DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

18th November, 2025

The Hindu Analysis 18th November, 2025

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Hasina, aide get death penalty over crackdown on 2024 student protests

Rabiul Alam
DHAKA

A special tribunal in Bangladesh sentenced former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death on Monday, after finding them guilty of crimes against humanity during the state crackdown on a student uprising in July-August 2024.

Former Inspector-General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who turned a state witness and testified before the tribunal against Ms. Hasina and Mr. Khan, was sentenced to five years in prison after he admitted to his involvement in the crackdown of the protests that led to the fall of the Hasina government.

Reacting to the development, Ms. Hasina said the charges were unjustified, arguing she and Mr. Khan "acted in good faith and were trying to minimise the loss of life".

"We lost control of the situation, but to characterise what happened as a premeditated assault on citizens is simply to misread the facts," the former Prime Minister said in a statement. "I mourn all of the deaths that occurred in July and August of last year, on both sides of the political divide. But neither I nor other political leaders ordered the killing of protesters," she added.

Protesters outside the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, former Bangladesh President and the father of Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka. AP

The verdict by the International Crimes Tribunal-1 (ICT-1) represents the most dramatic legal action against the Awami League leader and comes just months before the parliamentary election scheduled for February.

The tribunal also asked the government to provide compensation to the families of the victims and to those injured during the crackdown.

Attorney-General Md Asaduzzaman said Ms. Hasina, who is now in exile in India, and Mr. Khan, who is also in exile, cannot appeal the ruling as long as they remain fugitives. He further said the court had ordered the attachment and confiscation of all properties belonging to Ms. Hasina and Mr. Khan within Bangladesh, and that the state would take all necessary legal measures to implement the verdict.

Leaders and activists from various political and social organisations gathered outside the tribunal as the verdict was being read out.

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Delhi blast culprits will get strictest punishment, Shah says at Zonal Council meet

Eliminating terror a collective commitment: Union Home Minister; meeting marked by disputes over water sharing as Haryana, Punjab, H.P. debate SYL canal, pending dues, and territorial claims

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the culprits of the November 10 Delhi bomb blast will be traced "even from the netherworld", brought before the judicial system, and given the strictest possible punishment.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, eliminating terrorism from the roots is our collective commitment," Mr. Shah said while chairing the 32nd meeting of the Northern Zonal Council in Faridabad, Haryana. The meeting was attended by Chief Ministers Nayab Singh Saini (Haryana), Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu (Himachal Pradesh), Bhagwant Mann (Punjab), Bhajan Lal Sharma (Rajasthan), Omar Abdullah (Jammu and Kashmir) and Rekha Gupta (Delhi), along with several Governors and Lieutenant-Governors, and senior Central and State government officials.

Silent tribute: The Northern Zonal Council meeting started with a minute's silence for those killed in the Nov. 10 Red Fort blast. ANI

The session started with the participants observing a minute's silence for those killed in the terrorist incident near the Red Fort.

'Vital platforms'

Mr. Shah, the Chairperson of the five Zonal Councils, said the platforms are crucial for dialogue, cooperation, coordination, and policy synergy.

Water sharing emerged as a major topic of discussion, with the participating States making strong claims over their dues.

Haryana raised the issue of the non-construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal – the focal point of its decades-old conflict with Punjab over Ravi and Beas river waters.

Mr. Saini said proper arrangements must be made to ensure each State receives its rightful share of water. "Haryana has consistently been giving Delhi more water than its own share. However, due to the non-construction of the SYL canal, Haryana is not receiving its full share of water from Punjab. Once Haryana receives its rightful share of water through SYL, Rajasthan will also get its due share," said the Haryana CM.

However, Mr. Mann said, "Punjab has no surplus water to spare through the SYL." He added that no scientific calculation had been conducted regarding the availability of water "even in 1976 and 1981, when the ratio of water to be shared among the States was decided by the Government of India unilaterally".

