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Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for
Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

Both nations have taken steps to enhance cooperation, including lifting trade restrictions and initiating direct sea trade. Dar expressed Pakistan's support for Bangladesh and referred to it as a "brotherly nation." Yunus also accepted an invitation to visit Islamabad, reflecting mutual efforts to strengthen diplomatic and economic relations.

India Unlikely to Act on Hasina Extradition Request

India is unlikely to act on Bangladesh's request to extradite former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, citing incomplete formalities and the low priority of the note verbale submitted on December 23. The 2013 extradition treaty allows refusals on political grounds, complicating the matter. India's External Affairs Ministry confirmed receipt of the request but declined to comment. Despite this, bilateral ties improved with the mutual release of 185 detained fishermen. Bangladesh's Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain emphasised continued discussions on the extradition alongside broader efforts for balanced relations.

January 4

Chief Advisor Assures Free and Fair Elections to UK MP

Chief Advisor Professor Muhammad Yunus assured British MP Rupa Huq that Bangladesh's upcoming general elections would be free and fair, restoring citizens' voting rights after years of alleged malpractice.

January 1

Dhaka Prioritizes Balanced Ties with India, China, and the US

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain emphasised that balanced relations with India, China, and the US, along with addressing the Rohingya crisis, are priorities for Bangladesh in 2025. Announcing an upcoming visit to China, he highlighted the strategic importance of these ties but withheld full details. Regarding Bangladesh-India relations, he acknowledged the extradition request for former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as part of ongoing discussions. The visit to China aims to strengthen Bangladesh's commitment to engaging with regional and global partners.

January 3

Pakistan Foreign Minister to Visit Bangladesh in February

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar will visit Bangladesh in February, the first such visit since 2012. The invitation, extended by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus during a meeting in Cairo, signals improving bilateral ties after strained relations under Sheikh Hasina's tenure.



Yunus outlined potential election timelines—December 2025 or mid-2026—depending on ongoing reforms. The meeting, attended by British High Commission officials, also covered the interim government's efforts to rebuild democratic processes. A UK business delegation, led by UKBCCI, engaged with Bangladeshi officials to explore trade and investment opportunities. Special Envoy Lutfe Siddiqi urged British entrepreneurs to invest in Bangladesh's growing economy.

Experts Urge Strategic Engagement with Arakan Army

Experts at a BIPSS dialogue stressed the need for Bangladesh to engage with the Arakan Army (AA) to address challenges in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The AA controls over 80% of Rakhine, making the region strategically significant amid US-China competition and India's evolving Myanmar strategy. They proposed informal engagement channels, leveraging agricultural trade, and utilising Bangladesh's position between China and India. Concerns included the AA's exclusionary vision and cross-border insurgency risks. Experts urged prompt, balanced measures to protect Bangladesh's security and economic interests.

Bangladesh Emerges as a Profitable Destination for Investment

British MP Dr. Rupa Huq described Bangladesh as a top destination for foreign investment, citing opportunities in energy, IT, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, and RMG sectors. Dr. Huq was part of a 22-member UKBCCI delegation visiting Dhaka to explore trade prospects. Led by UKBCCI Chairman Iqbal Ahmed OBE, the delegation engaged with BIDA to discuss creating an investor-friendly environment. UKBCCI highlighted interest in ICT, logistics, and infrastructure, praising Bangladesh's special economic zones and hi-tech parks. Both sides reaffirmed commitments to fostering economic cooperation.

January 5

Saudi Updates Visa, Iqama Fees

The Saudi Ministry of Interior's Absher Business platform has revised fees for seven establishment-related services. The updated fees include SR103.5 for extending exit and reentry visas, SR51.75 for Iqama issuance/renewal, SR70 for final exit, SR28.75 for employee reports, and SR69 for updating passport information.



These fees apply to value-added services through Absher Business and exclude annual employer subscriptions. Additionally, the Absher Individuals platform now allows hosts to report absconding visitors under specific conditions, such as expired personal or family visit visas.

Aramco Eyes Refinery in Bangladesh

Saudi Aramco, the state-owned oil company, has expressed interest in building an oil refinery in Bangladesh. This initiative aims to enhance petroleum product production for domestic and regional markets. Saudi Ambassador to Bangladesh Essa Youssef Essa Al Duhailan announced the plan during the launch of a report at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The report, "Enhancing Saudi-Bangladesh Economic Engagement," highlighted long-term growth prospects. The refinery project is expected to bring transformative changes within Bangladesh and across the Bay of Bengal region.

