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# Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

**CGS** Centre for  
Governance Studies



## A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

EU Ambassador Michael Miller acknowledged public support for the interim government but emphasized the importance of achieving "quick wins" to show tangible reform capabilities. The EU remains committed to supporting Bangladesh's transition by promoting good governance, democratic practices, and respect for fundamental rights.

### Bangladesh Condemns Israeli Strikes on Iran

Bangladesh has condemned recent Israeli airstrikes on Iran, describing them as a violation of Iranian sovereignty and international law. The foreign ministry urged regional and global actors to use their influence to promote restraint and prevent further escalation. Such provocations, Bangladesh warns, threaten the stability of an already volatile region, impacting both regional and global peace. Bangladesh called for dialogue and adherence to international norms to maintain stability in the Middle East.

### Saudi Arabia Seeks More Skilled Workers from Bangladesh

Saudi Arabia has expressed a strong interest in recruiting additional skilled workers from Bangladesh. Saudi Ambassador Essa bin Yousef Al Duhailan highlighted the close ties between the two countries, noting the significant contributions of Bangladeshi workers to Saudi Arabia's economy. He underscored ongoing initiatives in Bangladesh, including infrastructure projects and financial assistance, which reflect Saudi Arabia's long-standing support and collaboration with Bangladesh.

**October 27**

### US Court Stays Arrest Warrants for Bangladeshi Officials

A U.S. court has temporarily stayed arrest warrants for Salehuddin Ahmed, Bangladesh's Finance Adviser, and Ahsan H Mansur, the Bangladesh Bank Governor. Originally issued by Judge Carl J. Nichols, these warrants sought to compel their testimony in a \$31.9 million arbitration dispute with a power company over a cancelled project. The officials were in Washington for IMF and World Bank meetings when Bangladesh's government appealed, denouncing the warrants as unprecedented. This case is tied to a 1997 agreement with Smith Cogeneration, which alleged the Bangladeshi government's failure to provide required permits, leading to the project's cancellation in 1999.

### EU Stresses Reforms Before Bangladesh Elections

The European Union has highlighted the necessity of implementing key reforms before holding democratic elections in Bangladesh.

**October 28**

## Germany Seeks Skilled Workers from Bangladesh Amid Labour Shortages

To address critical labour shortages, Germany requires at least 400,000 foreign workers annually across sectors such as transportation, healthcare, construction, and IT. With streamlined immigration procedures introduced in June 2024, Germany is now focusing on recruiting skilled workers from South Asia, including Bangladesh. Although there is no formal recruitment agreement with Bangladesh, the Goethe Institute's "Pre-Integration and Transition Management" project, set to expand to Bangladesh next year, will facilitate legal migration pathways.

**October 29**

## Bangladesh Unlikely to Abolish Death Penalty

Bangladesh is not yet ready to abolish the death penalty, according to Law Adviser Asif Nazrul. In discussions with UN High Commissioner Volker Türk, Nazrul emphasized that the death penalty is deeply ingrained in the legal system, particularly for violent crimes. He noted that any major legal reform must align with societal expectations. The United Nations Human Rights Commission is working closely with Bangladesh on legal reforms, focusing on transparency and fairness in trials under the International Criminal Tribunal law. The UN has pledged to support forensic analysis, technical assistance, and capacity building in these areas.

## UAE Companies Interested in Investing in Bangladesh



The UAE is keen to invest in sectors such as logistics, ports, aviation, and renewable energy in Bangladesh. UAE Ambassador Abdulla Ali Abdulla AlHmoudi met with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus to discuss potential investment projects, including development of Chattogram Port by DP World and Abu Dhabi Ports, as well as renewable energy initiatives by Masdar. Ambassador AlHmoudi affirmed the UAE's commitment to support Bangladesh's economic progress, while Yunus expressed gratitude for UAE's assistance, including the recent release of 57 Bangladeshi nationals in the UAE.

**October 30**

## UN to Release Report on July-August Violence in December

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk met with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in Dhaka to discuss the ongoing investigation into alleged atrocities during the July-August uprising. The UN fact-finding mission's findings are expected by early December. Türk also reviewed the work of the International Crimes Tribunal and the Inquiry Commission on enforced disappearances, urging Yunus to strengthen the National Human Rights Commission. Yunus reaffirmed his commitment to human rights and development.

