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Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for
Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

November 24

Bangladesh Eyes GSP Recovery with Labour Reforms

Commerce Adviser Sheikh Bashir Uddin has stated that Bangladesh could regain its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) status in the US market by implementing robust labour rights reforms. The US has outlined an 11-point agenda for Bangladesh, focusing on modernising labour laws to qualify for enhanced trade benefits. During a visit led by Kelly M Fay Rodríguez, the US delegation discussed key issues such as unionisation, security, workplace safety, and minimum wages. Bangladesh is actively coordinating with various ministries to improve workers' rights and conditions, a crucial step towards restoring GSP privileges.

November 25

Khaleda Zia Meets Saudi Ambassador in Rare Diplomacy

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia met with Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh Issa bin Youssef Al-Duhailan, marking her first diplomatic engagement in years.



Held at her Gulshan residence, this meeting was the first between Khaleda and a Saudi envoy since 2015. BNP leaders Dr AZM Zahid Hossain and Dr Enamul Huq were also present, though details of the discussions were not disclosed.

Japan Grants \$248M for Infrastructure Projects

Japan has committed \$248.88 million under its 45th Official Development Assistance (ODA) package to support infrastructure projects in Bangladesh. Agreements include \$237.68 million for the Jamuna Railway Bridge to boost connectivity and \$11.2 million for the Chattogram Sewerage System to improve sanitation. The loans feature favourable terms, underscoring Japan's position as Bangladesh's largest bilateral development partner.

November 26

Norway Backs Sustainable Ship Recycling in Bangladesh

Since 2015, Norway has supported Bangladesh's ship-breaking industry through the SENSREC (Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships) project. The initiative aligns with the Hong Kong Convention to enhance safety, health, and environmental standards. Norwegian Ambassador Håkon Arald Gulbrandsen praised progress in worker training and infrastructure, though many yards are still pursuing green certification. Norway remains committed to sustainable growth in this vital industry.

Bangladesh Rebutts Indian Statement on Arrest

Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has criticised a recent Indian statement on the arrest of former ISKCON leader Chinmoy Krishna Das, calling it misleading and contrary to the spirit of bilateral friendship. The ministry clarified that the arrest was based on specific charges, reaffirming its commitment to religious harmony, the rule of law, and judicial independence.

November 27

Bangladesh Faces 20% Export Decline Post-LDC Graduation

Bangladesh could see a 20% drop in exports to the EU due to its upcoming graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status and competition under the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). Experts warn of a potential 1% GDP decline as duty-free access expires. Recommendations include negotiating reduced tariffs, seeking GSP+ eligibility, and pursuing free trade agreements to boost competitiveness.

Govt Denounces Reuters Report on Lawyer's Murder

The Bangladesh government has refuted a Reuters report claiming inaccuracies regarding the murder of lawyer Saiful Islam Alif in Chattogram. Authorities clarified that the slain lawyer was not linked to Chinmoy Krishna Das's case, as reported. Reuters later amended the article, but the Chattogram Metropolitan Police condemned the initial bias. The government reaffirmed its commitment to communal harmony and justice.

November 28

Touhid Highlights Bangladesh's Peace Commitment

During the 10th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) in Portugal, Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser, Md Touhid Hossain, reaffirmed the country's dedication to peace and sustainability. He emphasised Bangladesh's progress towards achieving the

Three Zeros—zero carbon emissions, zero poverty, and zero unemployment—under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's leadership. Hossain also called for justice, equality, responsible AI use, and cooperation among civilisations. On the forum's sidelines, he met with foreign ministers from Spain, Turkey, and Portugal to discuss trade, infrastructure, the Rohingya crisis, and Gaza's humanitarian challenges.

ICC Offers Support to Bangladesh Tribunal

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has offered assistance to Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) for addressing mass killings during the July-August period. ICC Senior Trial Lawyer Essa Mbye Faal announced that the ICC is ready to provide technical support, training, and guidance if Bangladesh seeks it. This statement followed ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan's visit to Bangladesh, during which he revealed plans to seek arrest warrants against Myanmar military leaders for crimes against the Rohingya. The ICC commended Bangladesh for its extensive cooperation in the ongoing Rohingya investigations.

