

16 February | 2026

## Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch



### A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

importance of attracting greater European investment and further improving the overall business environment. He pointed to Bangladesh's recently concluded economic partnership agreement with Japan, which covers more than 7,300 products, as an example of proactive trade diplomacy. Lopez noted that Bangladesh faces growing competitive pressure from countries such as India and Vietnam. Meanwhile, EU Ambassador Michael Miller confirmed that existing trade preferences will remain in place until 2029, but emphasised the need for early signals from Bangladesh. Yunus reiterated the government's ambition to position Bangladesh as a global manufacturing hub and welcomed the EU's election observation mission as an expression of international confidence in the country's democratic process.

#### 01 Feb Yunus Calls for Early EU Trade Talks



Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has urged the early initiation of negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement with the European Union in order to safeguard Bangladesh's duty-free export access, particularly for the ready-made garments sector, following the country's graduation from Least Developed Country status. During a meeting with EuroCham Bangladesh Chairperson Nuria Lopez, Yunus stressed the

#### 03 Feb UK Scholarships Strengthen Bangladesh Relations

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Sarah Cooke has said that UK government-funded scholarships, including the Chevening and Commonwealth programmes, demonstrate the depth and resilience of the UK-Bangladesh partnership. Speaking at a reception in Dhaka organised for returning scholars, she highlighted the role these

graduates can play in driving positive social and economic change at home after studying at leading universities in the United Kingdom. The event, held at the British High Commissioner's residence, brought together 40 Commonwealth scholars and 22 Chevening graduates, alongside members of alumni networks and representatives of the British Council.

### **Foreign Diplomats Visit July Museum**

A delegation of foreign diplomats visited the July Museum in Dhaka to pay tribute to Bangladesh's history and the sacrifices made during the Liberation War. During the visit, they toured exhibitions documenting the nation's struggle for independence and reflected on the importance of preserving historical memory for future generations. The visit highlighted international recognition of Bangladesh's liberation history and underscored the role of cultural and historical institutions in promoting global understanding of the country's journey toward independence.

### **05 Feb**

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### **Asif Nazrul Praises Pakistan's Match Boycott**

Youth and Sports Adviser Dr Asif Nazrul has publicly expressed his appreciation to Pakistan for boycotting its scheduled cricket match against India in protest of Bangladesh's exclusion from the T20 World Cup. In a post on Facebook, Nazrul described the decision as a meaningful gesture of solidarity. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif announced the boycott during a cabinet meeting, stating that politics should not overshadow sports and that standing by Bangladesh was the principled course of action. The move has drawn attention to ongoing regional tensions within international cricket and has further highlighted Bangladesh's contested absence from the tournament.

### **UN Accepts Withdrawal of CAT Reservation**

The United Nations has formally accepted Bangladesh's withdrawal of its reservation under Article 14(1) of the Convention against Torture, a move that enables victims of state-sponsored torture or enforced disappearance to seek compensation and rehabilitation. The decision came into effect on February 3 after receiving approval from the Council of Advisers, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

Bangladesh had maintained the reservation since ratifying the convention in 1998, which had restricted victims' access to legal remedies. The withdrawal also extends compensation rights to the dependents of victims who die as a result of torture. Government officials described the step as historic, noting its importance for strengthening accountability, improving Bangladesh's international human rights standing, and addressing long-standing demands from rights organisations.

### **06 Feb**

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### **Bangladesh-Japan EPA to Be Signed in Tokyo**

Bangladesh and Japan are preparing to sign their first-ever Economic Partnership Agreement in Tokyo, marking a significant milestone in bilateral trade relations. The agreement, to be signed by Japan's foreign minister and Bangladesh's commerce adviser, was approved by Dhaka's Council of Advisers in January and aims to protect Bangladesh's market access following its graduation from Least Developed Country status. Under the deal, Bangladeshi exporters will receive duty-free access for 97 percent of their export basket, including garments, while automobiles will be excluded to encourage Japanese investment in Bangladesh's automotive sector. With Japan already one of Bangladesh's key trading partners, the EPA is expected to deepen trade ties, boost investment flows, and support industrial diversification.

