

Article

Crisis Management of the Anti-quota Student Movement in Bangladesh: Governance Capacity in Misery

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Abstract

This study assesses the governance capacity of Bangladesh's recently ousted government, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), led by Sheikh Hasina, on August 5, 2024, in managing the anti-quota student movement. This study finds major weaknesses in crisis management, including poor preparedness, coordination, and implementation by the last BAL government in Bangladesh. This study used a netnographic approach—a qualitative research method involving systematic observation and analysis to study online communities and cultures—and a literature review, which reveals that the Sheikh Hasina-led 16-year (2008–2024) administration failed to comprehend the anti-quota student movement crisis unfolding between July 1 and August 5, 2024. The 2024 Bangladesh quota reform movement began as a student-led protest from July 1, 2024, against the government's quota system, which involves reserved seats for various categories of people in public jobs. It later, throughout July 2024 until August 5, 2024, evolved into a broader pro-democracy uprising, especially after a violent crackdown by the government in July that killed many student protesters, becoming known as the July Revolution. The government's inability to gauge public sentiment and respond effectively reflects weak political leadership, an authoritarian governance style, and a disconnect between state policies and citizen concerns. The overthrown government struggled to engage with public attitudes and behaviors, further weakening the crisis response. A key practical implication is the government's failure to uphold sustainable development goal 16, which emphasizes peaceful, inclusive societies, access to justice, and strong institutions. The findings urge better governance strategies to effectively manage public dissent and political crises.

Keywords

Bangladesh, student movement, governance capacity, coordination, crisis management

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Introduction

An important issue in modern public administration is the ability of the government to handle exceptional events and calamities of diverse kinds (Rosenthal et al., 1997). Managing crises is an essential duty of the government, although it is a highly challenging task for political and bureaucratic leaders (Boin & Hart, 2003). Furthermore, when the crisis strikes, both democracy and governance pose challenges not just to governments' ability to function successfully but also to their responsibility, legitimacy, representation, and the citizens' capability to have their demands met efficiently (Dahl & Tufte, 1973). Public administration scholars need to explore the capacity of the recently ousted government of Bangladesh on August 5, 2024, led by Sheikh Hasina, to deal with the crisis involving the anti-quota student movement. The article explores the threat posed to the government's governance capacity, which undermines an effective administrative apparatus and government trust.

Bangladesh has recently, from July 1, 2024, until August 5, 2024, witnessed the outbreak of massive protests and demonstrations, unlike those witnessed in recent years, on the contentious issue of the country's quota system (reservation of a certain percentage of government jobs for specific groups of people categorized by the government) in public jobs (Borthakur, 2024). With Sheikh Hasina, the former prime minister, resigning and fleeing the country on August 5, 2024, an interim government was formed on August 8, 2024, under the Nobel laureate Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus. Dr. Yunus is a renowned economist and a social entrepreneur who is best known for pioneering the concept of microcredit, a groundbreaking financial innovation aimed at alleviating poverty by providing small loans to the poor, particularly women, without requiring collateral. He is the founder of Grameen Bank, a microfinance institution that provides microcredit to the poor, especially women, in Bangladesh. In recognition of his efforts to promote economic and social development from the grassroots level, Yunus and Grameen Bank were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus is currently the head of the interim government and was selected by the President of Bangladesh on August 8, 2024, in consultation with the Supreme Court as per Article 106¹ of the constitution. The President sought an advisory opinion from the Supreme Court under Article 106 of the constitution, as there is no provision in the country's charter for the formation of an interim unelected government. The Supreme Court opined that since the prime minister has resigned and the president has dissolved parliament, in such circumstances an interim government may be formed to carry out the executive functions of the state, and the president may appoint a chief adviser, other advisers to the interim government, and may administer the oath to them.

The situation in Bangladesh reflects a significant political and social crisis, with 326 people being shot dead and thousands wounded throughout Bangladesh by the men of the then party in power, Bangladesh Awami League (BAL), and policemen only between August 4 and 6, 2024 (*The Daily Prothomalo*, 2024b). According to the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, violence from the movement has caused an economic loss of around 10 billion USD (*The Daily Star*, 2024c). According to Mizrahi et al. (2021), effective crisis management should have reduced risks and minimized societal costs. In a crisis, legitimacy is contested (Rosenthal et al., 1997). The occurrence of a crisis involving such hostility and atrocities questions the effectiveness of governmental agencies and authorities in preventing the occurrence. Bangladesh's overall political scenario will be discussed in the next section of the article.

