

West Bengal poll politics tests the limits of Dhaka-Delhi reset process



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SHAKEEL ANWAR

"Detect, delete, deport."

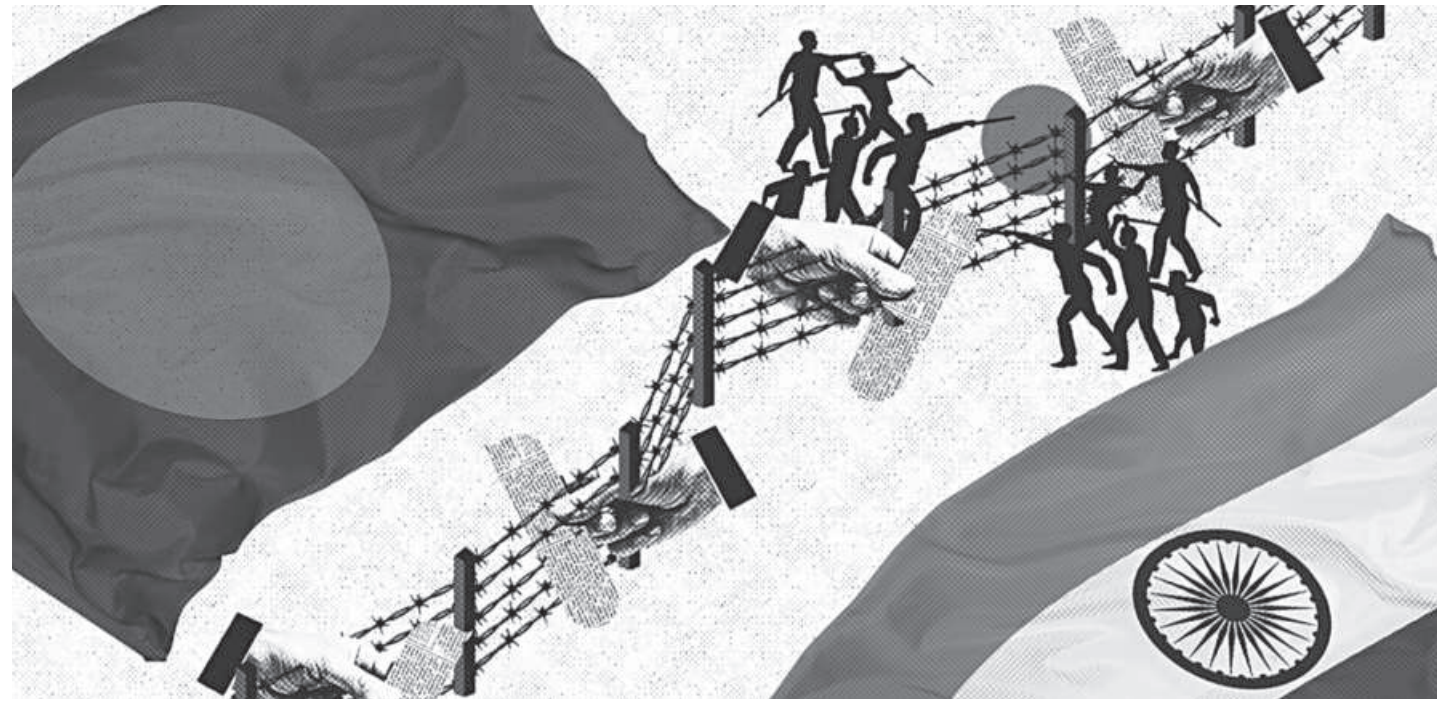
That three-word formulation has become the defining doctrine of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the run-up to West Bengal's two-phase assembly elections scheduled for April 23 and 29. The party has placed illegal migration at the centre of its political and security narrative, more sharply than in previous campaigns, so Bangladesh has naturally emerged as a reference point. That has implications far beyond state politics, especially at a time when Dhaka and New Delhi are trying to rebuild ties after a sharp downturn following the fall of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

For years, BJP has used the issue of so-called "illegal infiltration" from Bangladesh as a political tool in Assam, where demographic anxieties have long shaped electoral behaviour. The Assam assembly election is now over, but the narrative has not receded—it has shifted, recalibrated, and intensified in West Bengal. Terms like "infiltrators," "outsiders," and "illegal entrants" are dominating campaign speeches, frequently without naming Bangladesh directly. But the subtext is widely understood.