## Bangladesh Requests Direct WHO Contact

Bangladesh's interim government has requested direct communication with the WHO, bypassing its Regional Director Saima Wazed. Wazed, daughter of former PM Sheikh Hasina, is under investigation for financial misconduct, and her bank accounts are currently frozen. The government has asked WHO to expedite direct communication, stressing an urgent need for transparency and clarity in future health initiatives.

## Dhaka, Colombo Seek Faster PTA Negotiations



Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are working to expedite negotiations on a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) to enhance trade ties. During a recent meeting, Sri Lankan High Commissioner Dharmapala Weerakkody and Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin discussed pending agreements on coastal shipping, double taxation, and customs. Both countries agreed to hold the next round of consultations after Sri Lanka's elections in mid-November and reaffirmed their commitment to collaboration in SAARC and BIMSTEC.

**October 31**

## UN Probes Allegations of Minority Attacks

The UN's fact-finding mission is investigating reported attacks on minorities between August 5 and 15. High Commissioner Volker Türk emphasized accountability for such incidents. Türk also stressed the importance of including ethnic and religious minorities in leadership roles. He expressed appreciation for Bangladesh's support of Rohingya refugees and emphasized the need for security, livelihoods, and education in refugee camps.



## US Supports Bangladesh's Efforts to Reclaim Stolen Funds

Repatriating stolen funds is challenging but possible, according to US Embassy Charge d'Affaires Helen LaFave. In a recent meeting with Chief Adviser Prof Yunus, LaFave discussed the US's assistance to Bangladesh in reclaiming stolen assets and announced expedited resettlement of Rohingya refugees to North America. The meeting also covered judicial reforms, South Asian electricity projects, counterterrorism, and labour issues, with Yunus committing to key labour reforms.

### November 1

## Adani Power Cuts Supply to Bangladesh

Due to outstanding payments, Adani Power Jharkhand Limited has reduced its power supply to Bangladesh from 1,496MW to 700MW, causing widespread load shedding. Power Division Secretary Farzana Momtaz stated that recent issues with Adani had been addressed, though the Power Development Board continues weekly payments of \$17-18 million. However, rising costs now exceed \$22 million, making it challenging to clear dues. Approximately 12% of Bangladesh's power supply currently relies on imports from India.

## US to Train Bangladeshi Officials on Financial Crimes

The US Secret Service will provide training to Bangladeshi officials on combating money laundering and terrorism financing. Sixty officials from agencies including the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, Police, NBR, ACC, Department of Narcotics Control, and BSEC will undergo two training phases. The first, a five-day session starting November 10, would take place at Dhaka's Police Staff College, with US Secret Service experts leading the program.

## Ethiopian Airlines to Begin Dhaka Flights

Ethiopian Airlines will launch its Dhaka-Addis Ababa route on November 3, offering five direct flights weekly to connect Bangladesh with over 155 destinations globally. The inaugural flight, ET 678, will arrive at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on a Boeing Dreamliner 787-9. Ethiopian Airlines aims to strengthen ties between Bangladesh and Africa, aligning with its mission to "Connect Continents, Cultures, and Communities." Air Vice Marshal Md Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan and Ethiopian Airlines' Group Chief Commercial Officer Lemma Yadecha will attend the launch event.

### November 2

## Lobbyists May Have Influenced Trump's Comments on Bangladesh

Shafiqul Alam, Press Secretary to Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, suggested that lobbyists may have influenced Donald Trump's remarks condemning minority violence in Bangladesh, calling it a "state of chaos."

Alam stressed the importance of transparency and the need to present an accurate picture of events in Bangladesh. He also stated that the outcome of the US elections would not impact relations between Dhaka and Washington, highlighting Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's strong connections with both major US political parties. Alam reiterated Bangladesh's good relations with India and global support for its recent mass uprising.

### November 3

## Israeli Airstrike Kills Bangladeshi Worker



Bangladeshi migrant worker Mohammad Nizam Uddin, 31, was killed in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut, Lebanon, on November 2. Nizam, from Brahmanbaria's Kasba upazila, had been in Lebanon for 12 years, struggling with unstable employment. He was killed at a coffee shop, which his family identifies as his workplace. The Bangladesh Embassy in Beirut is working to repatriate his body to Bangladesh as his family seeks to bring him back home.