The Himachal CM sought the release of pending dues from the Bhakra Beas Management Board, which manages the Bhakra-Nangal and Beas projects and regulates water release, and pressed for the appointment of a permanent member from his State in the board.

Mr. Sukhu also reiterated his State's "legitimate right" to a 7.19% share in the lands and public assets of Chandigarh – the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, even as Mr. Mann reasserted its long-standing claims over Chandigarh and Panjab University.

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The lower judiciary — litigation, pendency, stagnation

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India, headed by the Chief Justice of India, recently linked the sense of stagnation in the subordinate judicial service to prolonged litigation and the huge pendency in India's courts. According to the National Judicial Data Grid, there are 4.69 crore cases pending in district courts. Another Bench of the Court has asked judges in Delhi to undergo training due to a lack of basic knowledge.

There are a few options to make changes in the administration of justice.

The Code of Civil Procedure and the Civil Rules of Practice contemplate procedures to be followed by courts in entertaining proceedings, issuing summons to the defendants, and for the appearance of parties. Subordinate judges handle this. They are forced to call every suit for the appearance of parties or order the issue of fresh summons and receive *vakalathnamas*. This takes up much time in the morning, leaving judges with very little time for the disposal of cases on merits. In most subordinate courts, the calling of cases goes on from 10.30 a.m. till well past noon. Quality time is lost by attending to such clerical and ministerial work.

A judicial officer in the lowest rank in hierarchy can be appointed in every district court to call all the cases of that particular cadre of courts (senior civil judges or civil judges or district *munsifs*, as the case may be). This court can do ministerial work the whole day and can also be assigned with the power to record *ex parte* evidence, issue of summons, receiving *vakalath* and written statements. At the end of the day, this court can list matters for trial and arguments the following day in each court. This list can be posted on the website in the evening.

The cases can be taken up, as in this list, from 10.30 a.m. every day by each court, and these courts can dispose of matters listed till evening. Even if some matters are adjourned, the orders can be still dictated, thus helping in judgements and case disposal.

The subordinate judiciary, its quality

There was a time when lawyers who practised law under the tutelage of a reputed lawyer in any branch of law, with at least 10 years of experience in the bar, used to be appointed district *munsif*/magistrates. Lawyers with more experience may also qualify after appearing for examinations for direct recruitment as district judges.

But now, judges are appointed without any experience and find it difficult to cope with the workload. In many cases, there are a number of judges who do not even pass orders as they are not equipped. Therefore, every civil judge or senior civil judge who is appointed must undergo training with different High Court Benches for a few months and observe how a High Court functions, how High Court judges hear matters, interact with lawyers, go through the judgments cited and study how orders are passed. This work culture by observation is a step that will definitely improve the working of the subordinate judge judiciary.

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There are solutions to improve the working of the subordinate judicial service

Whenever a statute is passed, new provisions are introduced, purportedly for the quick disposal of cases. But, in many cases, results are not achieved for expeditious disposal. On the contrary, there is a negative impact.

A typical example is Section 12(a) of the Commercial Courts Act and its provisions making pre suit mediation mandatory. The Supreme Court, while interpreting Section12(a), has held, in *Patil Automation vs Rakheja Engineers* (2022 (7) MLJ 139), that this provision is mandatory and that the plaint is liable to be rejected without pre suit mediation. In commercial cases, parties who are in business would have already exchanged notices. Only where exchange of notices do not result in settlement, do they resort to a legal proceeding in court. Therefore, at the time of filing the suit, it would be known where the matter is headed. So, where is the need to make mediation mandatory and direct the plaintiff to exhaust the remedy of mediation before filing the claim?

Another example is the six-month cooling-off period in marriage laws in filing for consent divorce. The parties concerned often want the disposal of the case within this period. Once a couple decides to separate on mutual terms, a pertinent issue is on whether they should be forced to wait for six months. Some courts do not allow this cooling- off period to be dispensed with, leading to further proceedings and pendency. It is not known if it is wise to have a one-year separation in filing a mutual consent petition, while the same is not applicable in a contested petition. An untrue declaration is made by the parties – making it out as if they have been separated for more than one year – to move a petition. Some of these provisions result in pendency and also the litigant facing frustration.

