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Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

US Engages India and Neighbours on Bangladesh Crisis

The United States is in dialogue with India and other regional nations to discuss the situation in Bangladesh and advocate for an end to the ongoing violence. Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel reaffirmed the US commitment to promoting accountability, the rule of law, and the protection of minority communities in Bangladesh. Two Indian American Congressmen have also urged the US Secretary of State to intervene in safeguarding Hindus in Bangladesh. The US has welcomed Dr. Yunus's call for calm and supports the new government's efforts to restore security and protect minorities.

Bangladesh Recalls Diplomats from Seven Countries

Bangladesh's interim government has recalled seven ambassadors appointed by the previous Awami League administration. The ambassadors, based in the USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Germany, UAE, and the Maldives, have been instructed to return to Dhaka immediately. Several other diplomats, including those posted in Washington, Ottawa, and New York, are also being recalled. These moves are part of a broader administrative reshuffle following the formation of the interim government on August 8.

August 15

UN to Investigate Atrocities in Bangladesh

The United Nations is deploying a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh to investigate human rights abuses during the Student Revolution in July and early August. This marks the first UN mission of its kind in Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. The mission follows international concern over reports of violence and repression during the student-led uprising, which resulted in the resignation of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Amnesty Calls for Minority Rights Protections

Bangladesh's interim government has vowed to uphold human rights and freedom of expression for all citizens. Amnesty International has urged the authorities to conduct thorough, impartial investigations into crimes against minority communities and to ensure justice. The new government is being called upon to promote equality and non-discrimination, particularly for minorities, and to end the culture of violence against political opponents while ensuring access to justice for survivors of mob violence.

IHRC Calls for Release of 57 Bangladeshis Imprisoned in UAE

The International Human Rights Commission (IHRC) Bangladesh Chapter has urged the interim government to facilitate the release of 57 Bangladeshi citizens imprisoned in the UAE. These individuals were jailed following their involvement in protests related to Bangladesh's quota reform movement. The IHRC stressed the need for the Bangladesh government and its embassy to provide legal support and engage in diplomatic negotiations to assist these citizens. The organisation is urging the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take immediate and effective action to resolve this issue.

Adani Power Reaffirms Electricity Supply to Bangladesh

Adani Power has confirmed its commitment to continue supplying electricity to Bangladesh, despite recent changes in India's power export regulations. The new rules permit connectivity to the Indian grid without requiring India to purchase the electricity. Adani's Jharkhand-based plant remains dedicated to fulfilling its contractual obligations with Bangladesh. The rule change follows political unrest in Bangladesh, potentially favouring future export-focused power projects.

August 16

Yunus Assures Modi on Protection of Hindus in Bangladesh

Dr. Muhammad Yunus has assured Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the interim government in Bangladesh will prioritise the safety and security of Hindus and all minority groups. Prime Minister Modi reiterated India's commitment to a democratic, stable, peaceful, and progressive Bangladesh. Dr. Yunus invited Indian journalists to visit Bangladesh to report firsthand on the situation of minorities, emphasizing that reports of attacks have been exaggerated. Modi also invited Dr. Yunus to participate in the upcoming 'Third Voice of Global South Summit,' which Yunus agreed to attend virtually.

UN Reports 650 Deaths in Bangladesh Protests

The UN has reported that around 650 people were killed between July 16 and August 11 in Bangladesh, including protesters, bystanders, journalists, and security forces. Reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and severe restrictions on freedoms have emerged. Following the government's resignation on August 5, further violence, including looting and attacks on minorities, escalated. The UN has called for a comprehensive investigation and accountability for these human rights violations. The High Commissioner announced that a team would visit Dhaka next week to assess how the UN Human Rights Office can support the transition process.

August 17

Yunus Invites Indian Journalists for On-Ground Reporting in Bangladesh

Dr. Muhammad Yunus has invited Indian journalists to visit Bangladesh to report directly from the ground. Bangladeshi foreign missions are speeding up visa approvals for journalists, highlighting the government's commitment to an open society where press freedom is upheld. Dr. Yunus has personally reached out to mission officials to ensure that visa applications are processed quickly.

