

30 June | 2025

## Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



### A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

03 June

#### UNICEF Suspends Bangladesh Education Programmes

UNICEF has halted several education programmes in Bangladesh due to a global aid funding crisis. The suspension includes contracts for 1,179 personnel supporting kindergarten to grade 2 education in host communities. The return of educational staff—both from Rohingya and local communities—after Eid depends on securing new funding. UNICEF stated that the decision prioritises emergency support and the core functions of ongoing programmes amid difficult circumstances. The organisation emphasised its ongoing commitment to children's welfare, especially Rohingya refugee children facing trauma and educational disruption. It called on the international community to increase support for restoring services and ensuring education and protection for children.

04 June

#### Touhid Urges Sri Lanka to Boost Pharmaceutical Imports

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain urged Sri Lanka to increase imports of Bangladeshi pharmaceutical products, citing their global competitiveness. Sri Lankan High Commissioner Dharmapala Weerakkody met Hossain at Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss bilateral cooperation. Talks focused on enhancing partnerships in trade, investment, ICT, education, pharmaceuticals, and tourism. The Sri Lankan envoy appreciated the growing interest of Bangladeshi tourists in Sri Lanka and discussed new investment opportunities. A Bangladeshi trade delegation is set to visit Sri Lanka later this month to explore business prospects.

#### UN Rights Office to Open in Dhaka

The United Nations Human Rights Office is preparing to open a branch in Bangladesh to support reforms in the political, police, and judicial sectors. UN Resident Coordinator Gwyn Lewis confirmed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been finalised and is awaiting signature. The new office will assist Bangladesh in various ongoing

human rights processes. This development follows increased international scrutiny of Bangladesh's rights situation, especially after last year's July–August uprising, which reportedly resulted in around 1,400 deaths. The International Crimes Tribunal is currently prosecuting individuals accused of human rights violations during the unrest.

## **Bangladesh Ranked Among Worst for Workers' Rights**

Bangladesh has once again been ranked among the 10 worst countries for workers' rights in the 2025 ITUC Global Rights Index, scoring 5—indicating no guarantee of rights. The country's labour laws are highly restrictive: union formation is limited to permanent employees at the factory level, with a cap of three unions per workplace. Civil servants, firefighters, and most public employees are barred from unionising. Export Processing Zones prohibit independent unions. Collective bargaining is rare, and strikes are heavily restricted or banned, especially in critical sectors. In February, police detained 23 Transcom Beverages workers protesting the dismissal of union leaders, highlighting systemic repression.

## **05 June**

### **India Pushes 32 More Into Bangladesh**

India's Border Security Force (BSF) allegedly pushed 32 Bangladeshi nationals into Bangladesh through the Bijoypur border in Durgapur upazila, Netrokona, at around 3:00 AM. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) detained the individuals 500 yards inside Bangladeshi territory. The detainees are from multiple districts, including Khulna, Jashore, Narail, Satkhira, Brahmanbaria, and Tangail—having previously travelled to India. They are currently being held at the BGB's Bijoypur camp, with preparations underway to hand them over to the police.

## **10 June**

### **UK MPs Hold Talks with Yunus**

UK parliamentarians met Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus in London under the All-Party Parliamentary Group to discuss mutual interests. Yunus also held meetings with executives from Airbus and Menzies Aviation, focusing on economic and trade cooperation. The Commonwealth Secretary-General was scheduled to meet him separately later during the visit. This four-day official

trip aims to strengthen bilateral ties between Bangladesh and the UK, particularly in economic cooperation, trade, and investment.

Yunus is also scheduled to meet King Charles III and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer for high-level discussions. King Charles will formally confer the "Harmony Award 2025" on Yunus, recognising his efforts in peace and sustainability.

### **Airbus, Menzies EVPs Meet Yunus**

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus arrived in London on 10 June for a four-day official visit. His schedule includes meetings with Airbus EVP Wouter van Wersch and Menzies Aviation EVP Charles Wyley, a bilateral meeting with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and discussions with Foreign Secretary David Lammy and other policymakers.

