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From Leadership to Legitimacy Crisis: Lexicon of Peace in Media Discourse on Sheikh Hasina's Resignation

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Abstract

Political transitions are not only institutional events but also discursive processes through which leadership, legitimacy, resistance, and peace are publicly reconstructed. The resignation of Sheikh Hasina during Bangladesh's 2024 protests provides a significant case for examining how media discourse negotiates political authority and social transformation. This study aims to analyze media representations of Sheikh Hasina's resignation and to investigate how discourse, ideology, and peacebuilding narratives are constructed around this political transition. Employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, the study examines a strategically selected corpus of 22 national and international news articles. The findings reveal that Hasina's resignation was framed less as a political retreat than as a discursive reckoning in which her leadership legacy was reconstructed retrospectively, while student slogans challenged established power through irony, solidarity, and collective identification. Through selective lexical choices, shifts in agency, competing ideological positions, and editorial framing, media narratives discursively represented both the erosion of political legitimacy and the emergence of popular agency. Hasina's silence at the moment of departure constituted a

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significant discursive absence subsequently filled by military statements, protest slogans, and journalistic interpretation. Despite her historical position as the longest-serving female head of government, gendered perspectives were largely absent from the analyzed coverage, suggesting a symbolic marginalization of gender within narratives of political failure. The study further demonstrates how peace was reframed from an imposed political order toward a discourse of collective renewal shaped by protest, memory, and popular participation. These findings contribute to critical discourse studies by demonstrating how media language participates in reconstructing legitimacy during political crises and transitions. The study also highlights the importance of media literacy in post-conflict contexts where competing interpretations of truth, justice, leadership, and collective memory continue to be negotiated.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Leadership Legitimacy; Media Discourse; Peacebuilding Narratives; Political Resignation

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is exercised not only through governance, policy, or statecraft but also through language, the enduring soft power of words that often outlasts formal authority (Nye, 2004). In Bangladesh, few political figures exemplify this interplay of power, narrative, and legitimacy as vividly as Sheikh Hasina. Her long tenure as the country's longest-serving Prime Minister has been marked by allegations of authoritarianism, human rights violations, economic exploitation, judicial manipulation, and political suppression. Yet, among the most symbolically potent moments of her leadership is her resignation in August 2024, a historical act occurring amid widespread civil resistance, state violence, and demands for justice. This paper examines the rhetorical construction of Hasina's resignation as represented in both national and international media, situating it at the intersection of political linguistics, media discourse, and peacebuilding.

In the Bangladeshi context, political power is often shaped through emotional and symbolic narratives rather than neutral rhetoric. Leaders such as Sheikh Hasina connect their authority with family sacrifice and national history, especially the legacy of the Liberation War. These narratives create a strong link with public memory and identity. At the same time, media institutions act as gatekeepers by selecting which parts of political speech to highlight or ignore, depending on their ideological positions (Voltmer, 2013). As a result, events like

resignation are not seen as simple decisions but as moral and ethical acts shaped by media framing.

Language plays a central role in leadership. It is not only a tool for communication but also a means to inspire, persuade, and build shared understanding (Fairhurst, 2007). Leadership discourse is performative and strategic, shaping both social reality and organizational culture (Clifton, 2012). Through devices like metaphors and inclusive language, leaders influence how people understand challenges and act collectively (Charteris-Black, 2007). Leadership is also co-constructed and context-dependent, emphasizing interaction and identity (Holmes et al., 2011). This becomes more important in multilingual settings, where communication must remain sensitive and inclusive (Angouri & Marra, 2011).

The anti-quota protests of July 2024 illustrate this interplay of language, power, and legitimacy. Students and citizens mobilized under the banner of the Anti-Discrimination Students Protest, using slogans like "Bangla Blockade" to challenge controversial quota policies approved by the Supreme Court. Violent responses from security forces and state-aligned actors, including the Bangladesh Chhatra League, exposed the authoritarian dimensions of Hasina's regime, transforming public shock and grief into mass mobilization. Her resignation on August 5, 2024, was thus not only a change of government but also a discursive event that recalibrated legitimacy, accountability, and collective peace in Bangladesh.