Crisis management is, first and foremost, a coordinated process (Boin & Hart, 2003) requiring government agencies and various entities to work together to prepare for, handle, and recover from crises (Boin & Lodge, 2016). Coordination among government agencies and social entities during crises is pivotal to governance capacity and crisis management performance (Christensen et al., 2016). The article presents a framework of governance capacity to understand crisis management performance in Bangladesh in light of the recent anti-quota student movement. The article postulates that the match or mismatch between governance capacity and behavior, on the one hand, and citizens' expectations, on the other hand, affects perceptions of crisis management performance, which the country has not seen since its liberation war in 1971. The article will look into the key factors leading to the mishandling of the mass student movement, which resulted in such a chaotic situation in Bangladesh.

Background of the Study

The quota on public jobs was introduced in Bangladesh in 1972, shortly after the country gained independence. The system has since undergone multiple changes. The quota system in Bangladesh sets aside 30% of seats in the public-sector jobs for freedom fighters, that is, war veterans and their children, as well as 10% in favor of women and an additional 10% for candidates from less developed districts (Shawkat Ali, 2004). It mandated another 5% reservation to members of tribal communities/minority groups and a 1% reservation to persons with disabilities, along with a new clause that the grandchildren of the war veterans would also receive the benefits of the quota system (Bhardwaj, 2024). As a result, 56% of employment positions in the country's public service were filled through reservations or quotas.

The opposition to the quota system started to gather strength in the 1990s, fueled by apprehensions that the policy was being abused and giving rise to a novel type of unfairness. The initial demonstrations were intermittent, although they underscored the increasing discontent among students and job seekers who believed the quota system impeded the merit selection process. Nevertheless, in 2018, the campaign experienced a significant increase in momentum as thousands of students inundated the streets, vociferously demanding reform. A wave of extensive demonstrations from university students swept through the nation, compelling the government to eliminate the quota system in civil service employment. The government abolished all quotas in grades 9 to 13, previously referred to as first and second-class jobs, in government employment (*The Daily Star*, 2024a).

However, the present crisis began on June 5, 2024, following the filing of a writ petition on the government's decision to scrap the quota by a group of relatives of the war veterans. The High Court of Bangladesh restored the 56% quota system in late June, citing the constitutional obligation to keep the reservations (Rahman, 2024). The students, however, again started their demonstration against the reinstatement of the quota system. The protests commenced at the University of Dhaka, widely regarded as the country's premier and most venerable educational institution. Subsequently, students from other institutions emulated this action, which led to a nationwide movement.

Tensions heightened when the ex-prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, made a contentious statement on July 14, 2024, in response to a question from a journalist about the quota reform demonstrators. She said:

Why do they (the protesters) have so much resentment towards the freedom fighters? If the children or the grandchildren of the freedom fighters do not get quota benefits, should the children or the grandchildren of *Razakars* (traitors, who opposed the country's war for independence in 1971) get the benefit?

To comprehend the students' wrath and disappointment, it is essential to grasp the reasons for the highly disparaging nature of the title "*Razakar*" in Bangladesh. The word denotes those who colluded with the Pakistani military to engage in acts of torture, homicide, and sexual assault on the populace of then-East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the liberation war of 1971. The general agreement is that the *Razakars* are the most treacherous individuals in Bangladesh's history. Any individual from Bangladesh would feel offended if they were referred to as *Razakar*. Therefore, it is not surprising that the prime minister's comment ignited the students' rage.

From July 16, 2024, there was a mass crackdown on the protesters through law enforcement agencies, such as the Bangladesh Police and Border Guard Bangladesh and the student wing of the party in power, the *Bangladesh Chatra League* (Rahman, 2024). As a result, six students lost their lives, and hundreds sustained injuries. To manage the volatile situation, the government was obligated to enforce a curfew and deploy the armed forces throughout the country to assist the civil administration. The Bangladesh government halted mobile internet connections on July 18, 2024, in response to the increasing violence nationwide.