On 11 June, Yunus addressed Chatham House on Bangladesh's current realities and future challenges. On 12 June, he received the King Charles III Harmony Award at St James's Palace and attend The King's Foundation anniversary dinner. He also met the Secretaries-General of the Commonwealth and IMO, as well as BNP's Tarique Rahman.

## **12 June**

### **Yunus Sends Condolences to Modi**

An Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner crashed shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad en route to London. At least 204 of the 242 people on board were confirmed dead, with the toll expected to rise. Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus sent a condolence message to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressing shock and solidarity with India. He conveyed sympathy to the victims' families and offered support, extending the "highest consideration" to Modi. The crash has raised wider concerns, and Boeing shares reportedly fell 8% following the incident.

### **US–Bangladesh Medical Workshop Concludes in Chattogram**

A four-day joint medical training workshop, organised by the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Army, concluded at Chattogram Port on 12 June. The workshop aimed to enhance emergency response capacity at ports, particularly for mass casualty events. Training included CPR and bleeding control techniques for 25 first responders—15 from the Chattogram Port Authority, five from the Coast Guard, and five from the Fire Service & Civil Defence. The U.S. Army Pacific Command Augmentation Team, supported by the U.S. Civil-Military Support



Element (CMSE), conducted the training to prepare these individuals as future trainers and strengthen inter-agency coordination. Since 2014, over 25,000 Bangladeshi responders have received specialised emergency training, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to Bangladesh's crisis readiness.

## **Bangladesh Missing 2025 Child Labour Goal**

Bangladesh is not on track to eliminate child labour by 2025, according to a joint ILO–UNICEF report. The child labour rate was 4.4% in 2022, nearly unchanged from 4.3% in 2013. Although hazardous child labour declined slightly, most child labourers remain in informal, exploitative sectors with long hours and poor conditions. The report calls for stronger social protection, universal education, and expanded child protection services to address root causes such as poverty and lack of access to schooling. Globally, child labour dropped from 246 million in 2000 to 138 million in 2024, but progress must accelerate elevenfold to meet global goals.

## **Nine, Including Children, Pushed into Bangladesh**

Nine individuals, including two children, were allegedly pushed into Bangladesh by Indian police through the Munshipara border in Dhobaura Upazila, Mymensingh. According to BGB Nayek Subedar Md Khairul Islam, the group had been working in Chennai but faced threats from locals demanding their return to Bangladesh. They were reportedly detained and forcibly returned by Indian police.

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) took them into custody and is preparing to transfer them to Dhobaura Police Station for legal processing. Similar incidents were reported earlier this month, including 22 people pushed back through nearby border points.

## **Yunus Honoured with King's Harmony Award**

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus received the "King Charles III Harmony Award 2025" at a ceremony at St James's Palace, presented by King Charles III. The award recognises individuals dedicated to fostering harmony among people, places, and the planet. Prof. Yunus, a 2006 Nobel Peace Laureate and

founder of over 50 social business initiatives, was honoured for his lifelong work in sustainable development and humanitarian causes. He also had a private audience with the King, where he briefed him on Bangladesh's political transition and reform efforts. Yunus later met Sir Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the UK House of Commons.

## **23 Bangladeshi Hajj Pilgrims Die in Saudi Arabia**

Twenty-three Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrims have died in Saudi Arabia during this year's pilgrimage—21 men and 2 women. Most deaths occurred in Makkah (15), followed by Madinah (7) and Arafat (1). No deaths were reported in Jeddah, Mina, or Muzdalifah.

A total of 87,100 Bangladeshis performed Hajj in 2025—5,200 under government arrangements and 81,900 through private agencies. In comparison, 65 pilgrims died in 2024 and 121 in 2023, indicating a lower death toll this year.

## **Bangladesh Condemns Israel's Strikes on Iran**

Bangladesh strongly condemned Israel's recent military strikes on Iran, calling them a violation of international law and Iran's sovereignty. The Foreign Ministry described the attacks as a threat to regional and global peace, warning they could escalate tensions.

