily focused on NEI and S/SEA, he is acknowledged to have ushered in systematic changes in Nagaland University. A distinguished alumnus of Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, he holds a PhD Degree in Management.



Subimal Bhattacharjee

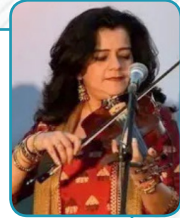
Tech Policy Adviser, Columnist

Mr. Bhattacharjee is a well-known policy adviser on technology and security issues. He has been a member of the advisory committee of Global Commission on Internet Governance. He has also served as a policy expert on two UN led programs on the subject of critical and emerging technology. He is a regular contributor to several print and TV media organizations in India, on all matters pertaining to technology. Previously, he was the Country Head of General Dynamics, India.

Sunita Bhuyan

Violinist & HR Professional

A renowned violinist, she regularly performs around the globe. She is also the Chief Mentor of Atos Prayas Foundation, a visiting faculty of IIM Shillong on Music and Aesthetics & CEDEP France, and is also a consulting practitioner for various prestigious forums and organizations. She was awarded by Pope Francis at the Vatican City for her work on music therapy with underprivileged children, cancer patients and people with disability.





Abhijan Das

Strategic Studies and Research Expert

Mr. Das has been involved in national security affairs for over a decade, counter-terrorism being one of his key focuses. He also has close to a decade of consulting experience working with Fortune 100 companies. He has completed his M.Sc. in Strategic Studies from S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore and has specialised in Terrorism Studies. He is currently overseeing the Strategic Intelligence division of one of the leading consulting firms working with law enforcement agencies to enable them to adopt emerging technologies to augment their intelligence generation capabilities.



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