Finally, on July 21, 2024, the Supreme Court scrapped the High Court judgment and declared that 93% of jobs in civil service would be merit-based, and 7% would be recruited through quota (*The Daily Star*, 2024b). However, agitating students made a nine-point demand, including the investigation into the excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies, compensation to the families of the dead/injured, releasing all detained students, and removing all government cases against the agitators (Karim, 2024). However, the government did not take any visible affirmative action to meet the demands of the students. Following this, more protests broke out. In the repression of the movement from July 15 to August 6, 2024, 543 people died, including 32 children, and more than 10,000 people were arrested (*The Daily Prothomalo*, 2024a).

The situation deteriorated rapidly as the movement expanded beyond its initial goals, fueled by deep-seated frustrations with the government's authoritarianism, corruption, and economic mismanagement. The economic mismanagement of the Sheikh Hasina-led government in Bangladesh, especially in recent years, has been the subject of both domestic and international criticism. While the government boasted high GDP growth and infrastructure development, critics point to several areas of poor economic governance, misallocation of resources, and rising financial instability involving chronic issues of loan default, bank fraud, poor regulation, rising public debt, and risky loans. The process of democratic erosion had been gradually occurring in Bangladesh for several years, mainly from 2014, with the leadership under the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina actively steering the

country toward a single-party system (Riaz, 2019b). According to the V-Dem report (2023), the level of democratic rights and freedoms had a substantial decline in Bangladesh. The violence peaked with reports of hundreds of deaths and widespread unrest across the country, which ultimately forced Sheikh Hasina to resign as the prime minister and flee the country on August 5, 2024. Her resignation marked the end of her 16-year rule and the formation of an interim government, with the military promising to investigate the violent crackdown on protesters (Marof, 2024).

The study analyzes why a peaceful and organized student protest in a democratic country turned into bloodshed. What may have caused the government led by Sheikh Hasina to mismanage the quota movement of the students? The article also tries to shed light on the lessons that policymakers can learn about crisis management in this movement.

Regime of Sheikh Hasina: Democracy Turned into an Authoritarian Regime?

Since its landslide democratic electoral victory in 2009, the left-centered BAL, the party of Sheikh Hasina, gradually deepened an authoritarian regime using several mechanisms operating within a framework of an unconsolidated democracy. The BAL government brought the 15th amendment to the constitution on June 30, 2011, proposing several changes that weakened democratic checks and balances and empowered the executive over the judicial and legislative bodies. The constitution is the most important institution in the country. When key institutions like the constitution break down, it becomes a major obstacle to inclusive development in developing countries such as Bangladesh. This also leads to the gradual weakening of democratic norms, procedures, and institutions, often leading to democratic erosion or backsliding.

The democratization process in Bangladesh began in 1991, after two decades of civilian and military authoritarian rule from 1972 till 1990 (Riaz, 2019a). However, within the following two decades, starting from 2011, the quality of democracy deteriorated, and the country became an electoral authoritarianism, a variant of the hybrid regime (Riaz, 2019a). In addition to abolishing the provision of a nonpartisan caretaker government for the purpose of the election, the constitutional change introduced a new provision to empower the Election Commission (Mostafa & Subedi, 2021). This means that in the case of any election dispute, the constitution would mandatorily require a court to hear the election commission's view before issuing any order. While this seems like giving more authority to the election commission, it limits the courts' power, because the courts cannot act independently in election matters. As a result, the election commission—an institution meant to protect fair elections and democracy—has become weaker, not stronger. This has crippled one of the most important institutions, the election commission, which is one of the important pillars in promoting democracy in the country, thus neglecting sustainable development goal (SDG) 16 in building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.

The Awami League tightened its authoritarian grip with the three national elections (2014, 2018, and 2024), with two being boycotted by most of the opposition parties, including one of the leading political parties of the country, the right-centered Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Ng & Hossain, 2024). Sheikh Hasina's election victories in 2014 and 2024 have been one-sided, as

the ruling party, civil administration, and law enforcement agencies acted in unison to deliver a victory for her and the BAL (Riaz, 2024). In 2018, manipulation of the election with stuffing of ballot boxes on the night before the election day, was evident from the report of Transparency International Bangladesh and from all the leading newspapers of Bangladesh, such as *The Daily Star* and *The Daily Prothom Alo* (Mostofa & Subedi, 2021; Riaz, 2019b). Riaz (2019c) found evidence of manipulation of the 2018 national election through the use of the election commission and civil administration. One example that demonstrates such manipulation was how the ballot boxes were filled in the night before the election day, as found by journalists and the election observers (Antara, 2018; Siddiqui & Paul, 2019).