ADB Commits \$1B for Bangladesh

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has committed \$1 billion annually to support Bangladesh's inclusive development, focusing on climate resilience and environmental sustainability. ADB's Country Director Hoe Yun Jeong discussed enhancing community engagement and public consultations in project implementation with Syeda Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the Ministry of Environment. Rizwana urged prioritisation of river-cleaning in Dhaka and sought concessional loans for key environmental issues. Jeong assured increased financial support, including grants, underscoring ADB's dedication to addressing Bangladesh's environmental challenges.

34 Rohingyas Rescued in Teknaf

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) rescued 34 Rohingyas, including women and children, entering Teknaf from Myanmar. The trawler carrying them was spotted drifting in the sea near Mundardail point. The rescued individuals revealed they were escaping conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army in Rakhine State. They had been adrift for five days after the boat's engine broke down. Arrangements are being made to send them back to their homeland.

Bangladesh Cancels Judicial Training Participation

The Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs has cancelled the participation of Bangladeshi judicial officials in February training sessions at India's National Judicial Academy. The Supreme Court's directives prompted the withdrawal, which had allowed 50 officials, including judges, to attend the programme. The Indian government was to cover all expenses. This programme, part of a 2017 bilateral agreement signed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India, aimed to enhance judicial collaboration between the two nations.

January 7

UK Seeks FTA with Bangladesh

UK MP Rupa Huq has called for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the UK and Bangladesh to enhance bilateral trade. She highlighted the need for diversification beyond garments into sectors like artificial intelligence. Chief guest Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury urged exploration of emerging economic opportunities. BGMEA Administrator Md Anwar Hossain noted Bangladesh's investment potential in textiles, while BKMEA President Mohammad Hatem suggested delaying Bangladesh's LDC graduation by three years. The BTMA-led event emphasized trade enhancement through diversification and policy reforms.

90 Bangladeshi Sailors Return Home

Ninety Bangladeshi sailors and fishermen, detained or sheltered in India, have returned home. In a reciprocal gesture, Bangladesh handed over 95 Indian fishermen and six boats to the Indian Coast Guard. Among the returnees were 12 fishermen rescued on September 12 after their boat sank near the Bangladesh-India IMLL. Additionally, 78 sailors and fishermen were detained on December 9 for allegedly fishing illegally in Indian waters. The exchange was facilitated through bilateral negotiations by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

January 8

India Extends Hasina's Visa

India has extended the visa of former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India after a nationwide uprising in August 2024. Bangladesh's interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, has sought her extradition. However, India has cited incomplete formalities as the reason for the delay. Bangladesh's Department of Immigration and Passports has revoked the passports of 97 individuals, including Hasina, for their alleged roles in enforced disappearances during the uprising. The International Criminal Tribunal has issued a second arrest warrant for Hasina.

UK Crime Agency Probes Tulip's Properties

The UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) is investigating properties linked to Tulip Siddiq, the UK's anti-corruption minister, allegedly tied to money laundering by the Awami League regime.

The probe includes a flat gifted to Siddiq and a house connected to a political ally. The BFIU and ACC in Bangladesh are also investigating embezzlement allegations involving Hasina and her family. Siddiq denies the allegations and has recused herself from Bangladesh-related decisions.

EIB Supports Interim Government Reforms

EIB Vice President Nicola Beer has reaffirmed support for Bangladesh's reform agenda in a meeting with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. Dr. Yunus requested EIB assistance in combating corruption, transitioning to green energy, and developing infrastructure. The EIB's support aligns with prior discussions between Dr. Yunus and EU leaders. The interim government is preparing for upcoming national and local elections.

Brazil Pursues Beef Exports Investments

Brazil is seeking to export beef to Bangladesh, proposing a rate of \$4.50 per kg. However, bureaucratic hurdles have delayed approval. Brazil aims to expand investments in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy in Bangladesh. The Brazil-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry will host an exhibition in São Paulo in June 2025 to promote exports and strengthen bilateral trade.

January 9

Adani Demands Payment Plan Urgently

The Adani Group has requested \$845 million from Bangladesh's Power Development Board (PDB) for electricity supplied by its Godda plant, with \$771 million still overdue. Despite improved payment patterns, disputes over claims have escalated. Adani seeks an urgent meeting with the government to address the issue as electricity demand rises during Ramadan and the Boro rice season.

Türkiye Urged to Relocate Factories

Dr. Muhammad Yunus has invited Türkiye to invest in Bangladesh and relocate factories, emphasizing the potential for collaboration in defense, healthcare, and pharmaceuticals. Türkiye's Trade Minister Prof. Dr. Ömer Bolat acknowledged opportunities beyond textiles. Bangladesh-Türkiye trade was approximately \$581 million in exports and \$424 million in imports in 2023-24.

Rohingya, Trade Key in Beijing Visit

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain will visit China from January 20-24, 2025, to discuss trade imbalances, Chinese investments, and the Rohingya issue. Meetings with Chinese officials aim to address the trade imbalance and foster investment. The visit marks the golden jubilee of diplomatic ties between Bangladesh and China.