Besides, media discourse shapes public perception by constructing reality through framing and language choices (Fairclough, 1995b; Dijk, 1988). It can reinforce biases or challenge them, making critical discourse analysis essential (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). In peacebuilding contexts, media can promote dialogue, empathy, and reconciliation through peace journalism (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005), rather than conflict-focused reporting (Sreedharan, 2013). Finally, political resignations are performative acts that express responsibility and legitimacy (Neshkovska, 2019, 2020). Their media representation can reshape public images of leaders (Bednarek & Caple, 2012). Thus, analyzing Hasina's resignation reveals a broader struggle over meaning, power, and peace in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

The political crisis culminating in Sheikh Hasina's resignation in August 2024 has generated substantial scholarly debate across multiple disciplines. For instance, the study of Behera (2025) identifies three interrelated causal factors: democratic deficit, Islamization of

polity, and external power intervention. He argues that successive Awami League regimes failed to institutionalize democratic norms while Islamist constituencies consistently resisted democratic reforms, creating persistent instability. Chowdhury (2025) traces how the July uprising transformed from a student-led quota reform movement into a nationwide revolutionary force, emphasizing the emergence of the chhatra-janata (student-people) as a powerful political agent. This shift from policy-specific grievance to regime-level challenge reflects what Zainuddin et al. (2025) term the mechanisms of frame alignment, moral shock, and scale shift that propelled the movement beyond its original demands.

Moreover, the government's inability to manage the escalating crisis reveals fundamental governance failures. Mahmud (2025) assesses the Awami League's crisis management capacity using netnographic analysis, finding major weaknesses in preparedness, coordination, and implementation. The administration's failure to gauge public sentiment reflected weak political leadership and authoritarian governance disconnected from citizen concerns. Yadawa (2025) extends this analysis by examining how Bangladesh's democratic institutions navigate regime transitions, concluding that while popular uprisings can trigger regime changes, the survival of democracy depends on robust and resilient institutions rather than mere electoral processes. Furthermore, religious dimensions of the uprising have received growing attention. Chowdury (2024) offers a Sufi-centered analysis, arguing that spiritual traditions of resistance against tyranny provided moral frameworks that complemented secular student activism. Hefazat-e-Islam and other Sufi-based groups mobilized their constituencies around principles of justice and martyrdom.

Besides, the centrality of youth to the uprising is well-documented. Islam and Faisal (2026) analyze demographic patterns of state violence, finding that students and young people bore the disproportionate burden, with over 69% of victims under 30 years old. Mostofa and Ullah (2026) apply Kuran's theory of preference falsification to explain how long-suppressed dissent erupted once the quota system controversy provided a legitimate outlet for expressing deeper frustrations. Rana et al. (2026) further explore how globalization, particularly digital connectivity and transnational democratic imaginaries, shaped the movement's trajectory, arguing that globalized inequality mediated through social media transformed localized grievances into nationally resonant collective action.

Crucially, the intersection of media and political change has emerged as a crucial area of inquiry. Shaikh (2026) critically examines how *The Daily Star* constructed Hasina's fall as

inevitable rather than contested, employing the propaganda model to reveal how media systematically marginalized pro-government voices while amplifying foreign and opposition narratives. Ikram et al. (2024) analyze international print media, finding that Western outlets framed Hasina's departure through democratic renewal narratives while regional media emphasized stability concerns. Ahmed and Ashraf (2025) examine how both traditional and social media amplified youth voices, with hashtags and viral content transforming local grievances into globally visible resistance.

Finally, Shaikh and Obaidullah (2025) advance this scholarship through corpus-assisted analysis, demonstrating how linguistic choices evolved from bureaucratic language of reform to emotionally charged calls for resignation as state repression intensified. Their findings reveal that *Prothom Alo* sustained institutional language of immediacy while *Jamuna Television* adopted vocabulary of urgency, resistance, and passion, portraying students as torchbearers of democratic transformation. Hassan et al. (2025) further examine the institutional and socio-political impacts of Hasina's departure, highlighting risks of political instability and governance challenges during transition.

As no study has examined the discursive construction of political legitimacy through the lexicon of "peace" in Bangladeshi and international media during the July 2024 regime change, the present study addresses this gap. Therefore, the study's point of departure is to advance understanding of how media discourse wields linguistic influence to shape public perception within Bangladesh's complex sociopolitical context.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. However, at the heart of Fairclough's (1995a) CDA framework is the conception of discourse as social practice, whereby language is not neutral but implicated in the reproduction and transformation of social structures. Language, in this context, becomes a means through which political ideologies are both disseminated and resisted. Fairclough (1992, 1995a) argues that discourse is dialectically related to society: while it is shaped by social practices and power structures, it also contributes to shaping them. In this dimension, discourse "is a socially and historically situated mode of action" (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 54), actively engaging with and influencing the social world. Therefore, the media texts covering Sheikh Hasina's resignation, in this study, are treated as discursive practices that not only reflect but also participate in constructing the broader socio-political conditions of Bangladesh's peacebuilding processes.