India Urges Bangladesh to Protect Minorities

India has called on Bangladesh's interim government to ensure the safety of Hindus and other minorities following recent incidents of violence. Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh highlighted attacks, including an assault on a Puja mandap in Tantibazar, Dhaka, and a theft at the Jeshoreshwari Kali temple in Satkhira during Durga Puja 2024. India urged Bangladesh to uphold its responsibility to protect all citizens, including minorities, and expressed concerns over these developments.

November 29

Germany Commits €181m for Bangladesh

Germany has pledged €180.8 million (approximately Tk2,265 crore) in financial and technical assistance to Bangladesh. The funds will support renewable energy, technical education, trade infrastructure, and combating domestic violence. Of this, €45.8 million will be allocated for technical cooperation, while €135 million will go toward financial cooperation. The agreement was signed by Economic Relations Division Secretary Md Shahriar Kader Siddiky and German Ambassador Achim Tröster. Since 1972, Germany has provided over €3.5 billion in developmental aid to Bangladesh.

Indian Funding Delay Stalls Railway Expansion

The Dhaka-Tongi-Joydebpur railway expansion project, originally set for completion by June 2027, faces delays due to a lack of no-objection certification from Exim Bank of India.

Only 35% of the project has been completed, with a mere 1.5% progress in the last 13 months. The project's cost has ballooned from Tk848 crore to Tk3,343 crore. Experts urge swift resolution of funding issues to prevent further setbacks.

Asif Nazrul Condemns India's Double Standards

Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Adviser Asif Nazrul criticised India's remarks on minority treatment in Bangladesh, labelling them hypocritical. His comments followed India's concerns about the arrest of a former Iskcon Bangladesh leader. Nazrul accused India of ignoring the persecution of its Muslim population while unfairly targeting Bangladesh. He also praised the interim government's efforts to secure minority rights, citing a survey showing improved safety compared to the previous regime.

Dhaka Condemns Flag Desecration in Kolkata

Bangladesh condemned the desecration of its national flag and the burning of an effigy of Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus during a protest outside its Deputy High Commission in Kolkata. Organised by the group Bongio Hindu Jagran, the demonstration turned violent as protesters breached police barricades and vandalised the diplomatic premises. Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry demanded swift action from India to prevent such incidents and ensure the safety of its missions and personnel.

India Raises Concerns Over Bangladesh

India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) expressed alarm over rising violence and extremist rhetoric in Bangladesh. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal urged the Bangladeshi government to protect minorities, particularly in light of alleged attacks on Hindu communities during Durga Puja 2024. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar echoed these concerns, highlighting India's close monitoring of the situation.

November 30

UAE Releases 75 Bangladeshis Arrested

The UAE has pardoned 75 more Bangladeshi expatriates detained during July protests supporting an anti-discrimination movement in Bangladesh. This follows the release of 57 individuals in September, bringing the total to 188 pardons under the UAE's general amnesty. Bangladesh clarified to the UAE that the protests were directed against Bangladeshi authorities, not the UAE government, and emphasised respect for local laws while expressing opinions.

India Must Address Bangladesh's Concerns

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain called on India to address unresolved bilateral issues, including the Teesta water-sharing agreement and border killings, to improve relations. Speaking at a roundtable on Bangladesh-India relations, he criticised media bias against Bangladesh since August 5 and emphasised the need for accurate reporting. Hossain also stressed the importance of developing human resources to boost Bangladesh's global standing, particularly in the Middle East.

December 1

Rizvi: Indian Govt Rejects Hasina's Fall

Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General, criticized the Indian government for its inability to accept the fall of Sheikh Hasina's regime. He accused India's ruling BJP and its allies of interfering in Bangladesh's internal affairs and spreading propaganda. Rizvi claimed that peace returned to Bangladesh after Hasina's departure and accused India of attempting to regain control over the country. He also rejected claims that BNP is obstructing the banning of the Awami League, emphasizing that such decisions lie with the government, not his party. Rizvi expressed concerns over India's role in fomenting division and instability.