The strategy is deliberate. Bengal's politico-cultural landscape demands a more calibrated tone than Assam. Direct references to Bangladeshis—especially Bengali-speaking Muslims—carry electoral risks. But the core message remains intact: migration is a threat to identity, resources, and security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addressing a rally in Purba Bardhaman district on April 11, delivered one of the sharpest statements yet: "The infiltrators should start packing their bags; it is time to leave. Those who have helped the infiltrators will not be spared."

The phrasing is striking not just for its directness, but also for its implied consequences. Across the campaign, BJP leaders have moved beyond general warnings. They are setting implicit deadlines for "infiltrators" to leave, linking migration to voter fraud and welfare leakage, and framing it as a national security issue.

In West Bengal politics, as an Atlantic Council columnist has noted, Bangladesh functions "less as a foreign policy concern



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

than a domestic political proxy through which citizenship, demography, and belonging are contested. For the BJP, references to Bangladesh collapse cross-border history into a narrative of undocumented migration and demographic threat." In effect, Bangladesh is no longer just a neighbour but a symbol within India's domestic political contests.

This transformation simplifies a rather complex, historically rooted migration issue into a binary political narrative: insiders versus outsiders. The political utility of the narrative is clear. By linking migration to jobs, welfare, and security, BJP taps into local anxieties while aligning them with a broader national ideology. The result is a message that resonates across constituencies. Even administrative measures are framed within this lens. The revision of electoral rolls through the controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which saw millions of names removed in West Bengal, has been projected by some as a clean-up of "illegal Bangladeshis."

At the same time, any report of communal

tension in Bangladesh is quickly amplified in West Bengal's political discourse. BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, seen as a potential chief ministerial face if the party wins, has repeatedly sought to link developments in Bangladesh to security and demographic anxieties in Bengal. In campaigns, he has expressed deep concern over Bangladesh's February 2026 election results, specifically regarding the performance of Jamaat e-

across the border is the public demeaning of Bangladesh by the very leaders he is keen to engage and rebuild ties with.

The Bengal campaign, in effect, is acting as a rhetorical drag on diplomacy. Some observers have already flagged this tension. Writing in *Deccan Herald* after a recent visit to Delhi by Bangladesh's foreign minister, Smita Sharma suggested that India should tone down its rhetoric. "India would do

northeast as "landlocked" and Bangladesh as the "only guardian of the ocean," illustrates how sensitive such language can be. From Dhaka's perspective, the continued portrayal of Bangladeshis as "infiltrators" and sources of instability is equally sensitive. Ironically, India expects rhetorical restraint from Bangladesh on issues related to its security, but its own political discourse often overlooks Bangladesh's concerns.

For the BNP government, this presents a delicate challenge. Although Tarique Rahman secured a strong electoral mandate, his government operates under domestic pressure. The Jamaat-NCP opposition coalition continues to mobilise anti-India sentiment, ensuring that any engagement with New Delhi is closely scrutinised. In this context, even routine diplomatic gestures may acquire political significance. If Dhaka appears overly accommodating while Indian leaders publicly link Bangladesh to infiltration and security threats, it risks triggering domestic backlash, a pattern evident during Sheikh Hasina's tenure. Yet a confrontational approach would equally undermine the broader objective of stabilising bilateral ties. The space for manoeuvre is limited.

A significant segment of Bangladesh's population, especially Gen Z youth who led the 2024 uprising, still view India with deep suspicion. The grievance is rooted, among other factors, in inflammatory rhetoric from sections of Indian media and political circles. This dynamic was evident during the interim government period, when Indian narratives about minority issues in Bangladesh triggered strong reactions in Dhaka. In West Bengal, the amplification of such issues for electoral gain further narrows the space for diplomacy.

At the heart of this strategy lies the politics of perception. Migration is a complex issue shaped by geography, economics, and history. But in electoral politics, it is often reduced to a simple narrative: outsiders taking what belongs to insiders. Research shows that perceived demographic threat, rather than empirical evidence, plays a decisive role in shaping voter behaviour. In this sense, the "Bangladeshi infiltrator" functions less as a measurable category and more as a political symbol.