Direct Shipping from China to Chattogram to Halve Transit Time

Pacific International Lines (PIL) is set to launch a direct shipping service between China and Chattogram Port starting 31 August. The new route will reduce transit time by nearly 50%, bringing it down to 9-14 days from the current 20-22 days. This service is expected to significantly benefit Bangladesh's garment industry by speeding up the delivery of raw materials from China. The introduction of this service is likely to increase competition among shipping companies, potentially leading to reduced freight costs.

August 18

Imports via Benapole Drop Amid Dollar Crisis

Benapole Port experienced a significant decline in imports, recording 17.21 lakh tonnes in FY 2023-24, down by 2.82 lakh tonnes from the previous year. The ongoing dollar shortage has made banks reluctant to open letters of credit (LCs), impacting import volumes. Importers are struggling with high margin requirements and increased interest rates. Officials and business leaders are hopeful that the situation will improve once the dollar crisis is resolved.

Chattogram Port Maintains 67th Position Globally

Chattogram Port retained its 67th position on Lloyd's List of the world's top 100 ports in 2023, handling 30,50,793 TEUs—a 2.9% decrease from 2022. The decline is attributed to the global economic slowdown and strict import regulations in Bangladesh. The port's ranking has varied over the years, peaking at 58th in 2019. According to Lloyd's List, Shanghai Port in China remains the top global port, handling 49,158,300 TEUs in 2023, followed by Singapore Port with 39,010,000 TEUs.

August 19

Japan Urges Reforms in Bangladesh's Banking and Customs Sectors

Japan has called for reforms in Bangladesh's banking and customs sectors to attract more Japanese investment. The Japanese ambassador highlighted that immigration procedures in Bangladesh are longer than in countries like Switzerland. In response, Bangladesh's finance minister assured that the interim government is committed to improving the business environment and has begun reforms in the banking sector. Ongoing Japan-funded projects, including the metro rail, will continue, and Bangladesh has sought additional financial assistance for health and education sectors.

Rosatom Refutes Allegations Against Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant

Rosatom has reiterated its commitment to transparency and anti-corruption in all its projects, rejecting recent false media allegations aimed at discrediting the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) project. Regular audits confirm the transparency of the project's business processes. Rosatom has stated that it is prepared to defend its interests and reputation through legal action if necessary.

August 20

Adani Power Deal Increases Electricity Costs for Bangladesh

Bangladesh is incurring significantly higher electricity costs due to its power purchase agreement with Adani's 1,600MW coal power plant in India, which charges Tk14.02 per unit compared to Tk7.83 per unit from other sources. This expensive deal has resulted in an 8% rise in electricity prices and added \$100 million monthly to the country's unpaid power bills. The agreement with Adani has been criticized for its lack of transparency and for favouring the investor, prompting calls for its review or cancellation. Energy experts and officials have voiced concerns about the deal's fairness and its economic impact, suggesting the need for scrutiny and potential renegotiation.

Bangladesh Requests China to Reduce Loan Rates and Extend Repayment Period

Bangladesh has asked China to lower the interest rates on high-interest loans and extend the repayment period by an additional 10 years. Discussions also covered ongoing Chinese-funded projects in Bangladesh, including the Padma Rail Link and the Dhaka-Ashulia Expressway. Both China and Canada have assured continued technical and financial support for Bangladesh's development projects. The finance adviser highlighted the substantial debt burden caused by policies of the previous government.

UN Supports Bangladesh's Interim Government's Democratic Initiatives

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has expressed strong support for Dr. Muhammad Yunus's interim government in Bangladesh. The UN stresses the importance of an inclusive approach that incorporates the voices of youths, women, minorities, and indigenous communities. Guterres also called on the interim government to ensure the welfare of Rohingya refugees amid the ongoing crisis in Myanmar. Dr. Yunus's leadership is considered pivotal for restoring peace, ensuring accountability, and preparing for democratic elections in Bangladesh.

August 21

Macron Congratulates Bangladesh's Chief Adviser

French President Emmanuel Macron congratulated Professor Muhammad Yunus on his appointment as Chief Adviser to Bangladesh's interim government. Macron underscored the crucial role of the interim government in preparing for democratic elections and fostering national reconciliation. He highlighted the importance of strengthening France-Bangladesh relations, focusing on human rights, climate adaptation, and poverty reduction. Macron assured France's full support and wished Yunus success in tackling the forthcoming challenges.