December 2

Bangladesh Seeks Normal Relations with India

Bangladesh's Foreign Adviser, Md Touhid Hossain, emphasized the country's desire for a "normal and friendly" relationship with India based on mutual interests. He also responded to remarks by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who had suggested deploying UN peacekeepers in Bangladesh over alleged attacks on Hindus. Hossain dismissed her comments as typical of her persona, stressing that while isolated incidents of violence against minorities do occur, they do not represent the overall situation. He assured that the Bangladeshi government is committed to maintaining religious harmony and will take firm action against any attempts to disrupt peace.

Dhaka Condemns Attack on Agartala Mission

Members of the Hindu Sangharsh Samity attacked the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala, forcing their way onto the premises, vandalizing property, and desecrating the Bangladesh national flag. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh expressed strong condemnation, highlighting the violation of diplomatic protocols and the deep insecurity felt by the staff.

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs regretted the incident and pledged to enhance security. This attack is seen as part of a broader pattern of violence targeting Bangladesh's diplomatic missions, especially following protests over the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Reduces Adani Power Purchases

Bangladesh has reduced its power purchases from India's Adani Power amid a dispute over unpaid dues and pricing. Adani cut the supply on October 31 due to payment delays, with Bangladesh owing approximately \$650 million, though the country continues to settle old debts. The reduction in power supply coincides with lower winter demand, with one of Adani's units shut down. Bangladesh is seeking a price revision, as Adani charges the highest rates among Indian suppliers. The government aims to lower prices to reduce the burden of subsidies, currently totaling Tk32,000 crore annually due to high energy costs.

Mamata Calls for UN Intervention in Bangladesh

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee called for the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force in Bangladesh, urging Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene in the protection of religious minorities there. Her remarks came after the arrest of three Hindu priests from the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Banerjee condemned the violence against religious minorities and appealed for action from the Indian government. While India has expressed concern over increasing attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi government reaffirmed its commitment to protecting the rights of all citizens, regardless of religion.

Zakiganj Export-Import Suspended Amid Protest

Export and import activities between Bangladesh and India through the Zakiganj customs station in Sylhet district were halted due to protests by Indian demonstrators from the Sanatani Oikya Mancha group. The protest occurred at the Sreebhumi customs station in Assam, with protesters burning goods like potatoes and cakes and calling for a boycott of Bangladeshi products. The protests were triggered by the recent arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das in Bangladesh. While goods from Bangladesh are regularly exported through other ports like Sheola, trade through Zakiganj and Chatlapur stations has been suspended amid escalating tensions.

Chinese Firm Invests \$19.53 Million in Mongla EPZ

Chinese company Bangladesh BaoRui Textile Co. Ltd. has committed to investing \$19.53 million in the Mongla Export Processing Zone (EPZ) to establish a composite textile manufacturing industry. The agreement was signed between the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) and BaoRui Textile.

December 3

EuroCham Officially Launched

The European Union Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (EuroCham) has been officially launched to deepen economic ties between Bangladesh and Europe. The chamber aims to promote collaboration, innovation, and sustainable business practices. The chamber seeks to address challenges faced by European investors, including regulatory complexities and bureaucratic hurdles, while fostering bilateral trade and supporting Bangladesh's post-LDC transition.

IMF Approves \$1.1B Loan Tranche

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved \$1.1 billion as part of Bangladesh's \$4.7 billion loan package. Scheduled for release in March 2024, this marks the fourth tranche, nearly double the expected amount. During its recent review, the IMF reiterated support for Bangladesh's reform agenda despite fiscal challenges, including declining revenues and a growing deficit. Key discussions focused on banking sector stability and tax reforms, with a push to reduce tax exemptions. Bangladesh is also seeking additional funding from global agencies to bolster reform efforts.

Bangladesh Closes Agartala Mission After Attack

The Bangladesh mission in Agartala, India, was closed following an attack by members of the Hindu Sangharsh Samity. Protesters vandalized the flagpole, desecrated the national flag, and damaged mission property. The Bangladeshi foreign ministry summoned India's high commissioner in Dhaka, demanding heightened security for its diplomatic premises. The Indian government has arrested seven individuals involved and increased security measures around Bangladesh's missions in India.