The politicization of security agencies by the BAL, such as the police, was no less than authoritarian in nature, with the government's dependence shifted from the people to the police force (Jackman & Maitrot, 2022). The ruling elite deliberately used law enforcement agencies against political opponents (The Asian Legal Resource Centre, 2014). Law enforcement agencies, such as the police, are routinely involved in human rights violations without being held accountable or punished (Hasan et al., 2017). The extrajudicial killing has been an integral part of the law enforcement system of Bangladesh for many years (Kamruzzaman et al., 2016). In recent years, Bangladesh has become one of the active participants, where the rate of enforced disappearances has escalated significantly, and surprisingly, without any consequences (Uddin, 2020). The detailed figures for extrajudicial police killings from 2009 to September 2024 are shown in [Table 1](#). From [Table 1](#), according to *Odhikar* (2024), a leading domestic human rights organization, a total of 1,017 people were killed extrajudicially by law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh. Statistics on disappearances also reveal 109 forced disappearances and abductions from 2009 to 2024. Human Rights Watch also corroborates a similar report; according to World Report 2024,² the security forces of Bangladesh have carried out over 600 enforced disappearances since 2009.

Table 1. Human Rights Violations (Alleged by the Police in Bangladesh).

Year	Extrajudicial Killings	Forced Disappearance (2009–2024)
2024	6	9
2023	18	39
2022	21	6
2021	43	8
2020	106	13
2019	212	12
2018	–	–
2017	106	–
2016	118	–
2015	97	–
2014	119	2
2013	–	–
2012	19	7
2011	33	13
2010	43	–
2009	76	–
Total	1,017	109

Source: Data reorganized by the author from *Odhikar* Human Rights NGO, Bangladesh (<https://odhikar.org/category/reports/annual/>).

Crisis Management and Governance Capacity: Theoretical and Conceptual Understanding

A crisis may give rise to different types of challenges for public administration (Christensen et al., 2016). According to Rosenthal et al. (1989, 1991), a crisis is when something threatens a society's core values or survival, and an urgent action is needed—even though it is unclear exactly what is happening or how it will turn out. According to Boin and Hart (2003), a crisis may be a situation when policymakers misinterpret, are ignorant of, or ignore repeated indications of impending social or political issues. A crisis may be defined as a scenario where the core values and pillars of society are threatened, and concern basic structures of institutions within social, organizational, and political life (Christensen et al., 2016; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997). According to Unlu et al., the key attributes of a crisis are its unexpectedness and uncontrollability, which disrupt normal operations (Unlu et al., 2010, cited in Baniamin, 2021). Boin et al. (2020) suggest that effective crisis management involves enhancing trust between the stakeholders in the dispute and the willingness of the government to handle the issue.

Governance capacity is considered one of the critical elements for a well-functioning governmental crisis management system (Christensen et al., 2016). Governance capacity includes administrative apparatus and informal elements, that is, how these features work in practice. For this capacity to be effectively implemented, coordination is a key factor that

needs attention (Baniamin, 2021; Christensen et al., 2016). The question of governance capacity is about preparedness or analytical capacity, coordination, regulation, and implementation or delivery capacity (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014, cited in Christensen & Lægreid, 2020). To combat a crisis, coordination is considered the core concern as it is identified as a critical factor for most failures to deal with crises, and simultaneously, it is seen as a solution to such failures (Christensen et al., 2016). Coordination refers to the key actors and institutional arrangements in place for responding to emergencies, as well as to the key instruments and processes of crisis management (Christensen & Ma, 2020). Koop and Lodge (2014) defined coordination as the adjustment of actions and decisions among interdependent actors to achieve specified goals. For this study, coordination will include the adjustment of actions and decisions among government agencies and social entities (Christensen & Ma, 2020).