### **Government Seeks UN Probe into Hadi Murder**

The interim government has announced that it will formally request the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate the assassination of Shaheed Sharif Osman Hadi. Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam confirmed the decision, stating that the government is committed to ensuring full justice and will provide complete cooperation to any international investigation. Officials characterised the move as an important step toward transparency and accountability, signalling the government's willingness to involve global institutions in addressing politically sensitive cases.

### **EU Stresses Credible Elections in Bangladesh**

EU Election Observation Mission Chief Ivars Ijabs has underscored the need for Bangladesh's

February 12 national election to be free, fair, and peaceful, reiterating the mission's principles of independence, impartiality, and non-interference. Speaking at the Sylhet Press Club, he said that around 200 observers are involved in the mission, including long-term monitors deployed across all 64 districts, analysts, diplomats, and a delegation from the European Parliament. The mission will assess voter participation among women, youth, and vulnerable groups, as well as examine the role of traditional and social media in informing the electorate. This is the European Union's first full-scale election observation mission in Bangladesh since 2008, reflecting renewed international attention to the credibility of the electoral process.

### **Japan to Send Election Observers**

Japan has announced that it will dispatch an Election Observer Mission to Bangladesh from February 9 to 14 to support the conduct of the February 12 general election. The mission will be led by former ambassador Watanabe Masato and will include officials from Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Embassy in Dhaka, and an external expert. Observers will monitor both voting and vote-counting processes and will engage with the Bangladesh Election Commission as well as other international observation missions. Tokyo said the initiative forms part of its broader cooperation to strengthen democratic institutions in Bangladesh and comes in response to Dhaka's request for international observers.

### **Bangladesh-Grenada Diplomatic Relations Established**

Bangladesh has formally established diplomatic relations with Grenada through a joint declaration signed in London by the respective high commissioners of the two countries. Although both nations have been members of the United Nations since 1974, this marks their first official bilateral engagement. The agreement was described as a milestone in South-South cooperation, rooted in shared commitments to sovereignty, resilience, and climate justice. Bangladesh identified opportunities for cooperation in areas such as disaster resilience and the pharmaceutical sector, while Grenada highlighted common challenges related to climate change adaptation and sustainable development. Both sides expressed interest in expanding collaboration in trade, education, and multilateral platforms, including the United Nations and the Commonwealth, opening a new

chapter in Bangladesh's expanding global diplomatic outreach.

**08 Feb**

### **US Envoy Meets Foreign Adviser**



US Ambassador to Bangladesh Brent T. Christensen met Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain in Dhaka, where they held discussions on key aspects of bilateral relations. The US Embassy described the meeting as "productive", noting that both sides reviewed priority areas of cooperation across diplomatic, economic, and strategic domains. Sources indicated that Bangladesh and the United States are likely to sign a trade agreement, suggesting growing momentum in economic engagement alongside ongoing diplomatic dialogue between the two countries.

### **Bangladesh Signs Vessels Deal with China**

Bangladesh has signed a framework agreement with China to purchase four vessels, including two crude oil tankers and two bulk carriers, under an intergovernmental cooperation project financed by Chinese concessional loans. The agreement was signed in Dhaka by Economic Relations Division Secretary Shahriar Kader Siddiky and Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen. The initiative is aimed at strengthening Bangladesh's shipping capacity, expanding foreign trade, and enhancing maritime autonomy. Ambassador Wen reaffirmed China's commitment to deepening economic and trade cooperation, promoting good-neighbourly relations, and delivering tangible benefits to the Bangladeshi people through this strategic partnership.

### **Bangladesh, UK Strengthen Defence Partnership**

Bangladesh and the United Kingdom have signed a government-to-government sales agreement for the former HMS Enterprise, an Echo-class

hydrographic and oceanographic survey vessel. The deal underscores the UK's continued partnership with Bangladesh in enhancing maritime security and supporting a stable, free, and open Indo-Pacific and Bay of Bengal region. The vessel, renowned for its distinguished service in survey operations, humanitarian missions, and disaster response, is expected to significantly boost Bangladesh's maritime capabilities while also creating research opportunities for universities. Officials from both sides highlighted the mutual trust and cooperation underpinning the agreement, describing it as an important milestone in bilateral defence collaboration.