## Adani Sets Deadline for Bangladesh to Settle Power Dues

Adani Power has given Bangladesh until November 7 to settle unpaid dues of nearly \$850 million, threatening to halt power supply if the deadline is missed. Due to these arrears, Adani has already reduced its power supply to half, impacting electricity availability. The Power Development Board is working to resolve the issue as Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves improve. Previous government mismanagement has been blamed for the backlog. Adani Power is the largest supplier of electricity to Bangladesh, followed by Payra, Rampal, and SS Power I.

## Religious Advisor Criticizes Trump's Remarks on Bangladesh

Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain condemned former US President Donald Trump's comments about violence against minority communities in Bangladesh, calling them "embarrassing." Hossain argued that all citizens, including minorities, in Bangladesh enjoy political, religious, and social rights. He speculated that Trump's remarks were politically motivated, aimed at securing votes, and emphasized the government's commitment to ensuring the safety of all faiths. He also highlighted the importance of tolerance and mutual respect for building an inclusive society.

## UK Lawyers File ICC Case Against Hasina

Three UK-based lawyers have filed a case at the International Criminal Court (ICC) against former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, accusing her of genocide and crimes against humanity during the July-August uprising. They have requested an independent investigation, citing evidence such as witness testimonies, videos, and reports of violence. The lawyers question the impartiality of Bangladesh's judiciary due to Hasina's strong ties with India. Hasina fled to India on August 5 amid protests, and Bangladesh has since revoked her diplomatic passport, raising questions about her potential extradition.

## Naf River Explosions Cause Panic in Teknaf

Explosions along the Naf River, near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border, have triggered panic among locals and workers in Teknaf. The blasts, which lasted for over an hour, disrupted operations at Teknaf land port and forced workers to flee. Tensions in Myanmar are escalating between the Arakan Army and Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) forces. Security forces are on high alert after reports of cross-border gunfire striking local buildings. Locals also reported seeing fighter jets bombing Maung Daw in Myanmar's Rakhine State, adding to security concerns.

## Chinese Firm Invests in Mongla Recycling Project

Xingchen Textile Co. Ltd., a Chinese company, has invested \$35.03 million in the Mongla Export Processing Zone (EPZ) to produce 20,000 metric tons of yarn and 12,000 metric tons of woven fabrics annually by recycling garment wastage, or "Jhut." The investment is expected to create 600 jobs for Bangladeshi nationals. This will be the second textile company in Mongla EPZ to recycle garment waste. A formal agreement was signed between the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) and Xingchen Textile Co. Ltd. in Dhaka.

## November 4

## US Launches Health Campaign in Bangladesh

The US Embassy in Dhaka has launched the "Healthier in Motion" campaign to promote health, fitness, and mental well-being among women and youth in Bangladesh. The campaign seeks to address social barriers that limit women's control over their health and to foster a supportive environment for equal opportunities. It includes regional and national events, involving youth, communities, health experts, and celebrities advocating for healthy lifestyles. The campaign also encourages men and boys to support women's empowerment and addresses challenges like urbanization, sedentary lifestyles, and climate change impacts.

## November 5

## Bangladesh Seeks EU GSP Flexibility

Bangladesh has requested the European Union (EU) to relax certain criteria under its new Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), particularly safeguard clauses, to maintain trade privileges for all exportable products, including garments, beyond 2029. Bangladesh is set to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026 and seeks more flexible rules of origin (RoO) to ensure a smooth transition. While Bangladesh qualifies for GSP+ after 2029, tougher standards on value addition, human rights, labor, and the environment pose challenges. Bangladesh also called for EU technical and financial support to diversify exports, improve competitiveness, and enhance logistics. EU representatives have pledged to consider these requests, including GSP terms and climate funding.

## Arakan Army Abducts 20 Bangladeshi Fishermen

On November 5, 2024, 20 Bangladeshi fishermen were abducted by the Arakan Army from the Naf River. The abduction occurred near Naikhongchhari, at the estuary of the Naf River and the Bay of Bengal. The fishermen, all from Jaliapara on Shahparir Island, were taken away in two engine-run and 13 engine-less boats. The Arakan Army, arriving on a large trawler, abducted the fishermen at gunpoint. Teknaf Upazila Executive Officer Md Adnan Chowdhury has notified the relevant authorities, and Lieutenant Colonel Md Mohiuddin Ahmed of Teknaf 2-Battalion confirmed that efforts are underway to communicate with Myanmar authorities regarding the incident.

