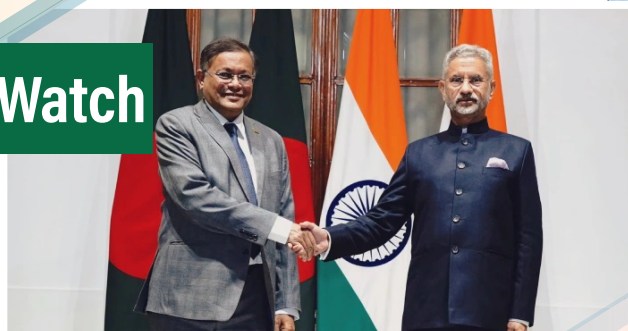


12 February | 2024

# Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



## A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

### January 30

#### More countries congratulate Hasina

Spanish President Pedro Sanchez and Luxembourg Prime Minister Luc Frieden conveyed their congratulations to Sheikh Hasina on her re-election as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. In their messages, both leaders expressed confidence in and pledged support for enhancing bilateral relations between their respective countries and Bangladesh. They also highlighted the shared values and interests that bind them together.

### January 28

#### BGB condemns the murder of a Bangladeshi citizen

Rabiul Islam, a Bangladeshi citizen, was fatally shot by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) near the Aunhorpota border in Patgram upazila of Lalmonirhat. Following an autopsy in India on January 28th night, the victim's body was transferred to the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) via the Tin Bigha Corridor. A flag meeting between the border forces of both nations took place earlier on that day, during which the BGB strongly denounced the incident.

#### Adani Power's Profit Surge Fueled by Bangladesh Electricity Deal



Adani Power, an Indian company, experienced a substantial increase in profits during the first nine months of the 2023-24 fiscal year, partly attributed to its agreement with Bangladesh to import electricity. The surge in profits was influenced by several factors, including reduced fuel and finance expenses, heightened power demand - which encompassed purchases from Bangladesh - and improved power consumption. Particularly, the Godda power plant situated in the Indian state of Jharkhand played a pivotal role in boosting Adani Power's earnings, as it commenced commercial operations and supplied electricity to Bangladesh via a dedicated transmission line.

## China proposes currency swap

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen recently held a meeting with Planning Minister Major General (Retd) Abdus Salam to explore avenues for Chinese assistance in the implementation of Bangladesh's development plan. During the discussion, Yao Wen proposed the utilization of Chinese or Bangladeshi currencies instead of US dollars to mitigate the impact of currency fluctuations. China also expressed keen interest in Bangladesh's 14th Five-Year Plan and assured prompt disbursement of funds to support its realization. In response, the planning minister affirmed that any minor issues concerning the pledged funds from China would be resolved through constructive dialogue.

## Border Tensions with Myanmar Escalate

Residents of the remote villages in Naikhyangchari, Bandarban district, Bangladesh, are gripped by panic as heavy firing and mortar shelling persist across the border in Myanmar. According to media reports, the Arakan Army has resumed attacks on Myanmar's regime in Ramree town along the Rakhine State coast, resulting in casualties and displacements. Local authorities and security forces have visited the border areas to reassure residents of their safety and prevent potential influxes from Myanmar.

## US urges fair legal process for opposition leaders in Bangladesh

Matthew Miller, spokesperson for the US Department of State, has voiced apprehension regarding the arrest of numerous opposition political activists ahead of Bangladesh's January 7 national election, which saw a boycott by major opposition parties. Miller urged the Government of Bangladesh to facilitate meaningful participation of opposition members and media professionals in the nation's democratic processes and civic affairs. He emphasized that the US did not view the parliamentary election in Bangladesh as free and fair, noting that it failed to represent the will of the Bangladeshi people. Miller reaffirmed the centrality of democracy to US foreign policy and pledged ongoing engagement with the Bangladesh government to promote democratic principles.