To manage a crisis effectively, one of the core actions of the government is to make sense of the crisis or the issue. The failure to prevent foreseeable crises is well-documented in the literature on intelligence fiascoes and manmade disasters (Kam, 1988; Turner & Pidgeon, 1997). The problems that prevent governments from heeding warnings are manifold and fundamental. Governments are routinely engulfed in oceans of information and advice. Moreover, they face ambiguous and contradictory signals. Warnings do not come with flashing lights; they are hidden in expert reports, advisory memos, or a colleague's casual remark. The warnings have to be distilled from a series of seemingly minor and insignificant indications. The government under Sheikh Hasina completely failed to document the severity of the anti-quota movement of the students, and there was no real political mobilization of government and social resources to address urgent issues.

Research Methodology

This study mainly used “netnography” to generate the data. Netnography is acknowledged as a useful research tool for analyzing available online data (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). Netnography is conducted using two sources of data: news media, blogs, and social media (Kozinets, 2015; Lugosi et al., 2012). The rationale for choosing the method is the emerging nature of the data and its scarcity. For news media, this study follows established newspaper platforms such as *The Daily Star*, *The Prothom Alo*, *BBC*, and *New Age*. The data collection for this study also involved an extensive literature review encompassing a diverse array of academic sources such as journal articles, scholarly books, and reports from international organizations. These sources provide invaluable insights into the factual intricacies of the events and the framing of information that aligns with the prevailing discourse of the anti-quota movement events that occurred over the period.

Findings and Discussion of the Study: Governance Capacity

In the public sector, coordination through hierarchy and network is singled out as a dominant mechanism (Bouckaert et al., 2010). In crisis management, hierarchy, network, and various hybrid arrangements often exist side by side (Christensen et al., 2016). Crisis management typically requires networks to help mediate interdepartmental conflicts or interests cutting across policy areas. Coordination in crises often implies facilitating cooperation between

network agencies (Hart, 2014). In response to the students' rational demand to amend the job quota, the government under Sheikh Hasina failed to show cooperation between the needs of the agitators and the government's agencies. Crises also demand strong leadership with central direction, clear-cut responsibilities, and chains of command throughout the hierarchy (Rykkja & Løegreid, 2014).

However, the actors in various political-administrative systems in Bangladesh did not adopt any strategies or organizational designs to address the situation. What may have caused this inaction? Drawing on Rosenthal et al.'s (1989) conceptualization of crisis as a situation characterized by a perceived threat to a social system's core values under conditions of uncertainty requiring urgent remedial action, the July 2024 Revolution in Bangladesh represents a textbook case of crisis mismanagement. Despite the escalating threats to institutional stability and political legitimacy, government actors at various levels of the political-administrative system failed to implement coherent strategies or organizational designs to mitigate the crisis. This inaction may be attributed to a confluence of factors, including weakened state capacity, institutional decay, and fragmented political leadership. In line with Rosenthal's emphasis on uncertainty and urgency, it is plausible that the regime was hindered by a lack of reliable information, poor interagency coordination, and fear of legitimizing the opposition movement through formal engagement. Studies by Baniamin and Jamil (2018), Khan (2016), Jamil and Askvik (2015), and Riaz (2024) find that poor governance involving the institutionalization of corruption, favoritism, kinship, regional empathy, patronage, bribery, and abuse of authority has become the social norm in public institutions in Bangladesh.

The Ministry of Public Administration, the central recruiting agency, and the Bangladesh Public Service Commission, which conducts the public exams, did not provide any information to the students to calm things down. The political leaders from the party in power, especially the spokesperson, the General Secretary, Obaidul Quader, did not arrange any meetings with the agitators, which could have been instrumental in responding to the crisis. This is because the cultural perspective of crisis management in Bangladesh in social and political movements has been solved through network coordination between and among the stakeholders. Network coordination can be an important administrative arrangement involving all participants having an equal voice (Christensen et al., 2016). No network coordination was developed across administrative levels, policy areas, and sectors by the ousted prime minister.

The decision-making process during this crisis in Bangladesh was characterized by a need to make major decisions under great uncertainty and urgency. The major decisions of the government on how to respond to the anti-quota movement were not initiated by the cabinet in close collaboration with the Ministry of Law and the Ministry of Public Administration. The political leadership opted for more radical measures, such as from July 15 to 22, 2024, when students were on the streets demanding quota reform, the government responded with measures as severe as a "shoot-on-sight" order, resulting in reports of over 200 deaths and thousands of injuries (Marof, 2024). This extreme response can be understood through the lens of state repression theory, which suggests that when governments perceive existential threats to their authority, they are more likely to substitute negotiation and reform with coercion and violence (Davenport, 2007).