Fairclough (1995a) views discourse as text as the micro-level of analysis where the linguistic features of a text such as vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, and modality are examined for their meaning-making potential. In this paper, media texts are analyzed to detect lexical choices and syntactic constructions that signify particular representations of Hasina's leadership and resignation. Furthermore, the analysis will consider the intertextuality of media reports that is, how they draw upon and integrate other discourses, such as speeches, historical events, or prior media coverage, to legitimize their portrayal of Hasina. As Fairclough (2003) notes, intertextuality reveals the dialogic nature of discourse and its embeddedness in broader discursive fields. Yet, to fully grasp how meaning is produced and circulated, it is essential to move beyond the text itself and examine the social processes that shape it. Fairclough's (1992) notion of discourse as discursive practice focuses on the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of texts. This level also accounts for interdiscursivity, the blending of different discourses such as nationalism, feminism, and security.

Finally, the broader socio-political context in which these discourses occur is the focus of Fairclough's third dimension: discourse as social practice. Fairclough (1995a) argues that discourse must be analyzed in relation to its socio-historical context, that is the institutional and structural conditions governing its emergence and reception. In addition, CDA's focus on language facilitating social conflict (Fairclough, 2001) places this theoretical approach at a special point where its use particularly identifies whether media discourse may serve as an instrument or obstacle to peace building. Hence, by conjoining these levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social context, this study applies CDA in order to address the dynamics of political discourse in times of change. It uses media texts both as a mirror of political events, but as an active subject in constructing the sociopolitical reality they account for.

METHODOLOGY

To examine the discursive formation of Sheikh Hasina's resignation in the media, this study conducted a qualitative, purposeful sampling approach. 22 news articles were collected from internet sources that each reported "Sheikh Hasina's Resignation" in a clear heading. The selection criterion was deliberately narrowed such that the selected articles were

clearly centered on the act of resignation itself and not referred to incidentally within wider political reporting.

The international corpus consists of 19 articles from diverse, influential sources with geopolitical reach, editorial bias, and tone of discourse. They are *DAWN* (Pakistan), *CBC* (Canada), *GULF NEWS* (UAE), *Hindustan Times* (India), *TIME*, *Financial Times*, *The Washington Post*, *DW* (Germany), *Human Rights Watch*, *CNN*, *The New York Times*, *Al Jazeera* (two articles), *AP News*, *Sky News*, *The Diplomat*, *BBC*, *Business Standard*, and *Reuters*. The addition of South Asian, European, Middle Eastern, and North American media made it possible for a multifaceted cross-cultural comparison of framing resignation. They were chosen based on their international coverage, influence on international narratives, and topicality in South Asian thought patterns regarding governance and human rights.

Besides the international sources, three Bangladeshi media outlets namely *The Daily Star*, *Dhaka Tribune*, and *bdnews24.com* were chosen for their considerable audience base, editorial trustworthiness, and potential for influencing local public opinion. These outlets were helpful in deconstructing the coverage of the resignation within the local media landscape, where press freedom has long been curtailed and coverage has been susceptible to challenge or censorship. The domestic sources provided culturally situated observations on the symbolic meaning of Hasina's exit, both to her constituents and critics.

The analytical procedure of this study adapts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with the level of textual analysis (description), the level of discursive practice (interpretation), and the level of social practice (explanation) (Fairclough, 1995a). This model provides a robust structure for examining how language operates within and across social systems, especially during political transformations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Elite Narratives on Preserving Legacy

The analysis reveals that discourse practices privilege certain narratives over others, often through direct quotation of elite voices. One striking example is Sajeeb Wazed Joy's defense of his mother's legacy in *BBC*, stating:

"*She has turned Bangladesh around in the last 15 years. When she took over power, it was considered a failing state… until today, it was considered one of the rising tigers of Asia*." (5 August 2024)

Here, the perfect tense ("has turned") is crucial. It suggests completed transformation, aiming to immortalize Hasina's role within a triumphant national arc. Such verb framing works discursively to preserve the leadership legacy, even as she exits under duress. However, it is juxtaposed within the same report against chaotic imagery of mass protest, eroding the possibility of unchallenged closure. More critically, this quote operates within an intertextual chain of nationalist economic discourse that has long accompanied projects like Padma Bridge. The textual strategy seeks to secure her symbolic authority despite political delegitimation. As Fairclough (1992) suggests, such rhetorical preservation is a classic case of discursive recontextualization, where past achievements are recycled to resist present scrutiny.

