

23 October | 2023

# Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



## A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

**October 11**

### Bangladesh Hands Over IORA Chairship to Sri Lanka



Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, participated in the 23rd Council of Ministers' Meeting (COM) of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in Colombo. The meeting marked the transfer of IORA Chairship from Bangladesh to Sri Lanka for 2023-2025. He stressed the importance of conducting activities in the Indian Ocean safely and securely. Dr. Momen called for support for the 'IORA-Development Initiative' and unity in fostering economic relations, environmental conservation, and disaster risk reduction in the region. After the Council meeting, he discussed bilateral interests with Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe. Dr. Momen also engaged with other high-level dignitaries from IORA Member States and Dialogue Partners during the event.

**October 10**

### Bangladesh's growth forecast lowered to 6%

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reduced Bangladesh's growth forecast for this fiscal year to 6 percent, in line with the World Bank's earlier revision. The IMF's previous projection for the country's economic growth was 6.5 percent for the current fiscal year and 5.5 percent for the previous year. The downgraded forecast is due to factors like high inflation and external payment challenges. The government aimed for a 7.5 percent GDP growth, but experts believe achieving 5 percent would be fortunate. Bangladesh faces both domestic and global economic uncertainties, with potential impact from the world economy. Inflation is expected to average 7.2 percent this fiscal year, surpassing the government's target of 6 percent, and current account balance deficit is likely to widen.

## ADB pledges \$3 billion annually

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) plans to support Bangladesh's transition from the least-developed country status with budgetary assistance and major project funding over the next three years. ADB intends to provide an average of \$3 billion per year, aiming to achieve this target for the next three years. This year, ADB plans to approve \$2 billion in concessional loans, including support for vaccine manufacturing, along with nearly \$1.5 billion in soft-term loans. The country aims to produce various vaccines locally and to benefit from the World Health Organization's guidance and standards in the project's implementation.

## October 13

### U.S. issues level-2 travel advisory for Bangladesh

The United States issued a level-2 travel advisory for Bangladesh, recommending that its citizens be more cautious when traveling to the country. This caution is advised due to concerns related to crime, terrorism, and the upcoming general election. Additionally, it urged U.S. citizens to think carefully about traveling to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region.

## October 15

### US pre-election assessment mission urges dialogue for credible elections



A US pre-election assessment mission in Bangladesh has recommended dialogue between political parties to ensure a credible, inclusive, and peaceful election. They advised tempering political rhetoric, safeguarding freedom of expression, creating space for civil society, renouncing violence, and fostering conditions for all parties to participate meaningfully. The mission expressed concern over a lack of constructive engagement among political actors and called for dialogue to resolve the political stalemate. However, the ruling party stated they would consider dialogue only if certain conditions were met, while the opposition supported the mission's call for meaningful dialogue. The government welcomed the suggestions but downplayed their importance.

## October 16

### FM seeks Thai investment in health sector



Foreign Minister Dr. AK Abdul Momen engaged in a bilateral discussion with Thailand's Public Health Minister, Dr. Cholnan Srikaew, where he advocated for increased Thai investments in the health sector and the establishment of hospitals. The meeting delved into various bilateral health service matters, emphasizing the need for enhanced cooperation within the health sector. While visiting Thailand, Foreign Minister expressed admiration for Thailand's adept management of the health sector, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Bangladeshi foreign minister conveyed his gratitude to the Thai government for their support in endorsing Saima Wazed as the Regional Director of the World Health Organization's (WHO) South-East Asia Region (SEARO).

## October 17

### High-level regional meeting on Rohingyas in Bangkok



A high-level regional meeting addressing the Rohingya crisis was convened in Bangkok. The event featured key delegates, including UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, UK Minister of State for Indo-Pacific Anne-Marie Trevelyan, and US Deputy Assistant Secretary Julieta Valls Noyes.

During the meeting, the Foreign Minister emphasized the need for "safe, voluntary, and sustainable repatriation." This gathering took place in preparation for the Global Refugee Forum, amid declining funding for Rohingya support, with only 40% of the budget secured so far. Despite ongoing voluntary repatriation efforts mediated by China, the Rohingya repatriation remains stalled.

## October 18

### Bangladesh stands in solidarity with Palestine

During an emergency meeting with the heads of missions from 14 OIC countries in Dhaka, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her solidarity with the Palestinian ambassador. Present in this gathering were the ambassadors of Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco, Qatar, Libya, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Egypt, Oman, and Indonesia. Bangladesh vehemently denounced the recent brutal airstrike on the Ahil Arabi Hospital in Gaza City, which resulted in the tragic loss of numerous civilian lives.

## October 19

### EU to send four-member mission to monitor national polls

The European Union has informed the Chief Election Commissioner of its intent to dispatch a four-member observer mission for monitoring the 12th Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh. Back on September 20, the European Union communicated to the Election Commission that they would not be sending a full-fledged election observation mission for the upcoming national elections.

The EU has opted not to deploy a full-fledged EU election observation mission due to uncertainty regarding whether the necessary conditions will be met during the elections.

The last full mission to Bangladesh was in 2008, with over 150 observers monitoring the polls.

## October 21

### Bangladesh observes state mourning for Palestinian victims of Israeli Attack



Bangladesh observed state mourning in honor of the Palestinians killed in the recent Israeli attacks. To pay respects to the Palestinian civilian casualties, national flags were lowered to half-mast at government offices, semi-government institutions, autonomous bodies, educational institutions, and Bangladeshi missions abroad. Bangladesh is set to provide medicines, dry food, and essential supplies to war-torn Palestine.

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