A third example is the new Rent Act. There is enough confusion already as to whether the absence of a written registered lease can vest the rent court with jurisdiction in conflicting judicial opinion. Armed with the same set of facts, one can approach a civil or a commercial court (in the case of commercial lease), but not a rent court. These anomalies could have been avoided had the legislation accepted oral lease as well as delivery of possession recognised by the Transfer of Property Act, as before. In the case of the lease of residential properties and small apartments, parties do not want to spend on stamp duty and registration fee for lease. The nebulous state of affairs created through statute is another reason for pendency in courts.

Archaic procedural law

A number of provisions in the Code of Civil Procedure have also become a tool for some litigants to delay proceedings. These provisions are misused for which there are many examples.

For instance, why should there be a preliminary decree and final decree in a partition action? Why cannot one decree be passed dividing the properties or order sale under the Partition Act soon after the passing of the decree?

Even if two decrees are contemplated, why should not the final decree proceeding be an automatic continuation of the preliminary decree, without a fresh application causing delay? Similarly, execution proceedings are not easily terminated because of many provisions under Order XXI of the Code which can be used by the judgment debtors to delay the process of execution. For example, why should there be 106 rules under Order XXI, many of which are hyper technical?

Unless drastic steps are taken to modify the procedure and compel parties to provide ways and means to satisfy the decree if passed in due course (even at the stage of framing and the list of assets by disclosure are made), a citizen will be forced to visit courts for years to realise his decree. This will be his plight in respect of all money claims including arbitration awards passed in his favour. There is a need to simplify the process of the execution of decrees and awards. and it is here that fast track procedure is needed.

What is important is the quick termination of the proceeding and not merely the conduct of trial or further proceedings by way of appeal. The code might have served the purpose when it was passed in 1908, but it is unfortunate that even after amendments in 1976 and 2002, there is still no solution to have the proceedings concluded expeditiously.

An example is the Amendment to Order VIII Rule 1 CPC making it mandatory for a defendant to file a written statement within 90 days (the Plaintiff can gather details for years to file the suit). What happens if the written statement is filed within 90 days? The suit is still not disposed of immediately and the trial takes its own course, especially when the right to appeal is exercised by the aggrieved party. So, why have a time frame only for filing the written statement?

This provision has not helped the cause other than its resulting in slipshod pleadings. While the time frame is fine when it is about money claims, it does not work in title suits.

Pendency and the higher judiciary

The issue of there being huge pendency needs to be addressed by the higher judiciary also. The termination of a judicial proceeding within a reasonable time – not a hasty approach to a proceeding when it commences or is work in progress – is the urgent need.

Solutions to reduce pendency ought to be considered. Unless we give up archaic laws and recruit competent lawyers as judges, we cannot expect the qualitative disposal of cases. Nor will pendency reduce.

The subordinate judiciary should be allowed to function as judges and not be a ministerial court officer ordering the issue of fresh summons, receiving *vakalathnama* and pleadings, and calling cases and writing notes on the docket for nearly two hours every day.

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India needs to 'connect, build and revive' with Africa

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Ten years after India hosted the last India-Africa Forum Summit, the next chapter needs to be written

Ten years ago, New Delhi hosted the last India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III). The 2015 summit was a moment of significance. Marking a leap in India's diplomatic imagination under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India had welcomed representatives from all 54 African states.

Since then India has added 17 new missions across Africa. Trade has surpassed $100 billion. Investment flows are gathering pace. India's support for Africa's global voice has grown. It was key in ensuring full membership for the African Union in the G-20. It is now time to take stock, not only of promises made but also of the foundations laid.

The opportunities and challenges

By 2050, one in four people on earth will be in Africa. India will be the world's third largest economy. Between these two lies a potential growth corridor of commerce, demography, technology and aspiration.