Dhaka urged all parties to exercise restraint and called on the UN and international community to support diplomatic solutions. The ministry reiterated that diplomacy and mutual respect remain the only path to sustainable peace.

## **UK Briefs CA on HMS Enterprise**



Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus met in London with Lesley Craig from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Commodore Whalley to discuss the HMS Enterprise—a hydrographic and oceanographic survey vessel being acquired for the Bangladesh Navy.

UK officials detailed the vessel's capabilities for marine data collection, which will aid in climate change research, biodiversity conservation, fisheries, and resource exploration. Professor Yunus expressed interest in joint maritime research, youth education programmes, and UK support in providing equipment and training.

## 14 June

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### World Bank Approves \$250M Governance Loan

The World Bank has approved \$250 million for Bangladesh under the Strengthening Institutions for Transparency and Accountability (SITA) Project. The initiative aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in five key government agencies: the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the National Board of Revenue, the Planning Division, the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority, and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. The project supports reforms in tax administration, procurement, financial oversight, and data transparency, emphasising digitalisation to reduce corruption and improve service delivery. A second-generation e-GP system will be developed, and audit mechanisms strengthened. This project complements an upcoming development policy credit focused on governance reforms.

### Assam CM Issues Shoot-on-Sight Order

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma issued a shoot-on-sight order in Dhubri town to curb communal unrest following the discovery of severed cow heads near a Hanuman temple on consecutive days after Eid-ul-Azha. He claimed that external forces, including a group called 'Nabin Bangla', are inciting unrest and promoting secessionist ideas aimed at making Dhubri part of Bangladesh. Central security forces have been deployed, and Sarma has ordered the arrest of all known criminals in the district. He also pointed to a rise in cattle smuggling from West Bengal, suggesting a broader network at play. Dhubri—where Muslims (mostly Bengali-speaking) form about 74% of the population—has long been considered communally sensitive.

### Bangladesh Tops Gender Equality Rankings

Bangladesh ranks 24th globally and leads South Asia in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender

Gap Index 2025, with a gender parity score of 77.5%. It is the only South Asian country in the global top 50, recognised for significant progress in political empowerment and education. Bangladesh outperforms wealthier nations in reducing gender disparities, despite regional declines in income parity.

## India Forces 24 More into Bangladesh

India's Border Security Force (BSF) allegedly forced 24 individuals, including 11 children, into Bangladesh through the Dinajpur-Birampur and Mymensingh-Dhobaura borders. Bangladesh's Border Guard (BGB-29) detained 15 people near Dinajpur's Achintapur border, stating they were pushed across pillar 295/1-S by BSF on Friday night. Separately, nine others—previously residing and working in Chennai—were reportedly threatened by locals, detained by Indian police, and sent back through Dhobaura's Munshipara BOP area. The BGB took custody of all individuals and is preparing to transfer them to local police for legal processing. Investigations into the incidents are expected to follow.

## 15 June

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### EU Apparel Exports Rise 25.3%

Bangladesh's apparel exports to the EU rose by 25.3% in the first four months of 2025, reaching €7.54 billion—the highest growth among top exporters during this period. Bangladesh remains the EU's second-largest garment supplier after China (€7.88 billion, up 23.5%). Growth was driven by spillover orders from late 2024, early-season buying, and front-loading amid market uncertainties. Other strong performers included Cambodia (+33.5%), Pakistan (+25.1%), and India (+21.5%), while Turkey saw a decline. BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan attributed the rise to a shift from China and improved capacity but noted persistent challenges in value retention and low profit margins.

## 16 June

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### Bangladesh Apparel Exports Rise Sharply

Bangladesh's apparel exports to the US surged to \$2.98 billion in the first four months of 2025, reflecting a 29.33% year-on-year growth. This rise is attributed to US-China trade tensions and new tariffs, prompting American buyers to shift away from Chinese suppliers. In April, Bangladesh's

exports to the US rose nearly 38%, while China's fell by 13%. Despite increased volumes, Bangladesh's unit price rose just 0.80%, indicating limited pricing power. A temporary US tariff moratorium on Bangladesh is set to expire soon, raising concerns. Experts urge Dhaka to initiate formal trade negotiations with Washington to maintain market access and secure long-term export growth.