The Bengal and Assam elections have turned Bangladesh into a central, if implicit, theme in India's domestic politics. For BJP, the strategy is seen as electorally effective. For bilateral relations, the effects could be ruinous. Whether these contrasting scenarios—engagement in diplomatic corridors, confrontation on campaign trails—can be reconciled will determine the trajectory of Bangladesh-India relations in the months ahead.

Islami in constituencies along the Indo-Bangladesh frontier.

All of this is unfolding at a sensitive moment in bilateral relations since the 2024 political transition in Bangladesh. The new government under Tarique Rahman has signalled a pragmatic approach, emphasising mutual respect and reciprocity under a "Bangladesh First" policy. New Delhi, too, has indicated a willingness to engage. But the contrast between diplomatic engagement and campaign rhetoric is stark. While officials on both sides speak of cooperation, political messaging in Bengal continues to cast Bangladesh in a negative light.

For the BNP government, this is both embarrassing and politically uncomfortable. Built historically on an anti-India sentiment, the party chief has consciously repositioned it towards a more centrist and moderate stance. Notably, its election campaign avoided overt anti-India rhetoric. Since assuming office, Tarique Rahman has moved quickly to signal a reset in ties with New Delhi. Yet what he sees

well to ease up medical visas and resume cricketing ties with the neighbour once the unfortunate shrill rhetoric over Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshi infiltrators by the BJP campaigners in Assam and West Bengal calms down," she wrote.

For now, however, there is little indication that BJP is willing to soften its tone in the middle of a crucial election. The rhetoric may well subside once the dust settles following the West Bengal elections, but it is likely to leave a scar. In Bangladesh, memories remain sharp—particularly of Amit Shah's 2018 remark describing illegal Bangladeshi migrants as "termites." That phrase continues to resonate, reinforcing perceptions of hostility and making the task of rebuilding trust between the two countries more difficult.

Rhetoric matters in international relations, especially between neighbours with deep historical and cultural ties. India's strong reaction to remarks by Prof Muhammad Yunus, who described India's

WORLD CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION DAY

Why Bangladesh is losing the innovation race



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SABBIR AHMAD

If you walk into a random classroom in Bangladesh and ask the students what they want to be when they grow up, there are some fairly common answers that might reach your ears. Some might want to be a doctor or maybe an engineer or a BCS officer, while others might just want to go abroad. The latter answer is more of a survival strategy than a professional goal. It also leads us to one of the most urgent questions facing our nation: how can we build a country where our brightest people would want to stay and work towards improving the nation?

World Creativity and Innovation Day (WCID)—observed on April 21—aims to raise awareness of the role of creativity and innovation in all aspects of human development. The day often invites policy announcements, innovation summits, or budget discussions across the globe. However, in Bangladesh, the day doesn't seem to inspire such discussions. This needs to change. Especially as we are close to graduating out of LDC status, a milestone that could strip away trade preferences covering roughly 70 percent of our global exports. Upgrading our status shouldn't feel like falling off a cliff but without a plan to replace current trade benefits, that's where we might be heading regardless of whether we are granted with the grace period we've asked for.

The WCID started its journey when a Canadian creativity advocate, Marci Segal, launched the first observance in 2002 to address a growing innovation gap in her country. Fifteen years later, it

became a global mandate through UN Resolution 71/284. April 21 was strategically chosen just before Earth Day on April 22 for a reason: we can't build a sustainable world without a creative one. Creativity and innovation are also crucial to global economy as cultural and creative industries generate annual revenues of almost \$2.3 trillion globally, contributing 3.1 percent of the global GDP, according to a UN estimate.

Shashi Tharoor recently argued that India could become the world's innovation capital. He was not referring to a vision but a policy decision already in place. India has 1,800 plus Global Capability Centers (GCCs). GCCs are dedicated offshore hubs where multinational companies set up their own teams to handle everything from software engineering and data analytics to product development and AI research. This was possible because India built, deliberately and over decades, the conditions necessary: regulatory certainty, deep talent pipelines, and relevant infrastructure.