## January 31

### Saudi Shura Council President Meets Bangladeshi Prime Minister



The president of the Shura Council of Saudi Arabia and the prime minister of Bangladesh recently convened to discuss deepening bilateral relations. Highlighting the rich and enduring ties between the two nations, rooted in religious, cultural, and economic connections, they expressed mutual interest in further enhancing cooperation. The Bangladeshi prime minister underscored the significance of Makkah and Madina in the hearts of Bangladeshi Muslims, who embark on pilgrimages to these holy sites. Additionally, praise was extended towards the visionary leadership of the Saudi king and crown prince for their development initiatives, reforms, and global engagement. Similarly, commendation was offered for the exemplary leadership of the Bangladeshi prime minister, credited with steering the nation towards unprecedented development.

### Russian envoy denies BNP's allegation

The Russian ambassador to Bangladesh, Alexander Mantytsky, refuted the claim by the opposition party that Russia had a role in forming the new government of the Awami League, which won the January 7 election by a landslide. In response to a question, the ambassador stated, 'It (BNP's allegation) is misleading or false information. Don't believe it.' He asserted that Russia respects the sovereignty of other nations and does not meddle in their politics. Citing the official figure of 41 per cent voter participation, the envoy emphasized that the people of the country chose Sheikh Hasina's government. The ambassador and the foreign minister met to discuss ways to enhance economic ties between the two countries, especially in the fields of energy, trade, and nuclear power.



## February 2

### The Foreign Minister meets with his counterparts from different countries



The bilateral meetings between Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud and his Belgian, Czech, Swedish, and Vietnamese counterparts took place on the sidelines of the 3rd Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum in Brussels. During these individual meetings, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh explored ways to enhance trade and investment ties with each of the four countries. He also urged all nations to exert pressure on Myanmar to repatriate the Rohingya refugees, who have been displaced in Bangladesh due to violence and persecution in Rakhine state.

### BNP Deems Russian Envoy's Remarks Unwarranted

The BNP, Bangladesh's main opposition party, has criticized the Russian ambassador for his remarks regarding the January 7 election, stating that they have undermined the democratic sentiment of the Bangladeshi people. According to Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, the senior joint secretary general of the BNP, the election was marred by violent fraud aimed at extending Sheikh Hasina's government's tenure, with voter turnout allegedly below 5 percent. Additionally, the BNP accuses the government of perpetrating discrimination, injustice, and oppression against the populace. The party urges Russia to demonstrate respect for the democratic aspirations and values of the Bangladeshi people.

## February 4

### The European Union aims to strengthen its relationship with Bangladesh

The European Union aims to enhance its partnership with Bangladesh, as stated by European commissioners during meetings with Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud in Brussels. Discussions included increasing cooperation, strengthening ties, and addressing mutual interests such as trade, investment, and the Rohingya crisis. Hasan urged for international pressure on Myanmar for Rohingya repatriation.

Additionally, he engaged with ministers from the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary, Portugal, and Lithuania, as well as EU officials Josep Borrell Fontelles, Xavier Bettel, and Tanja Fajon, emphasizing the importance of collaboration in addressing global challenges.

### The Department of Shipping issued guidelines for Bangladesh-flagged vessels to the Red Sea

Bangladeshi oceangoing vessels are avoiding the Red Sea due to safety concerns following Houthi attacks on merchant ships. The Department of Shipping has issued guidelines for Bangladesh-flagged vessels, outlining security measures for areas prone to Houthi attacks. Azam J Chowdhury, Chairman of the Bangladesh Ocean Going Ship Owners' Association, confirmed the decision to avoid the risky route, citing additional fuel costs and increased war risk insurance. The circular highlighted threats to vessels with connections to Israel through business ties and recommended caution. Bangladeshi ships must register with the UK Maritime Trade Operations and adhere to guidelines for safe navigation in the region.

## February 5

### BSF detains 23 Bangladeshis

Over 100 workers were caught smuggling sugar sacks at the Chhagalnaiya border area in Feni when members of the Indian Border Security Force chased them. Reportedly, the BSF detained 23 Bangladeshi nationals. Lieutenant Colonel Sheikh Mohammad Badruddoza, commander of BGB-4 Feni battalion, stated that legal actions would be taken if the allegations were proven true.