Chevron to Expand Gas Operations in Bangladesh



Chevron plans to invest in new gas exploration in northeastern Bangladesh, aligning with the country's growing energy demands. During a meeting with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, the company expressed satisfaction with the interim government's efforts to clear longstanding payment arrears. Chevron's upcoming projects will focus on onshore drilling to enhance energy security. Chief Adviser Yunus welcomed the investment and reaffirmed the government's commitment to attracting foreign direct investments and boosting industrial energy supplies.

December 4

Yunus Signals Hasina Extradition Request

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus revealed in an interview with Nikkei Asia that the government plans to request India to extradite Sheikh Hasina after her trial concludes at the International Crimes Tribunal. Yunus criticised Hasina's leadership as autocratic and underlined the need for governance, economic, and judicial reforms before elections. He also discussed Bangladesh's strategic relations with China, its bid to join ASEAN, and efforts to resolve the Rohingya crisis. Yunus reiterated that he has no political ambitions.

IMF Increases Bangladesh Revenue Target

The IMF has raised Bangladesh's revenue collection target by 27% for the current fiscal year, aiming for Tk 4.6 lakh crore—equivalent to a 0.6% GDP rise. Proposed measures include raising the standard VAT rate to 15% and ending tax exemptions. However, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has expressed concerns, citing a 1% drop in revenue collection during the fiscal year's first four months.

Demand for Indian Rupee Declines

Demand for the Indian rupee in Bangladesh has dropped, causing a 4-5 paisa depreciation over the past week. This decline is linked to fewer Bangladeshi visitors to India, partly due to political tensions and India's suspension of medical visas for Bangladeshis. Exchange houses now sell the rupee at Tk 1.40–1.44, down from Tk 1.48–1.50. Globally, the Indian rupee has also hit record lows against the US dollar amid economic uncertainties.

Sylhet Land Ports Face Trade Disruptions

Trade between Bangladesh and India via three Sylhet land ports—Sheola, Zakiganj, and Chatlapur—has been disrupted due to protests in Assam and disputes between Bangladeshi traders and Indian counterparts. Protests have halted port activities, while Bangladeshi traders have suspended stone and limestone imports at Tamabil port over alleged irregularities in weight measurements. The disruptions have caused significant financial losses and delays, with goods like fruits stuck at the border.

UK Asked to Help Recover Laundered Money

Bangladesh has sought the UK's assistance in recovering laundered funds as part of efforts to stabilise the economy. Adviser Mahfuj Alam raised the issue during a meeting with British High Commissioner Sarah Cooke, linking it to funds transferred abroad under previous administrations. Alam also assured the UK that Bangladesh is striving for political consensus and electoral reforms. Cooke reaffirmed the UK's support for Bangladesh's democratic transition and economic stability.

CPA Clears LPG Ships of Iranian Links

An investigation by the Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) has cleared two LPG-carrying vessels, GAS GMS and Captain Nikolas, of allegations of transporting Iranian products. A probe team, including representatives from Customs and the Coast Guard, confirmed the ships sourced LPG from UAE and Oman ports, with no links to Iran. The vessels also possessed valid international safety certificates, ensuring their legitimacy.

December 5

Russia Secures Rooppur Loan Payment Agreement

Bangladesh and Russia have resolved payment issues for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant loan by agreeing to use a foreign currency account at Sonali Bank. This account will handle all future repayments, managed by Russia's Ministry of Finance. However, past dues of \$800 million remain unsettled. The \$12.65 billion project, 90% financed by Russia, is expected to complete its loan disbursement phase by the end of 2024, with repayments starting in 2027.

December 7

Bangladesh Needs Openness to Grow: WB Chief Economist

Indermit S. Gill, Chief Economist of the World Bank, has urged Bangladesh to adopt a more open economic approach to avoid the middle-income trap. Speaking about the need for innovation, he stressed the importance of efficiency in energy use over focusing on energy sources to curb carbon emissions. He also cautioned against rising inequality and emphasised that socio-economic mobility must remain a key pillar for sustainable growth.

India-Bangladesh Share Mutual Prosperity Interests

Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma has highlighted the shared stakes in the prosperity of India and Bangladesh. Speaking at a Dhaka event marking the 53rd "Maitri Diwas," Verma underscored the role of youth in fostering stronger bilateral relations through connectivity, culture, and commerce. The event commemorated India's recognition of Bangladesh's independence in 1971.