Another important aspect of coordination in crisis management is the involvement of the experts (Boin et al., 2020). In collectivist societies like Bangladesh, the strategic involvement of trusted societal figures, such as teachers and legal experts, can play a pivotal role in crisis coordination. When student-led protests arise, leveraging the inherent mutual respect between students and teachers can serve as an organic channel for communication, de-escalation, and trust-building. Additionally, legal professionals can contribute by framing the crisis within a comprehensible legal and ethical context, helping both protesters and decision-makers make sense of the situation. This expert mediation creates a culturally resonant, low-conflict pathway to resolution, reinforcing social cohesion while addressing grievances. The political leadership's sidelining of experts, such as educators and legal professionals, eliminated culturally credible channels of dialogue. Simultaneously, failing to activate internal party mechanisms, such as delegating authority to BAL leaders or establishing a liaison committee, closed off potential avenues for trust-building and negotiation.

An additional problem that the government faced was the tradition of contentious politics. Bangladesh features a wide array of confrontations, competition, and monopolization of state institutions and resources by the party in power. This trend of politics has tremendously weakened the formal accountability mechanisms and put governance in crisis (Arfina Osman, 2010). This has caused no consensus on national issues, which is a prerequisite for democracy to flourish in any country.

Analytical Capacity: How Prepared were the Authorities?

In some ways, the authorities were not prepared to handle the crisis. Although this was a crisis with a warning when the protesters started their movement on July 1, 2024, it only involved blockades and demonstrations. When the high court scrapped the government's 2018 order of quota repeal, the government's action to appeal in the appellate division was not proactive. The students asked to speed up the hearing process; however, the ousted prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, and other senior cabinet members said that the government had nothing to do with the quota since the matter was under trial. The hearing at the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court was scheduled for August 7, 2024. On July 19, 2024, 103 people died in an unprecedented rash of violence, firing, and arson by law enforcement agencies (*The Daily Prothomalo*, 2024a). Seeing the issue, the government asked the Attorney General, the highest law officer in the country, to reschedule and bring the date of the hearing earlier, and the Appellate Division rescheduled the hearing, bringing the date to July 21, 2024. Many young people would not have given their lives if this initiative had been taken earlier. There was no delegation of responsibilities between and among the government authorities and social agencies to mitigate the crisis, and there was no robust emergency preparedness from the government.

Delivering and Regulatory Capacity: Implementation Through Regulations and Soft Guidelines

From the beginning of the movement, starting from July 1, 2024, there were no government measures involving a joint strategy of advice, guidelines, and directives. No ministry or

authority came up with a coordinated plan of action for the protesters. On the other hand, the police took draconian measures to control the protest involving the use of lethal weapons from July 19, 2024, until the end of the protests (Hasan, 2024). Analyzing the deaths of 175 availed from documents of 11 hospitals in Dhaka city, and other public hospitals from 12 other cities, it was learned that 137 had wounds from lethal bullets, 22 had wounds from shotgun pellets, and out of the remaining victims, 10 had marks of beating, and four died in arson attacks on vehicles and establishments (Moral & Hassan, 2024). Curfew was imposed at night, and the army was deployed. Internet service was suspended in the country. This was a complete negation of SDG 16, which calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development.

On July 21, 2024, the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, said that the police would not fire at students, but there was no sign of implementing her order in the field. From July 22 to 26, 2024, 31 people died from police bullets (*The Daily Prothomalo*, 2024a). Moreover, the police (detective branch) picked up coordinators of the quota reform movement without any criminal charges from various places in Dhaka city from July 26, 2024, and 6,264 people were arrested across the country (*The Daily Prothomalo*, 2024a). This triggered the movement again, and students and masses of people took to the streets. The students gave nine-point demands to be fulfilled, which the government did not heed regarding solidarity and collective attitudes. On August 3, 2024, the students then issued one-point demand, that is, the resignation of Sheikh Hasina as the prime minister. On August 5, 2024, tensions were heightened in the capital city, Dhaka, as protesters made calls for mass mobilization, causing Prime Minister Hasina to resign and flee on the same day.