Pakistan Requests Bangladesh's NDB Backing

Pakistan has sought Bangladesh's support to join the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS nations. Pakistan's Economic Affairs Minister made the request through Bangladesh's Finance Adviser.

Timor-Leste Grants Visa-Free Entry

Bangladeshi citizens with diplomatic or official passports can now travel to Timor-Leste without a visa for up to 30 days. The visa exemption agreement, signed in December 2024, is part of Bangladesh's broader effort to expand economic and trade cooperation.

Youth Killed by Indian Gunfire

Md Saidul Islam, a Bangladeshi youth, was fatally shot near the Chinakandi border in Sunamganj. The gunfire, suspected to be from the Indian side, killed Saidul as he attempted to cross the border with betel nuts. A flag meeting between Bangladeshi and Indian officials is planned to address the incident.

January 10

UK Eyes Replacements for Tulip

Senior allies of UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer are evaluating potential candidates to replace Tulip Siddiq amid an ethics inquiry into her links with her aunt Sheikh Hasina's ousted Bangladeshi regime. Siddiq referred herself to the prime minister's ethics watchdog following allegations of embezzlement tied to a Russian-funded nuclear power plant. Investigations in Bangladesh are probing whether Siddiq benefited from properties linked to the Awami League, including a £700,000 London flat gifted by a supporter.

January 11

Russian Ship Delivers RNPP Machinery

The Russian vessel MV Melina arrived at Mongla Port, delivering machinery for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP). The ship anchored at jetty No. 9, completed the delivery, and departed. The equipment will be transported to RNPP by road. Mongla Port has experienced increased foreign commercial activity, with 413 ships arriving in the first half of the fiscal year, handling over 10,386 TEUs of containers, 5,637 vehicles, and 52,84,471 tons of goods. The port generated Tk210 crore in revenue and offers anchoring facilities for 47 ships, 69 navigation buoys, and additional amenities for importers and exporters, enhancing its role in trade.

US Apparel Exports Surge 41.6%

Bangladesh's apparel exports to the US increased by 41.6% year-on-year in November 2024, reaching \$614 million compared to \$433 million in November 2023. This growth signifies a robust recovery in the final quarter, with September and October seeing increases of 18.4% and 26.7%, respectively.

However, total apparel exports to the US from January to November 2024 witnessed a slight 0.44% decline compared to the same period in 2023. India and Vietnam also reported growth in their apparel exports to the US.

January 12

Tarique, Fakhru Inited to US Prayer Breakfast

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, Secretary General Fakhru Islam Alamgir, and standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury have been invited to the National Prayer Breakfast in the US. Facilitated by the National Prayer Breakfast Foundation under US Congress leadership, the event will be attended by President Donald Trump in Washington, DC, on February 5-6. The invitation, signed by Representatives Ben Cline, Zach Wanip, Tom Suozzi, and James Slattery, expects around 3,500 guests, including international invitees from over 100 countries, to attend.

Bangladesh Urges Restraint on Border

The Bangladesh government has voiced serious concerns over recent activities by India's Border Security Force (BSF) along the border, including unauthorized attempts to construct barbed-wire fencing. Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma was summoned to the foreign ministry, where the Foreign Secretary emphasized that such actions undermine bilateral cooperation. Concerns were also raised about repeated border killings, despite India's commitment to a non-lethal strategy. The BGB-BSF director general-level talks in February will address these issues. Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury noted that India halted fence construction in some areas following resistance from BGB and locals.

EIB Investments Boost Bangladesh-EU Ties

The European Chamber of Commerce (EuroCham) in Bangladesh held a meeting with EIB Vice-President Nicola Beer in Dhaka, attended by BIDA Executive Chairman Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud and EU Ambassador Michael Miller. Discussions centred on expanding financing in green energy and infrastructure, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and enhancing Bangladesh's appeal for European FDI through improved branding strategies. EuroCham emphasized its role as a bridge between European and Bangladeshi authorities to strengthen trade and investment ties.

January 13

India Asserts Compliance on Border Protocols

India has assured Bangladesh of adhering to protocols and agreements on border security, including fencing, during a meeting with Bangladesh's acting High Commissioner Md Nural Islam.

This followed Bangladesh summoning Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma over recent BSF activities. Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi emphasized the mutual importance of a crime-free border and called for Bangladesh's cooperation in implementing earlier understandings to combat cross-border crimes. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin urged India to avoid provocative actions that could escalate tensions. The discussions underscore the need for collaborative efforts to maintain stability along the border.