Chinese Envoy Meets BNP; Offers Support

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh, Yao Wen, assured that China will not interfere in Bangladesh's internal affairs during a meeting with BNP's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and senior party members. The discussion was deemed productive, with the ambassador expressing hopes for stability and continued development in Bangladesh. The BNP acknowledged China's ongoing support, and the ambassador extended best wishes to Khaleda Zia and Tarique Rahman.

Bangladesh Seeks \$1 Billion from World Bank for Power Sector

Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan has requested \$1 billion from the World Bank to address a \$2 billion debt in Bangladesh's power sector. The foreign debt related to electricity and energy imports stands at approximately \$2.2 billion. The interim government has halted activities under the Quick Energy Supply Act and may consider reviewing or amending related laws. World Bank's country director, Abdoulaye Seck, expressed willingness to evaluate the proposal.

August 22

High-Level Flood Panel Proposed by Yunus

Professor Muhammad Yunus has proposed the establishment of a high-level committee between Bangladesh and India to manage flood risks. He expressed hope that issues related to transboundary river water-sharing would be resolved promptly. Both countries discussed enhancing BIMSTEC and SAARC cooperation, with a focus on youth engagement. The Indian High Commissioner reiterated India's commitment to a stable and prosperous Bangladesh.

UN Visit to Discuss Support, Not Investigation

A preliminary team from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has arrived in Dhaka to explore ways to support investigations into human rights violations amid recent unrest. The visit is exploratory, aimed at understanding the interim government's needs and priorities. The OHCHR team is encouraged by Bangladesh's commitment to democracy and human rights, particularly among the youth, and will discuss potential support for restoring democracy and advancing human rights in the country.

Nahid Criticises India's Unwarned Water Releases

Md Nahid Islam, an advisor to the interim government, has condemned India for releasing water from dams without prior notification, leading to severe flooding in Bangladesh. He called for India to reconsider policies that adversely affect both nations. The Bangladeshi government is working with military forces to manage the flooding, and Nahid has appealed to citizens to assist those impacted by the disaster.

August 23

Rizwana Criticises India for Lack of Flood Notification

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, an advisor to the Bangladesh interim government, has condemned India for failing to notify Bangladesh before releasing water from the Dumbor Hydroelectric Plant, which caused flooding. Bangladesh plans to engage in discussions with India to prevent future incidents and will launch a campaign against illegal encroachments along riverbanks. Efforts will focus on protecting the Khowai River and addressing issues related to the navigability of international rivers. A small-scale project will be initiated to safeguard the Khowai River, with additional funding to be allocated if necessary.

August 24

Key Equipment Arrives for Rooppur Nuclear Plant

A 235-ton transport lock for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) has arrived and will soon be installed. This equipment is crucial for containing radioactive substances, providing fire protection, and facilitating cargo transportation for maintenance and fuel handling. The RNPP, Bangladesh's first nuclear power project, is advancing with Russian support, although delays may occur due to current conditions. The plant will feature two units with a combined capacity of 2,400 megawatts, equipped with the latest generation 3+ Russian VVER 1200 reactors.

August 25

Chief Adviser Seeks Relocation of Chinese Solar Plants

Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad Yunus has requested China to relocate some of its solar panel manufacturing facilities to Bangladesh to enhance green transition and boost exports. Dr. Yunus highlighted the need for stronger economic ties, technological transfer, and increased imports of Bangladeshi goods into China. China has also committed to finding a lasting solution to the Rohingya crisis and providing humanitarian aid. Dr. Yunus stressed the importance of youth-to-youth collaboration and people-to-people connections between the two nations.

Japan Reaffirms Support for Bangladesh Projects

Japan has pledged continued support for Bangladesh's ongoing projects and future cooperation. The Japanese Ambassador met with Wahiduddin Mahmud, adviser to the Ministries of Planning and Education, to discuss support for technical education in Bangladesh and scholarships for Bangladeshi students to study in Japan. Wahiduddin Mahmud expressed gratitude to Japan for being Bangladesh's largest development partner.