**09 Feb**

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### **Japan Grants Bangladesh Duty-Free Access**

Bangladesh has secured a landmark Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with Japan, granting duty-free market access for 99.9 percent of Bangladeshi products across 7,389 tariff lines. The agreement, concluded in just one year, positions Bangladesh strongly as it prepares for graduation from Least Developed Country status. In return, 1,070 Japanese products will receive duty-free entry into Bangladesh, with minimal impact on domestic revenue. The EPA also opens 120 Japanese service sectors to Bangladeshi professionals, helping address labour shortages in Japan. Beyond trade, the agreement promotes investment, technology transfer, and small and medium enterprise growth, marking Bangladesh's first EPA and the beginning of a new phase in bilateral cooperation.

### **Bangladesh-US Conclude Reciprocal Tariff Pact**

Bangladesh and the United States have signed a landmark Reciprocal Tariff Agreement following nine months of negotiations. The agreement was led by Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin and National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman on behalf of Bangladesh, and Ambassador Jamieson Greer for the United States. Under the pact, reciprocal tariffs have been reduced from 37 percent to 19 percent. The deal also introduces zero tariffs on selected Bangladeshi textile and apparel exports produced using US cotton and fibres, providing a

boost to the garments sector. Officials described the agreement as a historic advancement in bilateral trade relations, enhancing market access for both sides and signalling a new phase of economic cooperation.

### **Yunus Congratulates Japan's LDP Victory**

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus extended warm congratulations to Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae on their landslide victory in the House of Representatives election held on February 8, 2026. In his message, Yunus described the decisive mandate as a reflection of the Japanese people's confidence in Prime Minister Takaichi's leadership and vision. He expressed Bangladesh's deep appreciation for Japan's longstanding support in infrastructure and connectivity projects, which have played a significant role in the country's development. Yunus also voiced optimism about further strengthening bilateral ties, enhancing economic and technological cooperation, and advancing shared priorities for regional and global prosperity.

**11 Feb**

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### **UN Calls for Inclusive Women's Participation**

The United Nations has called on Bangladesh to ensure women's safe, inclusive, and equal participation in the upcoming National Parliament Election 2026. UN officials stressed that women must be able to exercise their democratic rights without fear, intimidation, or discrimination. They emphasised the need to protect women candidates, voters, and activists from harassment and violence, while also ensuring accessibility for marginalised groups. The UN noted that inclusive participation strengthens democratic institutions and contributes to sustainable development, urging authorities, political parties, and civil society to work together to guarantee a fair, transparent, and gender-sensitive electoral process.

**12 Feb**

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### **EU Notes Positive Electoral Participation**

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) reported that Bangladesh's national elections and referendum witnessed "positive and enthusiastic participation" from voters across the

country. Chief Observer Ivars Ijabs pointed to strong voter turnout and highlighted the anticipated participation of young voters, describing the day as significant for Bangladesh's democratic journey. The EU deployed 200 observers, including 90 short-term teams, to monitor polling, ballot counting, and result tabulation across all 64 districts. A preliminary assessment report is scheduled for release on February 14, evaluating the credibility and inclusiveness of the electoral process, with the mission expressing hope for a participatory and trusted outcome.

**13 Feb**

### **Maldives President Congratulates Tarique Rahman**

Maldives President Dr Mohamed Muizzu has congratulated BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman on his party's victory in Bangladesh's 13th National Parliamentary Election. In his message, President Muizzu reiterated the Maldives' commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and regional cooperation with Bangladesh under Rahman's leadership. He highlighted shared priorities in democracy, peace, and development, and expressed optimism about deepening collaboration in areas such as trade, tourism, and security. The message reflects the Maldives' readiness to engage constructively with Bangladesh's new government and signals strong regional support.

**14 Feb**

### **Global Leaders Congratulate Tarique Rahman**

World leaders and diplomatic missions have extended congratulations to BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman following his party's decisive victory in Bangladesh's 13th National Parliamentary Election. Messages were received from India, China, the United States, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives, with leaders expressing readiness to strengthen bilateral relations and regional cooperation. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a direct conversation with Rahman, while US Secretary of State Marco Rubio emphasised shared goals of prosperity and security. Leaders from neighbouring countries highlighted democracy, peace, and development, signalling strong international engagement and a collective willingness to work closely with Bangladesh's new government.

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