UK Minister Tulip Faces Corruption Charges

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in Bangladesh has filed three cases alleging abuse of power to acquire government plots in the Purbachal New Town Project. Accused individuals include British anti-corruption minister Tulip Siddiq, her aunt Sheikh Hasina, mother Sheikh Rehana, brother Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby, and sister Azmina Siddiq. This marks the first legal case against Tulip Siddiq in Bangladesh. The ACC claims Tulip used her influence to secure plots for her family by manipulating Hasina's power. The plots are located in the diplomatic zone of Sector 27, Purbachal. A separate case was also filed against Sheikh Hasina, her daughter Saima Wazed, and 14 others.

CA Yunus Seeks Malaysia Visas



Chief Adviser Prof. Muhammad Yunus has urged Malaysia to issue multiple-entry visas for Bangladeshi workers and facilitate entry for 18,000 workers who missed their deadlines last year. A joint technical committee meeting on labour issues was held on December 31, with another scheduled for Jan 14. Prof. Yunus congratulated Malaysia on chairing ASEAN and sought support for Bangladesh's bid to become a Sectoral Dialogue Partner and for ASEAN's backing in the upcoming International Conference on the Rohingya Crisis. He also encouraged Malaysian investment and factory relocations to Bangladesh. Bangladesh anticipates the 4th Bilateral Consultation in Kuala Lumpur and the 5th Joint Commission meeting in Dhaka by mid-2025.

January 14

EU: Bangladesh Needs Post-LDC Preparations

The European Union Ambassador to Dhaka, Michael Miller, has urged Bangladesh to take significant actions to continue enjoying preferential trade facilities in the European market after its graduation from the least developed countries (LDCs) status. During his visit to two knitwear factories in Narayanganj, he emphasized the need for Bangladesh to carry out extensive activities, including labour law reforms and maintaining transparency with the EU. The EU is a major trading partner for Bangladesh, accounting for 20.70% of its total trade in 2023. The ambassador highlighted the importance of the readymade garments, textiles, and knitwear sectors for Bangladesh's future prosperity.

Tulip Siddiq Resigns Amid Allegations

Tulip Siddiq, the UK's City Minister, has resigned following an ethics review into allegations concerning her use of properties linked to the ousted Bangladeshi regime. While an independent review found no breach of the Ministerial Code or improper conduct, Siddiq stepped down to avoid distractions to government work. Her family ties, including her aunt Sheikh Hasina, were publicly known, and she had recused herself from Bangladesh-related matters. Siddiq has been replaced by Emma Reynolds. Meanwhile, Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has named her in three cases alleging misuse of influence to acquire government plots for her family in the Purbachal Project.

UN Defers Poll Timelines Decision

The United Nations (UN) will not set timelines for Bangladesh's next parliamentary elections; this decision lies with the government and political parties. UN Resident Coordinator Gwyn Lewis emphasized that the UN team will meet with every political party in Bangladesh to assess areas where the UN can support the election environment. The need assessment mission is focused on providing technical support to the Election Commission for the national elections. The mission will be completed within ten days, involving meetings with various stakeholders, including civil society, academia, and political parties.

Bangladesh Signs MoU with Pakistan

Bangladesh signed an MoU with Pakistan to import atap (parboiled) rice on a government-to-government (G2G) basis. The agreement, signed by Syed Rafeo Bashir Shah,

Chairman of the Trading Corporation of Pakistan, and Md Abdul Khaleque, Director General of the Directorate General of Food, aims to stabilize Bangladesh's domestic rice market and strengthen bilateral trade ties. Rising rice prices in Bangladesh by Tk6-10 per kg prompted the government to source imports globally and waive import duties. Bangladesh plans to import 1.75 lakh tonnes of rice in January and a total of eight lakh tonnes by June 2025.

Govt Demands Clarity on UN Rohingya Report

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangladesh has requested an explanation from the United Nations regarding a report published by the UN Refugee Agency. The report contains factually incorrect information, and Bangladesh wants to know the basis on which it was prepared. The Ministry conveyed its dissatisfaction to the UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka, Gwen Lewis. The report from the UN Refugee Agency's Myanmar office stated that 71,300 people were displaced from Myanmar between February 2021 and December 2024, and all of them entered the Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram, suggesting that no one displaced from Myanmar entered Bangladesh in the last three years.

KOICA Unveils Project Enhancing Statistics

KOICA, in collaboration with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), has launched a \$9.65 million project to modernize and strengthen Bangladesh's national statistical system. The project, "Capacity Development of Statistics Service Based on Platform," aims to integrate advanced ICT technologies to improve the efficiency and accuracy of data collection, management, and analysis by BBS. This initiative supports informed decision-making and evidence-based policy-making, critical for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Digital Bangladesh vision. KOICA's efforts emphasize data-driven governance, transparency, and public service delivery, contributing to Bangladesh's sustainable development, good governance, and economic growth.

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