August 26

Visa Centre Closures Disrupt Europe Travel

The indefinite suspension of visa processing in Bangladesh by India has caused significant issues for over 1,500 Bangladeshi students and workers. Students with European university offer letters are unable to attend visa interviews in Delhi, jeopardising their admissions and tuition fees. Workers with job permits and patients needing medical treatment in India are also facing financial losses and health risks. In response, affected individuals have formed human chains and are calling for the resumption of Indian visa applications in Bangladesh to address the crisis.

Biden and Modi Discuss Bangladesh's Path to Stability

US President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have discussed the situation in Bangladesh, stressing the importance of restoring normalcy and ensuring the safety of minorities, particularly Hindus. They also touched on the Ukraine situation and Quad-related issues, with Modi reaffirming India's commitment to peace and stability. Both leaders reviewed the progress in India-US relations and pledged to strengthen cooperation in multilateral forums, including the Quad, based on shared values of democracy and rule of law.

Sri Lankan Bank Eyes Bank Alfalah's Bangladesh Operations

Bank Alfalah has received non-binding acquisition offers from Sri Lanka's Hatton National Bank (HNB) and Bank Asia Ltd. for its Bangladesh operations. These offers are contingent on compliance with legal and regulatory approvals from the central banks of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Operating in Bangladesh since 2005, Bank Alfalah has a balance sheet exceeding Tk3,100 crore and seven branches. Bank Asia, known for acquiring foreign bank assets in Bangladesh, is a key player in the country's financial inclusion efforts.

India Requests Enhanced Security After Visa Centre Protest

A demonstration by visa seekers at the Indian Visa Application Centre in Dhaka led to chaotic scenes, prompting the Indian High Commission to request increased security. The incident caused panic among the crowd, but police swiftly managed the situation, preventing any vandalism. The High Commission is returning passports to applicants without rejecting their applications, allowing them to resubmit once full operations resume. Enhanced security measures are being implemented to ensure smooth and safe processing at the centre.

August 27

Gazprom Eyes New Gas Wells in Bhola



Russian Ambassador Alexander Mantytskiy met with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in Dhaka to discuss bilateral interests. Gazprom, the state-run Russian energy company, is interested in exploring five additional gas wells in Bhola and other inland areas.

Prof Yunus encouraged increased imports from Bangladesh, beyond just ready-made garments. Russia congratulated Prof Yunus and expressed a desire to enhance bilateral relations across trade, economic, scientific, technical, cultural, and humanitarian sectors.

Adani Power Resumes Full Supply to Bangladesh

Adani Power has resumed full energy supply to Bangladesh from its Godda power plant after resolving technical issues. The plant's two units now provide approximately 1,500 MW of electricity. The second unit, which was offline due to technical problems on August 13, resumed operations on August 26. Despite this, Bangladesh has accumulated up to \$800 million in unpaid bills to Adani Power.

HRW Urges Bangladesh to Address Human Rights Abuses

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called on Bangladesh's interim government to prioritise human rights in the wake of recent political violence and crackdowns on protests. The unrest between July 15 and August 5, 2024, resulted in over 440 deaths, thousands of injuries, and nearly 10,000 arrests. HRW recommends establishing an independent investigation mechanism, disbanding the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and reforming the judiciary and other institutions. The organisation emphasises the need to protect minority communities and address economic inequality and corruption.

UK Offers Support for Bangladesh's Reform Efforts

The UK has shown interest in assisting Bangladesh with reforms in its banking, revenue, and capital markets. Discussions focused on enhancing trade and commerce between the two countries, aiming to diversify Bangladesh's export items and improve its business environment to attract more private investment. The UK also highlighted ongoing cooperation in economic development and women's empowerment, with plans to continue and expand these initiatives.

August 28

IMF Supports Bangladesh's Development Goals

The IMF has reaffirmed its support for Bangladesh's development and reform efforts. Bangladesh has secured a \$4.7 billion loan package from the IMF, with the third installment already disbursed. The interim government is now seeking an additional \$3 billion, raising the total debt to \$7.7 billion. An IMF mission is scheduled to review progress in October before releasing the fourth tranche in December.