In stark contrast, protestors and student leaders articulate a rupture with this legacy. A *CNN* report quotes a Bangladeshi student in New York:

"*Gen Z made everything possible. They are the future of Bangladesh and they can create a better future*." (August 6, 2024)

This voice functions as a counter-discourse, positioned within youth-driven moral narratives. While former PM's son Joy invokes development and lineage, Gen Z voices invoke inclusivity, futurity, and democratic renewal. Fairclough (1992) argues that such democratization of discourse is essential for social transformation. The student voice is not just emotive; it inserts new subject positions into public discourse. For example, young, transnational, digitally literate citizens claim moral authority through this resistance. Moreover, this narrative thread carries peacebuilding implications. The call to "create a better future" is aspirational, non-retributive, and inclusive countering fears of a vengeful or fractured transitional moment. The optimism embedded here marks a rhetorical shift from violent upheaval to civic reconciliation.

Lexical Choices in Framing the Exit

The Daily Star headlines its coverage with: "*Sheikh Hasina has left Gono Bhaban for 'safer place'*" (August 5, 2024), displacing the center of political authority from Dhaka to elsewhere, lexically implying fleeing, not a peaceful handover. The choice of the syntax "has left" combined with the metaphor of a "safer place" casts Hasina in a position of vulnerability, eroding the legacy of a long-serving leader. This rhetorical drift is intensified in *Reuters*:

"*Hasina resigned and fled the country…in a military aircraft*" (August 7, 2024). The action verb "fled" takes the place of the neutral "left" and implies duress and panic. This lexical choice denies the former Prime Minister symbolic power, framing her exit not in terms of a political retreat with dignity but as evasion under pressure, which indirectly positions her as accountable for unrest. The language indirectly constructs the foundations of a new political dispensation arising on the grounds of youth activism and civic resilience, which are concordant with peacebuilding language.

Therefore, the media happen to be discursive gatekeepers that recode Hasina's resignation in terms of exile metaphor conjuring up pictures of a deposed monarch rather than a retiring bureaucrat. This reframes the public understanding of what leadership exit looks like in Bangladesh from scheduled succession to rupture and flight. As they iterate across outlets, these lexical choices disseminate an ordinary story of Hasina's downfall as inevitable and deserved, thus enacting collective consent that her removal is the prerequisite for national recovery. In a nation tainted by a legacy of patrimonial rule and militarized politics, this linguistic representation reinscribes the norm that rulers are not exception to accountability. By naturalizing the social expectation that even the longest-serving prime minister can be "forced to flee", the debate implicitly reshapes the social expectation of leadership change to make it compatible with peacebuilding through transitional justice and regime accountability.

The syntax across the reports actively manipulates transitivity to structure agency. A key example in *Financial Times* states: "*Sheikh Hasina has resigned and fled the country…after weeks of escalating anti-government demonstrations*" (August 5, 2024). The syntactic construction places Hasina as the actor ("resigned and fled"), and "anti-government protests" as the cause. Yet, the protests are given minimal agency; they are backgrounded. Conversely, *The New York Times* amplifies social actors: "*Protesters are demanding that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leave office*" (August 5, 2024). This brings protesters to the foreground, emphasizing collective civic agency over elite political maneuvering. Thus, by foregrounding students and citizens as active agents in Hasina's fall, and backgrounding the state's actions, the media reallocates symbolic power to civic actors. This discursive shift constructs peace as people-led rather than elite-imposed, amplifying the role of collective agency in leadership change. This aligns with Entman's (1993) framing theory, which asserts that the linguistic choices in news reporting significantly shape audience perception of agency and culpability. Structurally, this repositions youth and civil society as central to national transformation, disrupting traditional

hierarchies and fostering inclusive political culture, key elements in building sustainable peace and redefining leadership legitimacy.

Peacebuilding is also discursively instantiated through accounts of protest as ritual unity. Student Raiyan Aftab told *CNN*:

"*There's like thousands of people there… regardless of class, heritage, religion, we're all together*". (August 6, 2024)

Such testimony is not just descriptive, it is performative discourse. It constructs an imagined political community (Anderson, 2006) that transcends Bangladesh's historical fault lines. Through this recontextualization, the text offers the protests not as anarchic but as socially regenerative, marked by unity across traditional divisions. This mode of articulation furthers the project of discursive peacebuilding, where even spontaneous uprisings are scripted into cohesive national narratives of reconciliation. In doing so, student voices actively transform mourning into meaning, violence into unity.