## **Hotlines Activated for Bangladeshis in Iran**

Emergency hotlines have been opened by the Government of Bangladesh for its nationals in Iran and their families in Bangladesh. The decision follows concerns over the prevailing situation in Iran and aims to ensure urgent communication and support. The government reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding the welfare of Bangladeshi expatriates through diplomatic and consular measures.

## **Nepal Starts Power Exports to Bangladesh**

Nepal has commenced commercial electricity exports to Bangladesh, marking its first international power trade beyond India. Under a five-year tripartite agreement signed in October 2024 by Nepal, Bangladesh, and India, 40 MW is being transmitted seasonally via India, from mid-June to mid-November, aligning with Nepal's monsoon surplus. With hydropower capacity exceeding 3,500 MW, Nepal is expanding its regional energy footprint. While the deal enhances regional energy security, conservationists have raised concerns over environmental standards in Nepal's hydro projects. For Bangladesh—heavily reliant on fossil fuels and facing frequent outages—the agreement provides critical relief and supports diversification of its energy sources.

### **17 June**

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## **Chief Adviser Thanks Australia for Resuming Visa Operations in Dhaka**

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus thanked Australia for resuming visa operations in Dhaka during a meeting with newly appointed Australian High Commissioner Susan Ryle. Ryle noted that over 65,000 Bangladeshis and 14,000 students now live in Australia. They discussed reforms, upcoming elections, trade, and the Rohingya crisis. Professor Yunus highlighted key

reform initiatives and announced the upcoming July Charter. Australia pledged AUD 2 million in electoral support and reaffirmed its humanitarian aid for the Rohingyas. Ryle praised the Bangladeshi diaspora and expressed enthusiasm about her posting, calling Bangladesh's culture and politics "vibrant and dynamic."

## **Dhaka, UAE to Deepen Cooperation**

Lutfey Siddiqi, the Chief Adviser's Special Envoy on International Affairs, is working on a "comprehensive refresh" of bilateral ties, covering trade, investment, and migration. The UAE has raised concerns over visa and residency violations by Bangladeshi nationals, who reportedly constitute over 25% of all violators. Issues stem from Bangladesh's recruitment system, which involves high migration costs and lower salaries compared to other nationalities. Siddiqi criticised past government approaches, stating that relaxed visa policies have led to increased violations, including overstaying and forged certificates.

## **Bangladesh Economy Slows; Jobs Factories Hit**

Bangladesh's GDP growth is projected to decline to 3.3%, the lowest in two decades, while foreign investment has dropped by over 70% in the first half of FY2024–25. Nearly 100 factories have shut down, resulting in over 60,000 job losses—primarily among women—and a total of 2.1 million job losses over the past 10 months. Energy shortages, 16% interest rates, and weak banking support have disrupted industrial operations. Investor uncertainty persists due to unclear policies and pending elections. Bangladesh has failed to attract offshore gas investment, increasing energy import dependence. Economists are calling for reforms in transparency, domestic capacity, and worker protection to ensure long-term economic stability.

### **18 June**

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## **DCCI Urges Signing of PTA with Sri Lanka**

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) has stressed the urgency of a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Sri Lanka to boost bilateral trade and investment. DCCI highlighted Sri Lanka's maritime expertise as a key area for Bangladesh's capacity building and invited Sri Lankan investment in logistics, tourism, health, education, ICT, and agro-processing. Sri Lanka e



ncouraged Bangladeshi investment, presenting itself as a corruption-free, investor-friendly destination. Both sides emphasised reducing non-tariff barriers and enhancing regional collaboration. Former DCCI President Rizwan Rahman advocated for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), noting Bangladesh's skilled workforce and Special Economic Zones. A DCCI-Ceylon Chamber MoU was signed, and 200 business matchmaking meetings were held.