French Envoy Calls for Anti-Corruption Efforts to Boost Trade

France has pledged support for Bangladesh's rebuilding efforts, focusing on combatting corruption and enhancing trade and investment opportunities. French companies are interested in establishing three solar parks in Bangladesh. The French envoy extended an invitation to Professor Yunus for the 65th anniversary celebration of Alliance Francaise Dhaka in October. Additionally, France is planning a two-week cultural season for Bangladesh in Paris in April 2025. The French ambassador also expressed condolences for recent deaths and emphasised the importance of reconciliation and human rights.

Canadian Envoy Stresses Labour Rights for Trade Benefits

Chief Adviser Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus assured that Bangladesh would uphold labour rights according to ILO standards to benefit from Canadian trade preferences. The interim government is working to stabilise the economy, which faces significant debt issues. Canada is ready to support Bangladesh, particularly in enhancing food security and backing the UN fact-finding mission. Discussions also covered the security situation in Rohingya camps, with Canada contributing over \$600 million to humanitarian responses.

Yunus Seeks Malaysia's Support for ASEAN Membership

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has requested Malaysia's support for Bangladesh's bid to join ASEAN, positioning Bangladesh as a potential link between ASEAN and SAARC. The Malaysian High Commissioner expressed support and noted Malaysia's upcoming ASEAN chairmanship. Discussions included tax issues faced by Malaysian companies in Bangladesh and potential investments in education and car manufacturing. Malaysia was also proposed as a destination for affordable medical treatment for Bangladeshi citizens.

WHO Reports Air Pollution Reduces Lifespan in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been identified as the world's most polluted country, with particulate matter (PM2.5) levels significantly exceeding WHO guidelines, reducing life expectancy by an average of 4.8 years. Areas such as Gazipur and Narsingdi experience even greater reductions, with life expectancy cut by over 6 years. The impact of air pollution on lifespan is comparable to smoking and surpasses other health risks like high alcohol use and traffic accidents. Despite a slight global decrease in pollution levels in 2022, South Asia remains the most polluted region, contributing to 45% of the total life years lost due to high pollution.

August 29

Bangladesh Signs Convention on Enforced Disappearances

Bangladesh has officially acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. The signing, led by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, occurred during an advisory council meeting of the interim government and was met with applause from council members, according to Yunus's press team. Yunus described the event as "historic." This announcement precedes the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. Earlier in the week, the interim government established a commission to investigate cases of enforced disappearances that occurred during Sheikh Hasina's 15-year tenure.

Russia to Provide Free Fertiliser and Consider Additional Aid

Russia will supply Bangladesh with 30,000 tonnes of potassium fertiliser at no cost, announced Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh Alexander Mantytskiy during a meeting with Home and Agriculture Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury. Jahangir expressed gratitude and requested prompt delivery of the fertiliser, as well as a free shipment of wheat to support food security amidst the current floods. He emphasised Bangladesh's dependence on Russia for these essential supplies. Mantytskiy assured that Russia would consider Bangladesh's requests and asked for formal communication. The meeting also covered topics such as food security, cyber security, and modernising forensic labs.

August 30

UN Fact-Finding Team to Probe Rights Violations in Bangladesh

The UN Human Rights Office will dispatch a fact-finding team to Bangladesh to investigate human rights violations occurring between July 1 and August 15. Requested by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, the mission will focus on abuses during mass protests, identify root causes, and propose justice and reform measures, according to UN rights office spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani. An advance team visited Bangladesh from August 22 to 29, meeting with student leaders, government advisers, and minority groups to discuss investigation procedures, civic space, and the need for truth and justice, as well as the UN's role in supporting long-term reforms.

India to Engage with Bangladesh's New Government

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced that India will engage with the “government of the day” in Bangladesh following recent political shifts. Speaking at the launch of Rajiv Sikri’s book *Strategic Conundrums: Reshaping India's Foreign Policy*, Jaishankar acknowledged that political changes can be disruptive but stressed the importance of finding common ground. He noted that India must adapt to these shifts and adopt a pragmatic approach in its diplomatic relations. Jaishankar also reflected on the fluctuating nature of India-Bangladesh relations since Bangladesh's independence, underscoring the need for a flexible approach to future engagements amid evolving political circumstances.

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