Saudi Arabia Plans Transparent Recruitment

Saudi Arabia has announced reforms to ensure fair recruitment for Bangladeshi workers, focusing on transparency and career development. The Labour Reform Initiative and Wage Protection System are among measures aimed at improving workers' welfare.

With over two million Bangladeshi expatriates playing vital roles in Saudi Arabia's labour market, these reforms align with Saudi Vision 2030 goals, which include recruiting skilled workers for projects like the Green Saudi Initiative.

Myanmar Explosions Cause Panic in Teknaf

Explosions in Myanmar's Rakhine State have sparked panic in Teknaf, Bangladesh, as tremors shook homes near the border. Suspected military operations targeting Arakan Army hideouts have caused widespread fear, with locals reporting sleepless nights and seeking refuge outdoors.

Bangladesh to Import Rice Amid Shortfall

Following floods that damaged croplands, Bangladesh plans to import 150,000 tonnes of rice from India, Myanmar, and other countries. Food Adviser Ali Imam Majumder confirmed that steps are underway to address the shortfall and build stockpiles, including the construction of a rice silo in Ashuganj capable of preserving supplies for up to two years.

December 8

BNP Protests at Indian High Commission

BNP supporters marched to the Indian High Commission in Dhaka to protest recent incidents involving India, including the desecration of Bangladesh's flag and allegations of inciting communal unrest. A memorandum condemning Indian interference was submitted, underscoring BNP's demand for non-intervention in Bangladesh's affairs.

Bangladesh Warns Illegal Foreign Workers

The government has issued a circular urging undocumented foreign nationals to regularise their status or face legal action. Many workers from India, Sri Lanka, and African nations are reportedly operating without permits in sectors like IT and garments.

December 9

Yunus, EU Discuss Election Reforms

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has pledged to announce electoral reforms later this month, aimed at ensuring free and fair elections. Yunus sought EU support for renewable energy projects and requested the relocation of EU visa centres to Dhaka for easier student access.

India's Foreign Secretary Visits Bangladesh to Strengthen Bilateral Ties



Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka, meeting Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md. Touhid Hossain, and Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin. Misri emphasized India's support for a democratic and inclusive Bangladesh, highlighting cooperation in connectivity, trade, energy, and capacity building for the benefit of Bangladeshi people. Discussions covered political, security, trade, and cultural issues, with India raising concerns over minority welfare and recent attacks on diplomatic properties.

Following the talks, Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin stated that Dhaka urged New Delhi not to interfere in Bangladesh's internal affairs. "People of all religions in Bangladesh freely practice their faiths. This is our internal affair," he said, adding that Bangladesh refrains from commenting on other nations' domestic issues. His remarks follow India's statements on the arrest and denial of bail of Hindu priest Chinmoy Krishna Das, which led to demonstrations in India and an attack on the Bangladesh mission in Agartala.

Both sides agreed to enhance regional integration through BIMSTEC and other frameworks to deepen mutual trust and cooperation.

ADB Approves \$100M Loan for Infrastructure

The ADB has granted a \$100 million loan to support public-private partnerships in Bangladesh's infrastructure sector. The funds aim to reduce dependence on public financing while integrating gender and climate considerations.

December 10

Government Eyes VAT Hike Amid IMF Targets

The government plans to impose a 15% VAT on locally manufactured goods, such as mobile phones, to meet IMF revenue targets. The move may increase consumer costs, with businesses warning of disruptions. Experts suggest prioritising direct taxes to minimise the burden on citizens.

Adani Seeks Concessions for Jharkhand Plant

Adani Power is negotiating with Indian authorities for tax waivers on coal imports for its Jharkhand power plant, which supplies 10% of Bangladesh's electricity. A \$790 million backlog from Bangladesh and other operational challenges have prompted Adani's appeal.

Bangladesh Elected UNHCR Vice President

Bangladesh has been elected Vice President of the United Nations Human Rights Council for 2025. This marks a significant milestone, reflecting Bangladesh's growing influence in multilateral diplomacy. The tenure will focus on advancing human rights globally under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's leadership.

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