Across the texts, affective vocabulary operates as a mobilizer of political mood. The *Dhaka Tribune* emphasizes joy with:

"*Sweets were distributed…sold out within an hour. The largest gathering…was filled with slogans like 'Our Victory'*" (August 6, 2024).

Words such as "victory", "celebration", and "joyous procession" indicate emotional catharsis suggesting that peacebuilding here is experienced as euphoric rupture, not procedural calm. Affective language like "celebration" and "victory" enlivens the discourse with hope and collective healing, shifting the tone from trauma to transformation. These emotional signifiers invite the public to view leadership change as both a personal and national triumph. Structurally, such optimism reconstructs the political imagination, positioning peace not as mere absence of violence but as civic rebirth. It helps redefine leadership legacy through public participation, memory, and a shared vision of democratic renewal.

However, *CBC* tempers this with trepidation: "*Elation at the end of Hasina's rule was mixed with unrest continuing on the streets*" (August 6, 2024). The duality of tone constructs peace not as a destination but a negotiated and unstable horizon, a common theme in peace and conflict studies (Lederach, 2005). Language itself becomes a terrain of ambivalence, balancing catharsis with caution.

Modality and Inclusive Justice

CNN quoted student Faiza Chowdhury:

"*Until our religious minorities and ethnic minorities are protected and justice comes to them too, the nation is not free*". (August 6, 2024)

This sentiment is deeply significant. It refuses closure. It denies the assumption that Hasina's resignation is sufficient for peace. Instead, it opens the discursive space for a more inclusive, rights-based form of transitional justice. From a peacebuilding perspective, such statements act as moral injunctions, they articulate not merely political demands but ethical horizons. The very act of framing "freedom" through the lens of minority rights universalizes the protest movement and signals a transition from regime removal to structural reform.

Modality serves as a discursive technique to assert or hedge certainty, particularly in state-related claims. In *Reuters*, the statement: "*Hasina apparently decided to resign after a meeting with security forces*" (August 7, 2024) uses the adverb "apparently" casting doubt on the voluntariness of her decision. Media hedging responsibility, a characteristic of critical discourse practices in the period of authoritarian transition, is therein unveiled by this strategic deployment of epistemic modality. The deployment of modality creates discursive space for various interpretations of the crisis and indicates contested authority. This indeterminacy allows for inclusive argument and reduces the risk of discursive closure, essential for transitional peace discourses. Basically, the uncertainty embodies governance liminality, summoning negotiation and political ownership, and demythologizing absolutist leadership claims, mooring peace in deliberative, multi-actor statecraft.

Similarly, *The Daily Star* (August 5, 2024) reports: "*She wanted to record a speech. But she could not get an opportunity to do that.*" This syntactic structure, parataxis with a causal implication, alludes to her muzzling at a critical moment, which problematizes the democratic credentials of the transition itself. The grammatical negation "could not" represents institutional silencing, implying that even at the helm of power, voice can be structurally denied, a striking paradox that invites peacebuilding discourse to consider not just exit, but the conditions of speech and reconciliation.

This absence, a rhetorical silence, is powerful. Her resignation was not a performative address but a forced retreat, leaving her legacy to be written by others. From a media discourse perspective, this constitutes a crisis of authorship; she no longer owns her narrative. Such silencing stands in stark contrast to existing literature on leadership exit

strategies. Study by McAdams (2001) argues that exit narratives often function as myth-building tools for leaders offering redemption, justification, or sacrifice. In Hasina's case, the lack of narrative closure results in discursive abandonment, where the leader becomes a fugitive rather than a figure of reflection or atonement.

Despite efforts to position the military as neutral actors of transition, many protestors resist that narrative. Aftab cautions:

"*We have to remember the last 15 years, the army didn't do anything. They protected this regime so they can't just come into power and become good guys*". (*CNN*, August 6, 2024)

This direct quote constitutes a counter-hegemonic discourse, explicitly rejecting attempts to erase the army's complicity. It challenges the dominant narrative found in statements like:

"*Please trust the armed forces. I am taking full responsibility to protect all lives and property*" – Gen. Waker-Uz-Zaman (*The Washington Post*, August 5, 2024).

The contrast here is not just semantic but ideological: trust vs. accountability, order vs. memory. Fairclough (2001) highlights how power often seeks legitimacy by erasing its complicity. The protestor's refusal to grant "redemptive legitimacy" to the military represents a critical discourse of historical memory, essential to post-conflict peacebuilding.