## German Ambassador Calls for Reconciliation

German Ambassador Achim Tröster emphasized the importance of reconciliation within Bangladesh, stressing that apologies for past mistakes are crucial for healing. Speaking at the Day of German Unity reception in Dhaka, Tröster urged political parties in Bangladesh to reconcile, citing successful examples from South Africa and Rwanda. Germany, a long-term development partner of Bangladesh, has invested in renewable energy, climate resilience, and humanitarian aid, including €305 million for Rohingya refugee support since 2017. As a major importer of Bangladeshi garments, Germany also sees opportunities to expand trade. Tröster acknowledged Bangladesh's reforms, particularly in the banking sector.

## Bangladesh Requests Malaysia to Arrest Two Men

Bangladesh has formally requested Malaysia to arrest and extradite businessmen Aminul Islam and Ruhul Amin, who face allegations of money laundering, extortion, and trafficking migrant workers.

The two are accused of extorting money and mistreating victims. Bangladesh's Interpol branch has asked Malaysia to arrest them, and Malaysian authorities have requested an official extradition submission. Additionally, Bangladesh has urged Malaysia to cease using software from Bestinet Sdn, a company founded by Aminul, which monitors migrant workers. This request is part of a broader investigation targeting middlemen and lawmakers in the recruitment process, as Bangladesh works to regulate migrant fees and improve accountability.

## Bangladesh and IOM Sign €2.97 Million Grant

Bangladesh has signed a €2.97 million grant agreement with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for a project aimed at reducing irregular migration and supporting returnees. The project, titled "Reducing Irregular Migration and Supporting Returnees in Bangladesh," will focus on strengthening safe migration pathways, raising awareness, and supporting the reintegration of returnees. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment will implement the two-year project, with support from Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation as a resource partner.

## EU Calls for Changes in ICT Laws

The European Union (EU) has expressed concerns about Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) and urged revisions to bring its legal framework in line with international human rights standards. Both sides discussed the importance of transitional justice and holding perpetrators accountable for past violations. The EU acknowledged Bangladesh's efforts to reform labor rights and environmental policies and praised its role in hosting Rohingya refugees. The EU also discussed measures to ensure the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of refugees.

## November 6

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## Bangladesh-India Informal Trade Hits \$11 Billion

Despite growth in formal trade, informal trade between Bangladesh and India is estimated to be worth \$11 billion, presenting a significant challenge for Bangladesh's revenue collection. In the 2022-23 fiscal year, total trade between the two countries reached \$16 billion, with Bangladesh importing \$14 billion from India. As Bangladesh prepares to graduate from LDC status in 2026, strengthening intellectual property rights (IPR) protection is crucial for future economic growth. However, bureaucratic hurdles in Bangladesh are hindering the effective implementation of patents and trademarks. Improving IPR standards will be vital for Bangladesh's continued development.

## Yunus Optimistic About US-Bangladesh Relations

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus congratulated President-elect Donald Trump on his victory and expressed optimism about strengthening US-Bangladesh relations. Yunus highlighted that Trump's leadership reflects the American public's confidence in his vision and emphasized the importance of continued collaboration between the two countries on mutual interests. Yunus also addressed Trump's previous remarks on minority issues in Bangladesh, suggesting that greater understanding could help clarify the current situation.

## EU Expresses Confidence in Yunus' Leadership

The European Union (EU) has expressed its readiness to support Bangladesh's interim government, led by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, in its reform efforts and fight against corruption. EU officials welcomed Yunus's commitment to labor rights reform, which is expected to attract more investment. The EU pledged to provide technical and financial support for these reforms. Yunus also requested the EU to collaborate with Nepal and India to enhance regional power connectivity, specifically utilizing Nepal's untapped hydropower potential. He further urged the EU to focus on youth and recognized the achievements of Bangladeshi girls in South Asian football.

## November 7

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## World Bank to Support Bangladesh's Energy Import Payments

The World Bank has agreed to secure Bangladesh's energy import payments, a move that will reassure global suppliers and potentially reduce costs. Facing a gas shortage, Bangladesh is prioritizing affordable gas supplies amid financial pressures, including substantial debts to the Adani Group for electricity. The World Bank will provide budget support by December, with an emphasis on green growth. Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves are low, partly due to Bangladesh Bank's exchange rate policies. Debt restructuring is essential, and the World Bank's support is seen as critical to stabilizing reserves and remittances. Additionally, Bangladesh is focusing on improving domestic resource mobilization, particularly through digitalization, to ensure long-term stability.



## US-Bangladesh Policy Unlikely to Change Under Trump

Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain stated that US policy towards Bangladesh is unlikely to change under President-elect Donald Trump, with relations continuing along the same trajectory as during the Biden administration. Hossain noted that discussions with the Biden administration have been a continuation from Trump's tenure, ensuring consistency in bilateral relations. Hossain reaffirmed Bangladesh's commitment to a zero-tolerance policy on terrorism during a UN counter-terrorism conference in Kuwait City.

## India Refers to Hasina as Former PM

India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, referred to Sheikh Hasina as a former prime minister of Bangladesh after she congratulated Donald Trump on his presidential victory, where she was mentioned as the current PM. Hasina fled Bangladesh on August 5 due to political unrest and has been residing in India. The situation has sparked tensions, especially following recent attacks on Hindu communities in Chattogram, which were triggered by inflammatory social media posts. The Chattogram Metropolitan Police has linked ISKCON to the violence, which led to vandalism and heightened communal tensions.

## BGB Rescues 20 Fishermen from Arakan Army

On November 7, 2024, the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) successfully rescued 20 Bangladeshi fishermen who had been abducted by Myanmar's Arakan Army on November 5. The fishermen had been fishing near the estuary of the Naf River when they were taken captive. The BGB facilitated their release through constructive dialogue with the Arakan Army. The fishermen were handed over at Shahparir Dwip jetty in Teknaf, marking the successful end of the hostage situation.

## November 8

### Trump's Policies Could Benefit Bangladesh's Garment Sector

Economists and exporters believe that Donald Trump's trade policies could offer advantages for Bangladesh's garment sector. With potential tariffs on Chinese imports, U.S. buyers may shift orders to Bangladesh, a major apparel supplier. This shift could also attract foreign investment from manufacturers looking to avoid U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods. However, the broader protectionist trend presents risks, especially as Bangladesh prepares to graduate from Least Developed Country status, which could increase competition. Effective diplomatic strategies are crucial for Bangladesh to capitalize on these potential shifts.

## U.S. Indo-Pacific Deputy Commander Meets Army Chief



Lieutenant General Joshua M. Rudd, Deputy Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, met with Bangladesh's Army Chief General Waqar-Uz-Zaman in Dhaka. The meeting focused on strengthening U.S.-Bangladesh bilateral relations, particularly in defense, disaster response, and humanitarian assistance. The discussion also highlighted regional security challenges and capacity-building for humanitarian aid and disaster response (HADR), aiming to improve cooperation in addressing regional issues and enhancing disaster preparedness.

## Five Bangladeshi-Americans Win Historic Elections

Five Bangladeshi-origin candidates have made history in the recent U.S. elections. Sheikh Rahman was re-elected to Georgia's State Senate for a fourth term, while Nabilah Islam Parkes became the first Muslim woman elected as a senator from Georgia. Dr. Nurun Nabi, an author and freedom fighter, was re-elected unopposed as a councilman for Plainsboro Township, New Jersey. Masudur Rahman set a record for the highest number of votes in 50 years with his re-election to Connecticut's State Senate. Abul Bashar Khan was re-elected to the New Hampshire State House of Representatives for the sixth time, marking a significant achievement for Bangladeshi-Americans.

## US Urges Bangladesh on Religious Freedom

U.S. State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller emphasized the importance of religious freedom in Bangladesh and called for accountability for those responsible for recent attacks. Miller reiterated the U.S. stance that religious freedom should be respected worldwide and that individuals involved in attacks should be held accountable under national law. Meanwhile, India has urged Bangladesh's interim government to take action against extremist groups and ensure the safety of Hindu communities. Recent attacks on Hindus in Chattogram have raised significant concerns.

November 9

## Adani Reduces Bangladesh's Power Supply

Adani Power has significantly cut its electricity supply to Bangladesh, reducing the amount from 1,400-1,500 MW to around 520 MW due to an ongoing payment dispute. Bangladesh owes Adani Power over \$800 million, and despite efforts to expedite payments and lift a payment deadline on November 7, the power supply remains reduced. The Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) is exploring alternative measures to avoid being overly dependent on power producers and to mitigate the ongoing supply shortfall.

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