### Myanmar Conflict Spills Over Border

The ongoing conflict between Myanmar junta forces and the Arakan Army, seeking more autonomy for Rakhine state, is causing chaos in the Tumburu Border area. At least 68 Myanmar border police, 15 of them with bullet wounds, crossed the border and sought refuge in Bandarban as fighting raged close to the border. They were disarmed and taken into custody by the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). The fighting near the border caused bullets and mortar shells to land inside Bangladesh, injuring at least three Bangladeshi citizens. Many locals fled the area in fear, leaving behind their farm animals and belongings. On this matter, Bangladeshi Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan stated that Rohingya refugees are not allowed to enter the country at this moment. Obaydul Quader sought China's assistance in addressing this issue.

## Foreign Minister says Biden's letter will strengthen Bangladesh-US ties

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud welcomed the letter written by US President Joe Biden to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, expressing his commitment to supporting Bangladesh's economic goals and partnering with Bangladesh on their shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. The US president conveyed his sincere desire to continue working together with Bangladesh on regional and global security, economic development, climate change and energy, global health, humanitarian support, especially for Rohingya refugees, and more. The letter was sent nearly a month after Hasina was sworn in for a fourth term following an election boycotted by the opposition.

## February 6

### BSF objects to vehicle terminal at Benapole

The construction of a cargo vehicle terminal at Benapole Land Port in Bangladesh has been halted for 11 days due to objections from India's Border Security Force (BSF). The BSF claims that the construction violates a 150-yard border buffer zone. The Bangladesh Land Port Authority and the Border Guard Bangladesh are attempting to resolve the issue through bilateral discussions with the BSF. The project aims to enhance cargo handling and reduce congestion at the port, which is the largest land port in South Asia.

## February 7

### Bangladesh summons Myanmar envoy in response to border conflict

Bangladesh summoned Myanmar's ambassador, Aung Kyaw Moe, and lodged a strong protest over casualties in Bangladesh caused by mortar shells that crossed the border from Rakhine state, where fierce fighting has been ongoing between the army and rebels. A total of 229 Myanmar paramilitary Border Guard Police and some of their family members took refuge in Bangladesh amid reports of heavy gunfights in the junta-run country. The Myanmar government has agreed to repatriate their personnel via waterways.

## February 8

### FM Hasan Mahmud meets Indian Counterpart Jaishanker

Hasan Mahmud discussed the Myanmar conflict and Rohingya repatriation with India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval in New Delhi. Hasan Mahmud emphasized the importance of maintaining political stability and peace in the region to sustain the development achieved by Bangladesh and India under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, respectively. "Our discussions will strengthen Bangladesh-India Maitri (friendship)," Jaishankar said in a brief message shared on X. Hasan Mahmud paid tributes at Mahatma Gandhi's cremation ground and memorial square at Rajghat with Ajit Doval.

### Multifaceted engagement with Saudi Arabia

Bangladesh secures a \$2.1 billion loan from the Jeddah-based International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) to address energy import needs for 2024-25, up from \$1.4 billion. The agreement entails funding Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) for petroleum and Petrobangla for liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports. Salman F Rahman, Private Industry and Investment advisor to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, sought assistance from the Saudi Arabian government to address the ongoing dollar crisis in Bangladesh during his three-day visit to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has shown keen interest in establishing a special economic zone in the Payra port area of Bangladesh and investing in various sectors such as fertilizer, gas, oil, and food.

## ***Contributors***

### **Kazi Rhid**

Research Assistant at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)  
rhid@cgs-bd.com

### **Marzana Mahnaz**

Research Assistant at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)  
marzana@cgs-bd.com

### **Bahauddin Ahmed**

Digital Coordinator at Centre for Governance Studies (CGS)  
bahauddin@cgs-bd.com