In an emotional reflection, Hasina's son said:

"*She was so disappointed that after all her hard work, for a minority to rise up against her*" (*CBC*, August 5, 2024).

This framing deploys the rhetoric of betrayal, a classic device in leadership discourse. The "minority" is unnamed but marked as ungrateful. Yet in recontextualizing a nationwide protest as a deviation by a fringe, the speaker attempts to reassert hegemonic closure. However, in the same discursive field, the magnitude of the uprising contradicts this claim. Thousands marched. Hundreds died. The massiveness of the movement challenges the narrative of betrayal and instead reframes Hasina's leadership not as misunderstood greatness but as exhausted sovereignty. Such contestation over meaning illustrates Fairclough's (2013) point: discursive events are struggles over representation, not just reflections of them.

Linguistic Coup through "Razakar"

Accordingly, *Al Jazeera* (5 August 2024) opens with the irresistibly evocative lexical challenge: "Razakar", a word that had for years been used to characterize turncoats who had

collaborated with Pakistan during the 1971 war. It is charged linguistic use; it resets dissidents as "students" or "protesters" and not as former enemies, hence challenging suppressed national anguish. Students, however, hijacked this title shouting, "*Who are you? I am Razakar.*", turning the power of language on its creator. This discursive reversal is a linguistic coup, a rhetorical revolt. Other news outlets such as *TIME* (5 August 2024) report Hasina's breakdown in terms of war: "metastasized", "coup d'état", "purge", "traitors", and "bloody confrontation". These war zones of discourse are juxtaposed against Hasina's initial description as a so-called economic reformer, foreshadowing a linguistic turn away from maternal nationalism to despotic matriarchy. *Human Rights Watch* (6 August 2024) contributes to this shift as well, describing her years with words like "impunity", "enforced disappearances", and "extrajudicial killings". The term "culture of impunity" is employed repeatedly, putting her administration on the same linguistic level as international authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, the protesters' slogans, such as "*Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar. Who says it? Who says it? The autocrat*" (*Bdnews24.com*, August 6, 2024), are not just linguistic expressions but acts of resistance that redefine historical narratives and challenge the legitimacy of the ruling elite. Here, the term "autocrat" is a direct reference to Sheikh Hasina herself, and its usage here reflects a dramatic reversal of a long-standing rhetorical strategy employed by her regime. Hasina's political career, for years, was based on the moral weaponization of the term "Razakar". She and her party have often used that pejorative term to delegitimize opposition groups, particularly Islamist parties, as existential threats to the country's founding ideals. But the protesters co-opt that language here against the creator. By rhetorically asking to know "Who says it?" and answering with "The autocrat", the slogan underscores how Sheikh Hasina's repetitive evocation of "Razakar" has lost its moral force and become a political tool. The term is then turned into a performative act of resistance that delineates the fatigue of a once powerful discursive framework and exposes its strategic employment in silencing criticism. This reversal not only delegitimizes Hasina's rule but also questions the very founding narrative of her leadership that has, for so long, been based on the legacy of the Liberation War.

Surprisingly, this moment marks a rupture in the hegemonic discourse that has been controlled by the Awami League for over a decade. It is an indicator of a growing politicization of public conscience that critically evaluates the use of historical trauma as a means to political ends. The protesters' discursive action marks a reclamation of narrative

authority where the people will no longer be fixed within the regime's binaries. It presages a more pluralist construction of national identity that will have space for democratic contestation and disagreement without ideological demonization. Thus, this becomes a turning point. Lasting peace necessitates inclusive stories and the deconstruction of dominating discourse that suppresses counter-stories. The protest slogan, therefore, is not merely an act of defiance but a linguistic intervention that demands a more democratic political culture in which historical memory is not monopolized by the state but negotiated collectively. It challenges the legitimacy of authoritarian governance and opens space for reconciliation, accountability, and the reimagining of political leadership in Bangladesh.