India is among Africa's top five investors, with cumulative investments of $75 billion. However, the underlying model has shifted. From ports to power lines, vaccine production to digital tools, the message for engagement is clear. Build together.

The evolution of ties is visible. In April 2025, India and nine African navies (Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, the Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania) exercised together in the first Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME), initiating a security partnership rooted in shared oceanic geography.

India's Exim Bank recently extended a $40 million commercial credit line to the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) – modest in scale, but a signal of interest in African-led development. Education remains a trusted pillar.

The new campus of IIT Madras, in Zanzibar, is the most visible example. Behind it stands decades of knowledge partnerships, including the Pan-African e-Network and India's Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, which continue to train thousands across the continent.

These are not isolated efforts but part of a growing web. Beyond that, India continues to push for African representation in global institutions and contributes to United Nations peacekeeping missions on the continent.

India's trade with Africa is growing, but it still lags behind China. Indian firms arrive full of promise but are often slowed by small balance sheets and bureaucratic drag. The temptation to scale back is real, but erroneous.

Instead, India must move up the value chain. That means co-investing in future-facing sectors – green hydrogen, electric mobility and digital infrastructure. Africa today is asserting its terms. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is laying the groundwork for a single continental market. India's UPI and digital stack can complement this transformation. Alas, tools alone are not strategy. Delivery is. In cities such as Kigali (Rwanda), Nairobi (Kenya) and Lagos (Nigeria), African innovation ecosystems are growing. But the competition is global.

The human link

India's most enduring export to Africa is not technology. It is talent. Nearly 40,000 Africans have studied in India in the last decade, through the ITEC, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the e-Network platforms. Many have returned to shape policy, run ministries or lead innovation back home. They are living bridges that carry trust across borders.

The movement is not one way. African students, athletes and entrepreneurs are carving their space in India. Nigerian footballers such as Ranti Martins have become household names. The Indian cricket team's fast bowling coach is South Africa's Morne Morkel. African voices are present in India's universities and laboratories. The partnership is not just strategic. It is lived.

Looking to the future

If India wants to sustain this momentum, three moves matter.

First, connect finance to real outcomes. Every line of credit must lead to something visible and valuable. Public finance must de-risk, not displace, private capital.

Second, build an India-Africa digital corridor. This should rest not only on UPI and India Stack but also on Africa's digital strengths. Together, we can co-develop platforms for health, education and payments that serve the Global South.

Third, revive the institutional backbone. The IAFS has not met since 2015. That Summit, at Mr. Modi's insistence, brought all of Africa together. As its chief coordinator, this writer saw first-hand the diplomatic energy it released. It is time to bring that spirit back as a date on India's diplomatic calendar.

There was a time when merchants crossed the Indian Ocean in search of spice and gold. Today, India and Africa are not just exchanging goods. They are beginning to exchange confidence, capacity, ideas, and connecting futures.

A decade after India welcomed all of Africa to Delhi, the next chapter needs to be written. India once extended a hand to the whole of Africa. Now it is time to join hands and build together.

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India would source 2.2 MTPA of LPG from the U.S. Gulf Coast.

India oil firms bag first-ever U.S. LPG import deal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India's public-sector oil companies have successfully concluded a one-year deal to import liquified petroleum gas (LPG) from the U.S. Gulf Coast, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri said on Monday.

In a post on X, he said India would source about 2.2 million tonne per annum (MTPA) of LPG from the U.S. Gulf Coast for the contract year 2026 – making it the "first structured contract of U.S. LPG for the Indian market".

He added the deal would represent 10% of India's annual imports in the sector during 2026.

"A team of officials from Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum engaged in discussions with major U.S. producers over the last few months, which concluded now," he stated.

The move comes against the backdrop of India facing 50% tariffs on exports to the U.S. and many Indian Ministers' stating India would like to import more energy from the U.S.

(With inputs from T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan)