

Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events



February 1

Myanmar Unrest Halts Teknaf Port

The Arakan Army's seizure of Bangladeshi cargo vessels has drastically reduced ship arrivals from over 20 daily to just one or two weekly, severely impacting port revenue. Since the conflict escalated in early 2024 with the Arakan Army's control of Maungdaw near the Bangladesh border, port earnings have plummeted from Tk5–7 lakh daily to Tk40,000–50,000. In the first half of FY25, only 11,000 tonnes of goods were imported, generating Tk87 crore in revenue.

Zambia Invites Bangladesh for Pharma Plant

Zambia has invited Bangladesh to explore the possibility of establishing a pharmaceutical plant within its territory. The country is interested in importing Bangladeshi pharmaceutical products. The proposal was made during a courtesy call by the newly appointed Zambian high commissioner to Bangladesh, Percy P Chanda, on Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain.

Zambia also expressed interest in importing jute and jute products from Bangladesh. Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest, emphasizing the importance of strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing trade cooperation. Potential areas for future collaboration include agriculture and contract farming.

20 Bangladeshis Feared Dead Off Libya

Twenty bodies were recovered from the coast of Brega, Libya, and are feared to be Bangladeshi nationals. The identities of the deceased could not be confirmed due to decomposition, and no documents were found with them. The local Red Crescent assumes all of them are Bangladeshi nationals. The incident took place in an area under the jurisdiction of Libya's Eastern Government, headquartered in Benghazi. All 20 bodies have already been buried at Ajdadia, 40km from Brega. Two men from Faridpur's Bhanga, who were taken to Libya with the promise of being sent to Italy, were shot and killed.

Singaporean Doctors Treat July Uprising Injuries

A team of five renowned Singaporean ophthalmologists has begun treating patients with eye injuries from Bangladesh's July uprising. During their two-day visit, they examined over 100 patients at the National Institute of Ophthalmology Hospital and Bangladesh Eye Hospital. The team, including Donald Tan, Blanche Lim, Ronald Yeoh, Nicole Tan, and Ruben Fu, assessed previous treatments and recommended future rehabilitation protocols. Dr. Ronald Yeoh praised the care provided by the Ophthalmology Institute. This visit, organized by multiple agencies including the Ministry of Health and Orbis International, marks the fourth foreign medical team treating July uprising-related eye injuries.

February 2

Dhaka Rejects Ukraine's Worker Request

Bangladesh has declined Ukraine's request to recruit 160 Bangladeshi workers for a furniture factory in Zakarpattia Oblast due to security concerns amid the ongoing war. The Bangladesh embassy in Poland, overseeing Ukraine-related matters, refused to approve the proposal, citing risks to citizens. Prior to the conflict, over 1,500 Bangladeshis lived in Ukraine, but most have been evacuated, leaving around 40 primarily in Kyiv. Ukraine faces a labor shortage as many citizens are engaged in the war or have fled. Meanwhile, Bangladesh is exploring new employment opportunities in Russia to expand overseas job prospects for its workforce.

Japan Invites Dr. Yunus, Reaffirms Support

Japan reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Bangladesh and enhancing bilateral relations. Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Ikuina Akiko met with Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad Yunus in Dhaka. Dr. Yunus was invited to attend two events in Japan in May: the Nikkei 30th Future of Asia event and the Osaka Expo 2025. Japan is Bangladesh's largest bilateral development partner, with bilateral trade standing at around USD 4 billion. More than 350 Japanese companies are currently operating in Bangladesh.

February 3

China Plans Mongla Port Upgrade

The interim government of Bangladesh has approved a project to upgrade the container terminal at Mongla port in Bagerhat with a loan of Tk 3,592.90 crore from China. The Bangladesh government will contribute Tk 475.33 crore to the overall project cost of Tk 4,068.23 crore. The project aims to develop the port as a regional hub, serving countries like Bhutan and Nepal.

The project includes constructing a container terminal with equipment, delivery yard, multi-storied car sheds, removal of sinking wreckages, and improvement of main roads. The port has been underutilized, with about 40% of its berthing facility remaining unused. The project is expected to be completed by 2028.

India Eyes Stronger Trade Ties with Bangladesh

Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma highlighted the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector's role in Bangladesh's socio-economic development and its importance in fostering supply chain linkages with India. He emphasized the mutual benefits of Bangladesh-India cooperation in the RMG and textile sectors. Verma expressed optimism that Bangladesh's participation in the Bharat Tex 2025 exhibition, scheduled for February 14–17 in New Delhi, will create new opportunities for supply chain integration, investment, and technology partnerships.

February 4

Yunus Requests Canada's Aid Recovering Funds



Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has sought Canada's assistance in recovering billions of dollars laundered from Bangladesh to Canada. These funds were allegedly siphoned off by oligarchs, cronies, and politicians connected with the Sheikh Hasina administration. Yunus discussed this matter with the Canadian High Commissioner, Ajit Singh, during a meeting in Dhaka. Canada has expressed support for the recovery efforts and has mechanisms in place to freeze such stolen assets. Additionally, Canada is interested in expanding trade and investment with Bangladesh and plans to discuss further cooperation in various fields, including setting up a visa office in Dhaka to support the Bangladeshi community in Canada.

Yunus Requests Canada's Aid Recovering Funds

A delegation comprising Danish Ambassador Christian Brix Moller, Pieter Bas Bredius from APM Terminals, and Nikhil D'Lima from MAERSK met with Muhammad Rafiqul Islam, CEO of Bangladesh's PPP Authority (PPPA), to discuss Government-to-Government (G2G) projects, notably the Laldia container terminal under the PPP framework.

The delegation stressed expediting bureaucratic processes for timely project completion, vital for economic growth. CEO Rafiqul Islam assured swift resolution of administrative challenges and emphasized the PPPA's commitment to fostering strong international partnerships, reinforcing efforts to advance sustainable development and economic progress through effective public-private collaborations in Bangladesh.

February 5

Bangladesh's Manpower Reliance Shifts to Saudi

Saudi Arabia remained the top destination for Bangladeshi workers in January 2025, accounting for 72.5% of total overseas employment, despite a 7.33% overall decline from the previous month. Reduced opportunities in Oman, UAE, and Malaysia have increased reliance on Saudi Arabia. Issues such as illegal visa trading and non-compliance by recruitment agencies have affected job market stability. European countries are limiting work visas due to unauthorized migration. Malaysia now restricts Bangladeshi recruitment to the plantation sector. Despite these challenges, remittances rose to \$2.19 billion in January, marking six consecutive months of over \$2 billion inflows.

Japan's Euglena to Study SAF Feasibility in Bangladesh

Japanese biofuel company Euglena Co Ltd will conduct a feasibility study to develop a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) supply chain in Bangladesh under Japan's "FY2023 Supplementary Global South Future-Oriented Co-Creation Project Subsidy." The study, in partnership with Grameen Euglena, will focus on recovering used cooking oil (UCO) and cultivating oilseed crops from February to December 2025. SAF, derived from renewable feedstocks, can reduce carbon emissions by up to 80% compared to fossil fuels. The project aims to boost Bangladesh's economic opportunities and support Japan's goal of replacing 10% of its aviation fuel with SAF by 2030.

Nahid: India Liable for Hasina's Politics

Information and Broadcasting Adviser Nahid Islam warned that if ousted Sheikh Hasina conducts political activities from India, the Indian government will bear responsibility for any consequences. Bangladesh has formally requested Hasina's return, and Nahid stated that her political engagements in India could lead to diplomatic tensions. He emphasized that anti-Bangladesh activities would not benefit India and called for national unity to prevent potential unrest.

Call for Saudi Exit Clearance Reform

A section of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) members has demanded the introduction of an exit clearance certificate without attestation for single-visa holders in Saudi Arabia.

The demand was raised during a human chain at Probashi Kallyan Bhaban, criticizing BMET's reimplementation of the attestation process, which verifies job offer authenticity. Baira also urged the government to address issues with airline ticket syndicates, introduce fixed fares, and expedite exit clearance. Additional demands include halting punitive actions against agencies without conclusive proof, abolishing the Malaysia migration syndicate system, and addressing discriminatory practices by BMET and ministry officials. A memorandum was submitted to the ministry.

February 7

Bangladesh Attends UN Peacekeeping Ministerial

A four-member Bangladesh delegation, led by Lieutenant General S M Kamrul Hassan, attended the 2nd Preparatory Conference for the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial-2025 in Indonesia from February 4-5, 2025. The conference focused on future strategies and challenges in global peacekeeping operations. Bangladesh reaffirmed its commitment to UN peacekeeping and engaged in discussions with key international figures, including UN Under Secretary General Katherine Pollard. Through active participation and co-hosting efforts, Bangladesh strengthened its global peacekeeping role, enhancing its international standing and demonstrating dedication to promoting global peace and stability.

February 8

BSF Allegedly Kills Bangladeshi Farmer

A Bangladeshi farmer, Barikul Islam, 36, was allegedly beaten to death by India's Border Security Force (BSF) while irrigating farmland near the Raghunathpur border in Shibganj, Chapainawabganj. Witnesses reported that BSF chased several farmers, detained Barikul, and fatally assaulted him before dumping his body on a riverbank inside Indian territory. Ward member Saidur Rahman confirmed the incident, but Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has yet to verify it. Lieutenant Colonel Monir-uz-Zaman of BGB's 53rd Battalion stated that investigations are ongoing and the victim's family has not contacted them. Authorities are examining the circumstances surrounding the alleged killing.

33 Rohingyas Detained for Illegal Entry

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) detained 33 Rohingyas from Alikadam in Bandarban early today for illegal trespassing into Bangladesh. Among those detained, there are 9 women, 10 men, and 14 children. The detention happened after a tip-off led a BGB patrol team to conduct a raid at the Amtali Asrayan Project Office in Sadar Union. All the detainees are citizens of Myanmar.

February 9

Indian Media Linked to AL's Anti-Yunus Campaign

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam accused the Awami League (AL) of orchestrating a campaign against Prof. Muhammad Yunus, alleging Indian media involvement in spreading false narratives, including claims of Yunus being a militant leader. Alam stated that AL oligarchs are funding efforts to portray the July uprising as a conspiracy rather than a legitimate movement. He emphasized the need to document Dr. Yunus' public life and global contributions through research and seminars to counter misinformation. Alam made these remarks at a book launch event, where BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi was the chief guest.

UN Chief Vows Rohingya Aid Mobilization

UN Secretary-General António Guterres pledged to mobilize aid for the Rohingya crisis during a meeting with Dr. Khalilur Rahman, Bangladesh's high representative on Rohingya issues. Khalilur urged international action for a sustainable resolution and emphasized the worsening funding situation. Guterres reaffirmed the UN's commitment to securing resources and advancing a solution. The upcoming UN International Conference on Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities of Myanmar will address the crisis. Khalilur also briefed Guterres on Bangladesh's reform initiatives and advocated for an expanded role in UN peacekeeping operations, stressing the need for stronger international engagement in the region.

Bangladesh Not Desperate for Loans: Adviser

Finance Adviser Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed stated that Bangladesh's economy remains stable, with sound financial and current account balances, reducing reliance on international loans. In a meeting with World Bank Vice President Martin Raiser, he discussed economic reforms, tax policy, revenue collection, and reducing tax exemptions. Upcoming discussions include an IMF meeting in March and a World Bank meeting in June to review progress. Talks also focused on enhancing transparency, accountability in tax administration, government procurement, and access to information. Strengthening the independence of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics was also highlighted as part of governance reforms.

February 10

BSF Installs CCTV, BGB Raises Objection

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) installed CCTV cameras near a mosque on the zero line of the Dakshin Banshjani border in Bhurungamari, Kurigram, prompting strong protests from Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Locals raised concerns over security and privacy. The century-old Dakshin Banshjani Jhaquatari Jame Mosque has been a contentious site, with citizens from both countries praying there. A company commander-level flag meeting was held, where BGB demanded camera removal, but BSF has not complied. A battalion commander-level meeting is scheduled for Tuesday to resolve the issue and address Bangladesh's concerns over surveillance.

February 11

Odhikar Blames India for Electoral Decline

The human rights group Odhikar claims India's ruling party heavily influenced Bangladesh's elections from 2014 to 2024, undermining the electoral system and enabling an authoritarian regime under Sheikh Hasina. The report alleges India swayed political parties to participate in elections, placed Jatiya Party ministers in both government and opposition, and spread misinformation through media to discredit protests. It also highlights BSF killings of Bangladeshis, increased deaths in jail custody, lynchings, and rising political violence post-August 2024. Extrajudicial killings surged under the interim government. The report criticizes India's alleged interference and its impact on Bangladesh's political and human rights landscape.

Deported Migrants Set 10-Day Ultimatum

Expatriate workers deported from the UAE for supporting the Students' Movement Against Discrimination during the July-August uprising have issued a 10-day ultimatum for their demands. They protested at Bangla Motor, marched to the chief adviser's office, and later occupied the InterContinental Dhaka road before police intervention. A six-member delegation met Chief Adviser's Assistant Personal Secretary Shabbir Ahmed, demanding a direct meeting with the chief adviser, financial aid, rehabilitation, and government action to protect their rights. With the chief adviser visiting Dubai on February 12, Shabbir Ahmed assured the issue would be raised with UAE authorities.

Bangladesh Below Global CPI Average for 12 Years

Bangladesh has remained below the global average Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score of 43 for 12 years, reaching a low of 23 in 2024. Ranked 151st out of 180 countries, it is among the most corrupt in South Asia, performing worse than Bhutan (18th), Maldives (96th), India (96th), Nepal (107th), Sri Lanka (121st), and Pakistan (135th), with only Afghanistan (165th) ranking lower. The least corrupt nations are Denmark, Finland, and Singapore. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Dr. Iftekharuzzaman disclosed the rankings at a press conference.

Bangladesh Requests Full Power Supply Restoration from Adani

Bangladesh has requested Adani Power to fully resume power supply from its 1,600MW Jharkhand plant after over three months of reduced deliveries due to payment disputes and foreign exchange shortages. Bangladesh has been paying \$85 million monthly to clear dues, but full supply restoration faced technical delays, including high vibration issues in the second unit. A Bangladesh court has ordered a review of the Adani contract, with possible renegotiation due to pricing concerns, as Adani's power costs 55% more than other Indian electricity sold to Dhaka. Meanwhile, Adani executives face US indictments over a \$265 million bribery scheme in India.

CA Yunus Urges End to Retribution



Chief Adviser Prof. Muhammad Yunus met with US Chargé d'affaires Tracey Ann Jacobson, emphasizing reconciliation in Bangladesh to break the cycle of retribution and uphold human rights. They discussed the US freeze on USAID projects, its impact on Bangladesh, and key issues including reforms, law and order, migration, and the Rohingya crisis. Prof. Yunus highlighted efforts to establish a consensus commission for political dialogue and reforms, while Jacobson stressed the need for free, fair, and inclusive elections. Yunus thanked the US for Rohingya aid and urged continued support for critical projects, including ICDDR'B's life-saving health initiatives.

World Bank Reaffirms Support for Reforms



The World Bank is supporting Bangladesh in implementing urgent reforms to enhance transparency and governance in tax policy, public procurement, and statistics. Vice President Martin Raiser emphasized these reforms' significance for Bangladesh's democratic transition and inclusive growth. He advocated separating tax administration from tax policy to improve governance.

Chief Adviser Prof. Muhammad Yunus discussed forming a consensus commission for political dialogue on reforms. Raiser also stressed the need for an independent Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and improved public procurement. The World Bank is keen to support Bangladesh's digitization efforts, including strengthening the National Identification (NID) system, to enhance institutional integrity.

Indian Visa Limits Boost Regional Tourism

Bangladeshi tourist travel to neighboring countries has surged, with arrivals increasing by 121.6% to Sri Lanka, 52% to the Maldives, and 34% to Nepal in 2024. The rise follows Indian visa restrictions, limiting access mainly to medical tourists and students. Nepal, offering on-arrival visas, saw Bangladeshi arrivals grow from 36,483 in 2023 to 48,848 in 2024. Sri Lanka is now Bangladesh's second-fastest growing source market. The redirection of Bangladeshi tourists has created business opportunities in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Middle East.

Arakan Army Kidnaps Four Fishermen

The Arakan Army abducted four Bangladeshi fishermen at gunpoint from the Naf River estuary near Golar Char in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar. The victims, all from Shah Porir Dwip, were taken along with their boat. Bashir Ahmed, president of the South Boat Terminal, confirmed the incident, which has alarmed the fishing community. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and local authorities have been informed. Lt Col Ashiqur Rahman of BGB Battalion 2 stated they are monitoring the situation. This follows an October 2024 incident where Myanmar's navy detained 58 Bangladeshi fishermen, leading to protests and subsequent repatriation of some captives.

February 12

Interim Government Welcomes OHCHR Report on Human Rights Violations

The Bangladesh Interim Government has welcomed the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on the July-August events that led to the fall of the Hasina regime. The report details grave human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture, implicating the former government, security forces, and Awami League-affiliated groups. It estimates up to 1,400 protester deaths and widespread abuses against children and women. The Interim Government, committed to justice, has initiated legal proceedings. Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus reaffirmed efforts to reform institutions and uphold human rights and the rule of law.

February 14

Chief Adviser Concludes Visit to UAE

Bangladesh Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus wrapped up his visit to the UAE after attending the World Governments Summit in Dubai. UAE Sports Minister Dr. Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi saw him off at the airport. During the visit, Yunus discussed visa restrictions, trade expansion, and Emirati investment in Chittagong Port. He urged the UAE to recruit more Bangladeshi workers and proposed an exclusive industrial park for UAE businesses. Trade Minister Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi expressed interest in making Bangladesh a halal manufacturing hub and announced plans to lead a trade delegation to Bangladesh soon.

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