Contrasting Narratives of Hasina's Exit

The abdication terminology against the dislocation terminology presented stark differences in tone and imputation. As an example, the use of the passive voice "*Hasina had been ousted*" by *DAWN* (5 August 2024) implies systemic rejection rather than self-determined exit. Interestingly enough, the *DAWN* describes Hasina's exit in military and anarchic imagery: "*protesters storm, loot PM palace*", "*death toll crosses 300*", and "*Hasina flees*". The verb choice: stormed, plundered, fled, stress loss of control, framing her resignation as surrender and not democratic transfer. *Hindustan Times* (5 August 2024), on the other hand, cited that Hasina "*submitted her resignation*", which indicates intentionality, a nuanced difference that shifts her from expulsion to voluntary departure. This tone is consistent with earlier work by Grint (2010), who claimed that leadership rhetoric will turn to military metaphors in times of crisis in an effort to redefine defeat as moral sacrifice. But unlike peace narratives in Nelson Mandela's farewell speeches, Hasina's rhetoric, relayed secondhand through her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, remains affectively personalized: "She's very disappointed", "after all her hard work". These emotional entreaties lack in the conciliatory essence of resignations to correct national grievance, thus pointing towards a failure in linguistic reconciliation.

Statements by UN officials and the EU are routinely included in coverage. For example, the EU stated: We call for an "*orderly and peaceful transition toward a democratically elected government*" (*DW*, August 5, 2024). Such discourse injects a moderating frame into chaotic national scenes. Fairclough (2003) views this as genre blending, where diplomatic norms are layered over journalistic reporting to shape how publics interpret crises. These external interventions function as discursive ratifications of regime change, embedding the idea that Hasina's departure is both legitimate and overdue. While they call for peace, they also re-

inscribe global norms of liberal democratic order, often overlooking the emotional labor of post-authoritarian transition.

Leadership Rhetoric in Crisis

AP News (August 6, 2024) adopts a more critical tone, quoting a protester who declares, "*This is not just the end of the tyrant Sheikh Hasina, with this we put an end to the mafia state that she has created*". Here, the discourse shifts to delegitimize her rule, reflecting a Gramscian struggle for hegemony where the protesters' narrative gains dominance (Hoare & Smith, 1971). In one sweeping statement, the protester collapses the personal and the political, collapsing the fall of a single leader into the implosion of an entire system of governance. The term "tyrant" paints Sheikh Hasina not merely as an unpopular politician but as a figure of autocratic dominance, an emblem of repression, whose authority was maintained not through democratic consensus but through fear, patronage, and institutional capture.

Yet it is "mafia state" that delivers the more incendiary blow conjuring a vision of a republic held hostage, where justice is traded like currency, loyalty is bought not earned, and the state serves the few while suppressing the many. This phraseology does more than express rage, it performs resistance. Through the term "mafia state", the protester retrieves the right to describe the republic's state. It is a rhetorical uncovering that strips away the rhetoric of stability and growth that the powers use to expose the interests which have apparently drained democracy of its content. In Bangladesh's politics, where for decades powers have used language to build histories, identities, and enemies, this turnabout is both a gesture of poetry and of resistance. It brings to mind the indignation of a generation raised under a government it has come to see as more and more tyrannical, where dissent is called treason and patriotism is better rewarded than civic morality.

Language delegitimizing state power also destroys the ideological ground of authoritarianism. Such discourse can fuel short-term polarization but also provides room for reopening political belonging and national identity. In the end, the discovery of counter-narrative like this is needed to any democratic transition because they allow people to reimagine the political future beyond the confines of fear and repression. Finally, these words are a turning point in political speech in Bangladesh where hegemony is not taken for granted, but fought over. In a nation where political speech has been censored or criminalized for so long, this sentence is an act of provocation, a verbal sledgehammer hurled against the pillars of a house which stands on enforced silence. It calls for a reckoning: with

the past, with the price of peace, and with the type of republic Bangladesh is brave enough to envision without the long shadow of Hasina.

The text production on these mediums employs opposing ideological sympathies. *Sky News* (6 August 2024) reads Hasina's resignation as a culmination of "weeks of deadly protests" highlighting popular agency: "*A dramatic turn of events shows the power of the people, particularly the young*". Nevertheless, *Gulf News* (5 August 2024) emphasizes the disorder, quoting around the army chief's call to "stop violence" and the fiscal cost: "*Bangladesh has taken a $10 billion hit to the economy*". Economic framing, here, legitimize military intervention as an agent of stability, appealing to neoliberal ideologies of emphasis on order over protest.

Herman and Chomsky's (1988) argue that news coverage occurs in the spheres of political closeness and institutional interests. The disparity, therefore, in such news reports is not arbitrary, but ideologically informative. One channel frames the moment as a birth of possibility; the other as a crisis of control. For Bangladesh, a nation grappling with the twin demands of democratic aspiration and developmental urgency, these global representations are more than words on a page, they shape international legitimacy, domestic perception, and the terms on which peace is imagined. Thus, these contrasting lenses matter. *Sky News*' celebratory tone might inspire movements but could oversimplify complex power dynamics, while *Gulf News*' order-centric view may justify the return of securitized governance under the guise of economic stability. Both narratives reveal the global tug-of-war between people-powered transformation and elite-driven preservation. In this discursive battlefield, Bangladesh's future will not only be shaped by who holds power, but by who gets to tell the story of how that power was won or lost.

