

What awaits Awami League after the Hasina verdict?

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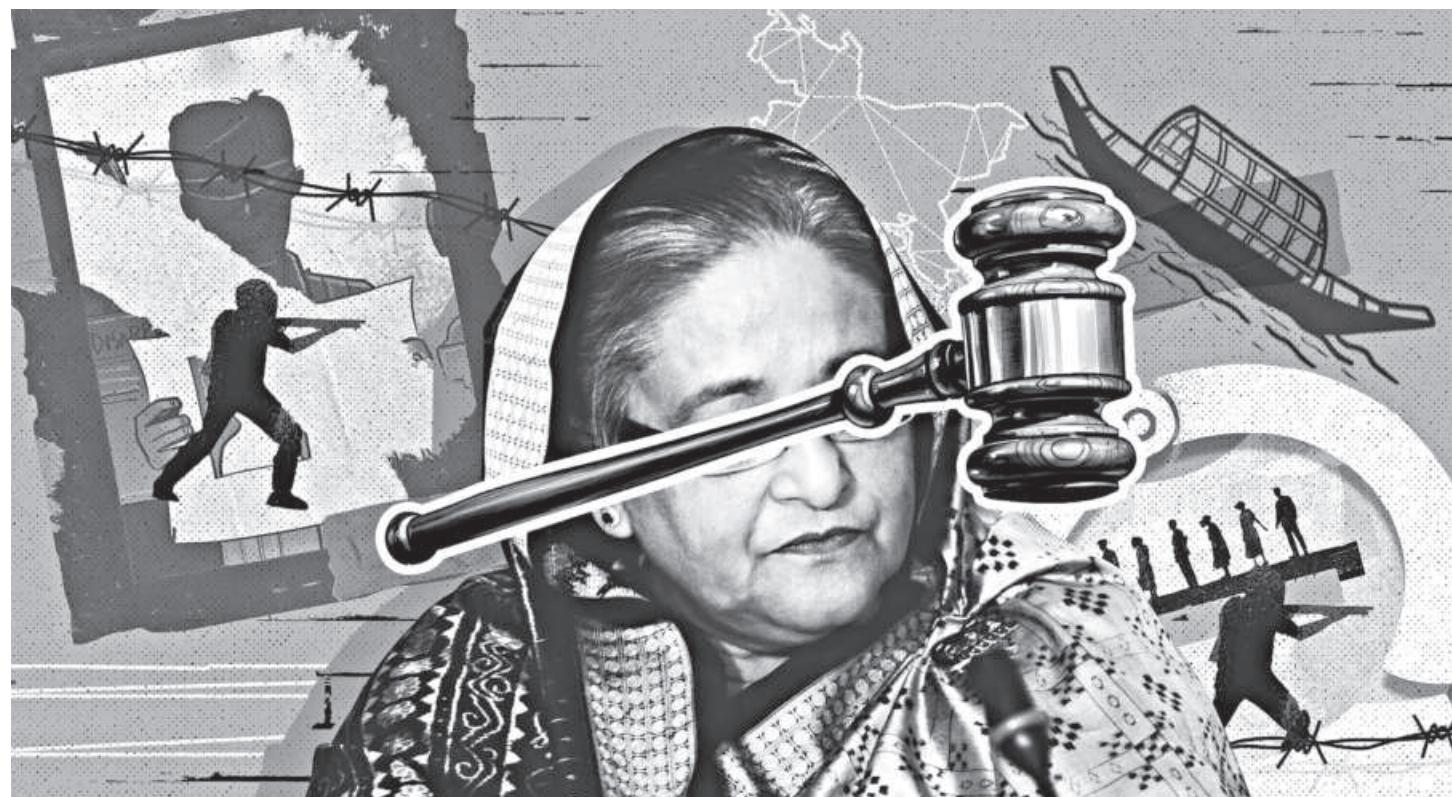
The verdict against Sheikh Hasina does not just condemn a former prime minister. It sentences an entire model of politics. The deeper question now is whether Awami League survives as a party, or only as a memory of fear and loyalty.

Awami League today is a textbook example of a personalist party. Scholars describe such parties as vehicles built around a single leader who controls nominations, finances, and coercive linkages between state and party far more than any committee does. In Bangladesh, party constitutions often speak of councils and presidiums, but in practice, the central working or executive committee has long revolved around one figure whose word can override procedure. When that figure is unseated, exiled, and now sentenced to death in absentia, three factors usually matter for the party's fate: its brand, its machine, and the violence in its past.