It can be summed up that governance capacity was overall very poor in terms of delivery capacity, regulative capacity, and analytical capacity, and coordination capacity was the worst regarding any collaborative approach, both from the party in power and the administration, to grasp the severity of the crisis.

Conclusion and Policy Implications of the Study

The article argues that the governance capacity involving coordination in the government and political apparatus for crisis management needs to be addressed. Not only what the government actually does, but also citizens' views and expectations regarding what it should do, matter for crisis management performance. The article argues that the organizational coordination mechanisms within government arrangements are crucial to understanding crisis management arrangements' development, functioning, and performance.

One of the important policy implications of the study is the negation of the severity of the issue. The anti-quota student movement in Bangladesh, despite the movement being a normal blockade, rally, and demonstration of only the students wanting to reform the quota system and urging the government to take quick, necessary steps based on the high court's order, the government absolutely neglected the importance of the issue. Another implication of the study is the presence of deeper political and economic problems that the country was already facing. The quota issue was the tip of the iceberg of economic and political discontent underneath the surface. The perceived unfairness of guaranteeing jobs with high unemployment in the country (New Age, 2024), along with endemic corruption and public jobs

providing lucrative benefits and being the center of power in the country, students wanted a fair and just system for everyone. Another implication of the study is the government's authoritarian characteristics in running the country.

The key conclusion is that the government failed to control the crisis and opted for a suppression strategy rather than a collaborative and pragmatic decision-making style involving successful communication with the students. In a situation of uncertainty and urgency, an agile-adaptive approach to government capacity, effective crisis communication, and government cooperation are critical factors for effective crisis management (Moon, 2020). There was no coordination and collaboration with any stakeholders or among the administrative levels, political authorities, and students, which was necessary and characterized the authoritarian regime in Bangladesh.

Successful crisis management must prioritize protecting citizens from getting hurt, which the government failed to do. Around 78% of the people killed during clashes centering on quota reform protests had lethal bullet wounds on their bodies (Moral & Hassan, 2024). In a crisis, the government needs to reduce the negative economic side ([Christensen & Lægreid, 2020](#)). Due to the curfew and internet shutdown, the country suffered a substantial economic loss due to remittance, which it heavily relies on, and it had a huge negative effect on small and medium enterprises.

The 2024 Anti-quota Movement in Bangladesh, culminating in Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, has significant implications for SDG 16, which emphasizes peace, justice, and strong institutions. The movement began with students protesting the reinstatement of a government job quota system perceived as unjust. Their demands for a merit-based recruitment process highlighted a call for more transparent and accountable institutions. The initial governmental resistance and subsequent violent crackdowns on protesters exposed weaknesses in institutional accountability. The eventual resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina under public pressure underscored the necessity for institutions that are responsive and transparent to citizens' concerns. The government's violent response to peaceful protests, resulting in numerous deaths, fatalities, and injuries, highlighted significant breaches of fundamental freedoms and human rights. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Fact-finding Report on "Human Rights Violations and Abuses related to the Protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh" finds conclusive evidence that the former government and its security and intelligence apparatus were systematically engaged in serious human rights violations and abuses between July 15 and August 5, 2024. The report also finds that violations were committed with the knowledge, coordination, and direction of the political leadership and senior security sector and intelligence officials. The crackdown included measures such as internet shutdowns and arrests, impeding freedom of expression and assembly, which are vital components of a just society. The movement underscored the critical need for inclusive and participatory decision-making processes in governance to prevent such conflicts and ensure societal stability.

The challenge ahead of the interim government is to restore law and order in the country, as there has been vandalism in many infrastructures after the government's fall. The interim government needs to readdress the governance capacity of all the state apparatus involving cultural factors such as trust and loyalty, structural factors such as coordination and

regulatory capacity, and stronger evidence-based knowledge of the needs of the people in general. The anti-quota movement of the students in Bangladesh is a strong case of crisis management in misery.

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1. Article 106 of the Constitution is about the advisory jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. According to the article, “If at any time it appears to the President that a question of law has arisen, or is likely to arise, which is of such a nature and of such public importance that it is expedient to obtain the opinion of the Supreme Court upon it, he may refer the question to the Appellate Division for consideration and the division may, after such hearing as it thinks fit, report its opinion thereon to the President.”
2. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/bangladesh> (accessed on November 17, 2024).

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