Our engineers are also world-class. According to experts, there are some 10 lakh freelancers in the country and around 650,000 of them are in the IT field who bring in about a billion dollars annually. Many of those living abroad remain emotionally invested in Bangladesh too and with the right policy framework, their knowledge, networks, and capital can add to our country's economy. A diaspora engagement strategy—offering equity pathways,

co-founding incentives, tax benefits, or the opportunity to remotely contribute—may convert brain drain into "brain gain."

Furthermore, in the Global Innovation Index 2025, Bangladesh ranked 106th among 139 economies. Our score of 21 points, up from 19.1 in 2024 reflects a persistent paradox: we consistently outperform on outputs relative to inputs. bKash didn't have a world-class research and development lab but became hugely successful with seven crore users. The credit could be owed to the smart people identifying and filling a structural gap. Pathao, iFarmer, 10-Minute School, among others are proof that Bangladeshi ingenuity consistently outpaces institutional support. But instinct isn't always enough. Bangladesh's total research and development investment stood at just 0.03 percent of GDP in 2022-23 against Vietnam's 0.54 percent, India's 0.70 percent, and China's 2.55 percent. Our budget allocation for science and technology is also minuscule and we must have the courage to follow the roadmap to fix it.

First, we must prioritise research and development spending. Both public allocation and tax frameworks should be channelled for research funding. The regulatory sandbox piloted by Bangladesh Bank or a2i for fintech could be a template for agri-tech, health-tech, and energy-tech.

Second, the government must reconstruct the education sector from the ground up. When a considerable number of tertiary degree holders remain unemployed, it shows a gross mismatch between classroom output and market demand. Syllabuses must include more technical programmes such as AI, data science, systems thinking, and applied problem-solving. Universities must learn to build genuine bridges to industry, not merely produce graduates and call it a pipeline.

Third, we must make sure innovation transcends geographic

restrictions. Bangladesh's startup ecosystem remains overwhelmingly concentrated in Dhaka. Regional hubs in Chatogram, Sylhet, Rajshahi, and Khulna with infrastructure guarantees and targeted incentives would distribute both risk and opportunity. The next "bKash" should be as likely to emerge from somewhere in Sylhet as from Dhaka's Gulshan area.


Fourth, we must attract GCC investments. India built its GCC advantage over two decades. Bangladesh has a window of cost base, young workforce, expanding digital infrastructure to position ourselves as South Asia's next GCC hub.

Fifth, we should make staying home

competitive. Freelancers working for foreign clients and diaspora professionals in global tech hubs are responding to better opportunities. To close the gap, we need equity culture in startups, stock option frameworks, competitive compensation, and IP protection strong enough that building something here feels worth the risk.

As a country on the path to LDC graduation, we can't afford to be without an innovation strategy. The trade preferences that cushioned our growth for decades are expiring, automation is arriving in factories millions depend on, and our most capable minds are making the

calculation as to where their best future lies. So, we must ensure innovation is something we are taking seriously. The most innovative economies did not get there because their people were born more creative. It is because their governments, educators, and businesses worked together to build ecosystems where creativity compounds. Bangladesh has talent, but it lacks effective institutions to treat imagination as investment and failure as data. So, on this World Creativity and Innovation Day, the question is not how we observe this day but whether we are willing to honour what it demands before running out of time.



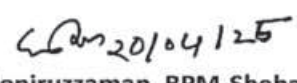
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Inspector General
Bangladesh Police
Police Headquarters, Dhaka.

Corrigendum of International Tender Notice

Memo No-44.01.0000.058.07.019.25/379 Date: 20/04/2026.

Invitation for International Tender Notice Published in different national dailies as per Invitation tender ref No-44.01.0000.058.07.019.25/07(2025-2026) Date: 15/03/2026 for procurement of Crew Served Machine Gun in FY 2025-2026 is hereby amended as follows:

Particular Information	Published	Revised
Tender last selling date	27 April 2026	04 May 2026
Tender closing date and time	28 April 2026 at 12.00 hrs	05 May 2026 at 13.00 hrs
Tender opening date and time (Technical offer only)	28 April 2026 at 12.30 hrs	05 May 2026 at 13.30 hrs


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