The Awami League brand is split in two: one layer is the liberation memory and the promise of secular nationalism, which still hold sway among many loyalists; another is the experience of authoritarian rule from 2009 to 2024, which ended in regime collapse following a mass uprising. This constitutes what political scientists call a brand crisis. Voters who once associated the party with independence and development now also associate it with enforced disappearances, digital surveillance, images of students shot in broad daylight, etc.

The machine, however, remains real. For more than a decade, Awami League reshaped local power structures by tying local government, law enforcement, business contracts, and even relief distribution to partisan loyalty. Even after the interim government banned party activities and suspended its registration under the Anti-Terrorism Act, those ties did not magically vanish. What we see instead is a scattered, weakened, but still-resilient network of former lawmakers, chairmen, contractors, and student enforcers—some in prison or on the run, others quietly negotiating their survival with the new authorities.

At the top level, exile has created a parallel command structure. Recent reporting shows that Hasina and senior leaders coordinate



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

shutdowns and protests from Kolkata, London, and other cities, using encrypted channels and sophisticated digital outreach that still engages supporters. This is not a dead party. It is a party stripped of legal recognition and territorial control but still armed with diaspora money, foreign connections, and an angry base. That combination can produce renewal, or catastrophe.

So, what are the realistic futures for Awami League without Hasina as a legal political actor inside Bangladesh?

The first scenario is fragmentation under new labels. Comparative research on authoritarian successor parties shows that even when a ruling party is banned, its cadres often reappear in new centrist or regional vehicles, especially where they still command local patronage and social capital.

The second scenario is negotiated rehabilitation without Hasina. After bans and trials, discredited parties are sometimes re-legalised on strict conditions: lustration of condemned leaders, truth-telling about past crimes, and broader constitutional changes making concentration of power more difficult. The ongoing restrictions on Awami League and its student wing carry built-in conditionality tied to the outcomes of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), which has now issued the harshest possible verdict against its central figure. If the tribunal or any other competent court moves towards a collective judgment on the party, one compromise available to future elected governments will be to distinguish between the organisation and its former leadership. Down that path, a post-Hasina Awami League would have to

coalition, one that comprises middle-ranking organisers and local notables who were never central to the security apparatus.

The third scenario is radicalisation in exile. The combination of a death sentence, an effective party ban, and frozen assets can produce a strong sense of victimhood. Diaspora networks can drift from lobbying and digital propaganda into funding or facilitating underground activities. Here lies a danger for Bangladesh—a slow erosion of the new institutions through constant attempts at sabotage, diplomatic pressure from sympathetic foreign patrons, and episodic violence by splinter groups that claim the Awami legacy but reject its secular connection. History offers many such examples, from armed offshoots of banned movements in Latin America to factions that turned to street

level militias after losing their constitutional space.

Which of these future scenarios unfolds depends less on Hasina herself and more on two other actors. The first is the interim and future elected governments, especially how they handle transitional justice. A process that looks like victor's justice will push many ordinary Awami supporters towards denial and resentment, making exile narratives of persecution more plausible. But a process that separates individual criminal responsibility from collective guilt, and offers lower-ranking activists a clear pathway back into civic life, will weaken the appeal of militancy.

The second actor is the generation that toppled Hasina. Young people who buried bullets in 2024 and then organised through new parties and civic platforms will determine whether Awami League remains a toxic brand for life or can be recycled as one competitive option in a pluralistic system. Research on political generations indicates that experiences in late adolescence can leave deep partisan imprints. For many of these young citizens, the word "Awami" now evokes memories of checkpoints, trolls, and mothers waiting outside morgues. To rebuild legitimacy, any successor formation will need to acknowledge this trauma publicly, not bury it beneath slogans about development and liberation.

A prudent approach, therefore, will be to avoid two temptations. One is to treat Hasina's death sentence as the final closing of a chapter and drive Awami League entirely out of politics; that path almost guarantees some form of underground politics and invites sympathetic foreign powers to use the exiled leadership as a bargaining chip. The other is to rehabilitate the party too quickly in the name of reconciliation without serious institutional reform, which would amount to inviting the same machine back under a fresh coat of paint.

Awami League without Sheikh Hasina should be neither sacred nor forbidden. It should be forced to become ordinary. That means full accountability for crimes committed under its rule, strict campaign-finance transparency, internal elections that actually matter, and a constitutional environment that prevents any party from monopolising power again. The networks that long sustained the party will not disappear, but they can be tamed by new rules and higher expectations from citizens.

If that happens, the future Awami League may resemble what it has not been for a long time: a fallible political party competing for votes, not a dynasty backed by a security apparatus. Sheikh Hasina's death sentence will still mark a key moment. But it may also become the point at which Bangladesh finally separates liberation memory from impunity and replaces fear with institutions.

Why Bangladesh can no longer ignore its earthquake risk

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Dhaka and Bangladesh's other densely populated cities stand exposed to alarming seismic hazards—an uncomfortable truth underscored by the magnitude 5.7 earthquake that rattled the nation on November 21, 2025. The quake, which killed at least 10 people and injured several hundred, exposed how fragile urban life is in cities where millions live in tightly packed buildings, many never designed for seismic forces. For me, who was born and raised in Dhaka with a childhood fear that a devastating earthquake could strike at any moment, the news felt deeply personal. That fear guided my career into earthquake engineering, but knowledge alone cannot safeguard our families and our cities. Bangladesh must urgently translate science into action.

Bangladesh lies atop an active tectonic boundary, where deforming plates and hidden faults create frequent moderate earthquakes that shake major cities several times each decade. Beneath Dhaka lies a thick layer of water-saturated deltaic soil, which amplifies shaking and increases the potential

for liquefaction (especially in reclaimed low-lying areas), causing buildings to tilt, sink, or collapse. However, the hazard is intensified not only by geology but also by urban reality. In many parts of Dhaka, buildings stand shoulder-to-shoulder, separated by only a few centimetres or none at all. This density creates a unique and dangerous seismic phenomenon: building pounding.

When two buildings stand extremely close together, they may sway differently during an earthquake. Without adequate separation gaps, they can slam or "pound" into each other. This can lead to catastrophic failures, including collapse of upper floors, shear failures in columns, falling facade elements or walls, and progressive collapse of an entire block of buildings. Dhaka, Chattogram, and Sylhet contain thousands of such high-risk adjacency conditions, especially in older neighbourhoods. The recent quake caused visible pounding cracks and dislodged masonry in several areas, clear warning signs of what a larger earthquake might bring.

Furthermore, many high-rise buildings

in Bangladesh feature unreinforced masonry infill walls (walls made of brick or concrete blocks without steel reinforcement) or decorative facade elements. These components, perfectly stable during normal conditions, can behave unpredictably during an earthquake: out-of-plane wall failures can eject large masonry panels onto streets, falling debris from parapets, balconies, and exterior tiles can kill or injure pedestrians, and heavy air-conditioning units and water tanks on building edges can topple during shaking. Most casualties in moderate earthquakes around the world come not from pancaked buildings but from these secondary, avoidable hazards. Dhaka's crowded sidewalks and narrow lanes make falling debris an especially lethal risk.

One straightforward action Bangladesh can take immediately before any major retrofit is to identify the most vulnerable buildings, especially those with unreinforced masonry, glass facades, or insufficient separation gaps. "Danger zones" should be mapped on the ground using paint or physical barriers, indicating where pedestrians should not stand or walk during or after shaking. Additionally, warning signage should be installed in front of identified buildings, and building owners should be required to remove or secure loose external elements. Several earthquake-prone countries, including Japan and Chile, implemented variations of these low-cost interventions to dramatically reduce casualties from falling debris.

The recent Dhaka earthquake revealed

how even moderate shaking can create chaos: thousands rushing down congested staircases, injuries from debris dislodged during tremors, traffic jams halting emergency access, and widespread panic among residents. If a moderate quake can cause this level of disturbance, imagine the level of devastation a major event could generate.

What is needed is a whole-of-society approach with the national government, city corporations and local governments, the private sectors, including real estate developers, media, NGOs, academics, experts, and communities. The national government must update and enforce seismic codes, retrofit schools and hospitals, modernise zoning regulations, establish advanced early-warning systems, and create and maintain city-level emergency operations centres.

Meanwhile, city authorities must conduct rapid seismic assessments and building tagging, identify pounding-prone building pairs and mandate separation or retrofitting, map sidewalk danger zones in front of vulnerable structures, and organise frequent emergency drills and enforce evacuation protocols. However, the private sector, too, must come forward and do the needful. Real estate developers must retrofit aging buildings and comply with seismic design codes, remove unanchored heavy elements from facades and rooftops, and invest in earthquake insurance schemes.

The role of media, NGOs, and communities in earthquake preparedness and resilience

building is equally important. Media and communities must train volunteers for emergency response, raise public awareness about safe evacuation and debris hazards, and ensure preparedness efforts include vulnerable and marginalised populations. In the meantime, academics must advance seismic risk mapping, conducting vulnerability studies, and retrofit solutions. They can advise government and non-government actors about technical foundations for safer reconstruction, and work with authorities to prioritise high-risk districts.

Bangladesh must pursue an actionable resilience strategy, including conducting vulnerability audits and mandated separation or structural retrofits, rapid tagging of buildings using colour codes (red/yellow/green), mandatory soil investigations for all new developments, retrofitting public structures and high-rise clusters, city-wide emergency management centres with trained staff and clear protocols, large-scale public education campaigns on earthquake safety, and cross-sector partnerships to monitor progress and enforce accountability.

Bangladesh is no stranger to natural disasters, but the threat posed by a future large earthquake, one striking at the heart of its megacities, is unlike any other challenge the country has faced. The science is clear. The risks are known. And the consequences of inaction could be catastrophic. If this latest earthquake teaches us anything, it is that the time for warnings has passed. The time for resilience has arrived.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Wild guess
- 5 Company division
- 10 Home run, in slang
- 12 Concerning
- 13 Chosen few
- 14 Relish
- 15 Feel poorly
- 16 Splash in drops
- 18 Be significant
- 20 Mine find
- 21 "Orinoco Flow" singer
- 23 Good times
- 24 Mint product
- 26 Baseball's Rose
- 28 Cargo amount
- 29 Weakens
- 31 Each and every

DOWN

- 32 Future cake
- 36 Serving aid
- 39 Hearty brew
- 40 Blender speed
- 41 Dodge
- 43 Moved cautiously
- 44 Easy runs
- 45 Judges
- 46 "Chicago" actor
- 1 Teakettle output
- 2 Shire of "Rocky"
- 3 Crooked
- 4 Track act
- 5 Epic tale
- 6 Touch on
- 7 Missed opportunities

8 Muse of music

9 Mail units

11 Bristles at

17 Be a snoop

19 Toe count

22 Duds

24 Conspire

25 Blow up

27 Id

28 Designated

30 Tad's dad

33 Grayish brown

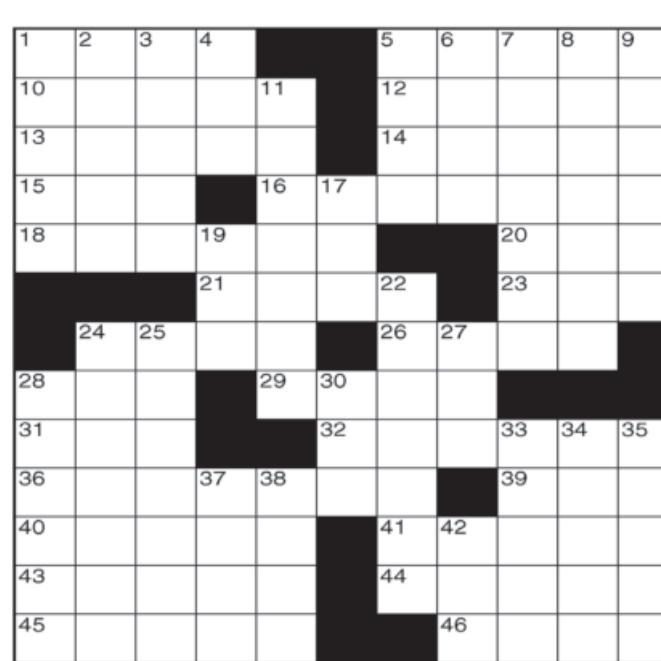
34 Tribal leader

35 Baseball's Pee Wee

37 Abound

38 Danson and Turner

42 Fireplace item



FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14TH'S ANSWERS

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