## 10 Bangladeshi Firms Join Sydney Expo

The Global Sourcing Expo Sydney 2025 opened at the International Convention Centre, featuring ten Bangladeshi companies—eight ready-made garment (RMG) exporters supported by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and two independent apparel businesses. Bangladesh's High Commissioner to Australia, F. M. Borhan Uddin, inaugurated the Bangladesh Pavilion, joined by officials from the Ministry of Commerce and the EPB. The three-day event hosts around 600 manufacturers and suppliers from 12 countries. Held biannually in Sydney and Melbourne, the expo offers a vital platform for trade networking and market expansion. RMG products make up 93% of Bangladesh's exports to Australia, its 23rd-largest trading partner.

## BSF Pushes 20 More into Bangladesh

India's Border Security Force (BSF) pushed 20 more individuals into Bangladesh through the Chapainawabganj border early Wednesday, bringing the total pushed into the district to 45 since 27 May. The group includes 3 men, 7 women, and 10 children. The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) detained the group in the Masudpur area and plans to hand them over to the police after verifying their identities. The BGB has formally condemned the BSF's actions, citing similar incidents on 27 May and 3 June involving 17 and 8 individuals, respectively.

## 19 June

### Nepal Seeks Closer Tourism Ties

Nepal is actively seeking to enhance tourism and people-to-people connections with Bangladesh. At a tourism event in Chattogram titled "Destination Nepal: From the Bay of Bengal to the Himalayas," Nepal's Ambassador Ghanshyam Bhandari emphasised boosting tourism ties by linking the Himalayas with the Bay. Organised by the Nepalese Embassy and Tourism Board, the event

promoted collaboration with Bangladeshi travel agents, highlighting Nepal's offerings and infrastructure. Bangladesh was identified as a key source market. Bangladeshi mountaineer Babar Ali shared his experiences, adding personal insight. The programme featured B2B sessions, cultural performances, and a raffle draw. Over 120 tourism sector participants attended.

## US Praises Yunus, Reaffirms Support



US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau praised Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus for his leadership during a pivotal moment in Bangladesh's political transition. In a meeting with Bangladesh's National Security Adviser Dr Khalilur Rahman in Washington, DC, Landau reaffirmed the United States' commitment to supporting Bangladesh—especially in promoting peace and regional stability. Discussions covered the Rohingya crisis, reciprocal tariff negotiations, South Asian developments, and the country's democratic progress. Dr Rahman also met Assistant US Trade Representative Brendan Lynch to discuss advancing a reciprocal tariff agreement aimed at boosting bilateral trade.

## 24 June

### Kosovo Envoy Meets Chief Adviser Eyes Deeper Ties



Lulzim Pllana, Ambassador of Kosovo, paid his

maiden courtesy call on Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna. The Chief Adviser welcomed him and praised Kosovo's commitment to freedom and peace. They discussed expanding bilateral ties, especially in trade, education, and labour cooperation. Ambassador Pllana expressed gratitude for Bangladesh's support and highlighted Grameen Kosovo's post-war role. The Chief Adviser encouraged Kosovan investment in Bangladesh and proposed greater student and worker exchanges.

**25 June**

### **Chief Adviser Urges Meta to Tackle Disinformation Ahead of Election**



Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has urged Meta to develop more effective mecha-

nisms to combat disinformation that threatens social harmony and public safety in Bangladesh. Speaking at a meeting with Meta executives Simon Milner and Ruzan Sarwar, he warned that in a densely populated country, "one wrong word can destabilise the whole nation." Meta expressed its willingness to engage with the interim government ahead of next year's general election. Officials also called for greater investment in Bengali AI, more local content reviewers, and faster response mechanisms to harmful content on Meta's platforms.

**28 June**

### **Dhaka, Washington Advance Tariff Agreement Talks**

Bangladesh and the United States continued discussions on finalising the Agreement on Reciprocal Tariff in Washington. The meeting was led by National Security Advisor Dr. Khalilur Rahman and US Assistant Trade Representative Brendan Lynch. Dr. Rahman stated that both sides made "very good progress" and are making serious efforts to conclude the deal quickly. Rahman, a former UNCTAD trade policy chief, reaffirmed Bangladesh's commitment to strengthening bilateral trade ties.

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