Accordingly, the *Business Standard* (5 August 2024) complicates this by juxtaposing "jubilant celebrations" with "violent clashes", citing protesters' vandalism of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statue as a "symbolic act of rebellion". This duality reflects Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony (Hoare & Smith, 1971) where dissent challenges not just political power but national symbols. The *Diplomat* (5 August 2024) further critiques Hasina's authoritarianism, noting her "use of live ammunition" and framing the protests as a "popular uprising", that invokes revolutionary legitimacy. These variations reveal how media producers selectively amplify narratives to align with ideological positions, whether pro-democracy, pro-stability, or anti-authoritarian.

As the ideological lenses of outlets shape what is highlighted and what is obscured, we see the performative nature of news itself. Therefore, lasting peace cannot be scaffolded on a single, state-sanctioned narrative, it must emerge from contested stories, from the dialectic between memory and dissent, reverence and rupture. Because, Lederach (1997) argues that sustainable peace is achieved through institutional frameworks rather than narrative coerced rule. The protests, and the language around them, expose the fragile consensus on which Bangladeshi identity rests. If Sheikh Mujib is no longer universally untouchable, if Hasina's legitimacy can be undone through song, statue, and slogan, then the future demands a new cultural pact, where historical symbols are not weaponized, and where dissent is not criminalized but woven into the very idea of the nation.

CONCLUSION

Media narratives are strategically constructed and manipulated to influence societal understanding and reinforce political agendas, rather than being neutral or objective in their presentation. This insight echoes Robert Evans' (2013) poignant words: "There are three sides to every story: yours … mine … and the truth. And no one is lying. Memories shared serve each differently" (p. xix). The resignation of Sheikh Hasina serves as a prime exemplar of how media becomes both the battlefield and the trophy room of political transitions.

Pro-government discourse, exemplified by Sajeeb Wazed Joy's proclamations, leans heavily on perfect tense constructions and nationalist intertextuality to enshrine Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's developmental legacy. Her achievements are cast as irreversible, cemented into the fabric of history. Yet even this narrative, steeped in state-sanctioned triumphalism, begins to unravel when juxtaposed with the visceral imagery of street protests and public unrest. What comes into being is discursive tension: a dense heritage pulled apart by the pressure of events in progress. This new rhetorical authority is countered by Gen Z demonstrators with stories of inclusivity, democratic renewal, and civic engagement. Thus, these actors' vocabularies signal a move away from state-centric grandeur to popular action, from legacy to possibility. This generational rhetoric remakes the political subject: no longer the passive recipient of development, but the active designer of democratic futures.

Emphatically, every word, every omission, every frame participates in the discursive construction of political reality. Media, far from being neutral conveyors of information, are sites where power is both articulated and contested. Timotjevic (2022), in her critique of

BBC's neutrality myths, cautions that media narratives often mirror the architecture of power rather than dismantle it. Kryzhanivska (2022) furthers this point, noting that no narrative is ever whole; instead, each is a patchwork of ideology, emotion, editorial strategy, and institutional alignment. Because, "ideology requires language" (Lukin, 2019, p. 16).

Thus, within this context, protest slogans like "Who are you? I am Razakar" become more than chants, they become semiotic acts of resistance. By inverting the regime's historical symbols, protestors deconstruct the Awami League's moral monopoly over national identity. This is, as Bhatia (2005) asserts, the essence of postcolonial contestation: colonization begins not with invasion, but with the imposition of naming systems and linguistic hierarchies. The resistance, then, is equally linguistics. Besides, Liaropoulos (2022) observes, information has always been a double-edged force, a tool and a weapon. In the hands of protestors, journalists, and citizens, language becomes the terrain upon which the battle for Bangladesh's future is fought.

To conclude, peacebuilding, in this landscape, is no longer just about procedural calm or institutional stability; it is a discursive reimagining of the political community that is emotional, ethical, and insurgently democratic. The linguistic legacy of leadership is not found in final speeches of Sheikh Hasina but in the stories told when the microphones are off, in the syntax of protest, in the metaphors of memory, and in the voices of those long excluded from history. Regime change, therefore, does not begin at the ballot box or the barracks but in the way narratives are constructed, contested, and transformed.

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