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Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

145 more Bangladeshis repatriated from Libya detention center

December 6

Misinterpretation of Letter of Credit Raises Concerns

Amid the growing emphasis on human rights and environmental sustainability in the global trade landscape, a member of BGMEA has received a copy of a letter of credit from a foreign buyer. The letter stipulates that the buyer will not engage in any transactions involving countries sanctioned by the US, UK, EU, or UN. The BGMEA President has confirmed that the LC came from a specific buyer and is not a statutory notice from any country. BGMEA has not received any information supporting sanctions from diplomatic missions. BGMEA has instructed its members to seek clarification from buyers if the LC is intended solely for Bangladesh. In such cases, member factories will review the matter and reconsider continuing business with specific buyers.



A concerted effort of the Ministry of Foreign affairs, Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli and financial support from the International Organization for Migration has successfully repatriated 145 Bangladeshi citizens from Benghazi detention center in Libya. In continuation of the repatriation process started from November 30, a fresh batch of irregular Bangladeshi citizens trapped in Libya has been returned home making the total number of returnees 398. Foreign Ministry and IOM officials welcomed the destitute repatriated Bangladeshi citizens. The IOM provided each of them with Tk 6500 and food items. Remaining Bangladeshis in the detention centers will be rescued soon.

Rickshaws and Rickshaw painting in Dhaka have been inscribed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity



Rickshaws and Rickshaw paintings in Dhaka have been recognized as “intangible cultural heritage of humanity” by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Republic of Botswana hosted the 18th session of the Intergovernmental Committee, at which the declaration took place. Dhaka Rickshawchitra is an exceptional work of art and decoration on the body of the rickshaw.

The Rickshaw, a hand painted three-wheel human-driven vehicle, is a distinctive feature of Bangladesh. Rickshaw painting characterizes Dhaka residents' identities, and it has become an integral part of the city's cultural tradition. Increasing modern transport has diminished the number of rickshaws, and so the prevalence of Rickshaw painting. UNESCO looks forward to working with the communities to find sustainable ways of keeping this living heritage alive for future generations.

Government approves import of 40 MW Power from Nepal

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has provisionally approved the import of 40 MW of electricity from Nepal, with Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal presiding over the virtual meeting. The tariff for Nepalese electricity was not disclosed, awaiting approval from the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase (CCGP). This development comes months after Kathmandu and Dhaka agreed to sign a 25-year agreement for electricity imports. The decision stems from bilateral discussions, culminating in India allowing Bangladesh to import electricity from Nepal through the Indian power grid. The 40 MW import will occur via the Baharampur-Bheramara transmission lines. Bangladesh aims to export surplus electricity to Nepal, addressing the high demand for electricity in Nepal during the winter. Additionally, Bangladesh is eager to import 500 MW of hydroelectricity from Nepal through the Indian company GMR.

December 7

Saudi Operator to Transform Patenga Container Terminal



Bangladesh's first foreign port operator, RSGTI, a Saudi Arabia-backed company, will equip and run the Patenga Container Terminal (PCT). RSGTI signed an agreement with the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) to equip and operate the PCT, located at the estuary of the Karnaphuli River, for 22 years. The port serves as a gateway for 90 percent of Bangladesh's import and export activities.

The terminal will target the rapidly expanding import and export market, projecting an annual growth rate of 7 percent. Businesses, port users, and officials hope that the appointment will ensure optimum performance in the new terminal's handling of cargo and ships.

131 Global Observers Interested in Monitoring Polls

The Election Commission (EC) has reported that 131 international observers and 46 journalists are interested in monitoring the January 7th election. Entities such as the EU, Commonwealth, African Electoral Alliance, and the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) have expressed interest in observing the polls. For context, the EC states that the past four elections in the last two decades had the following number of observers: 225 in 2001, 593 in 2008, and 169 in the 2018 election. The legitimacy and overall acceptance by the international community depend on the reports of these observation missions for the upcoming elections.

US Pledges Support for Workers' Rights



During an event on Bangladesh Cotton Day, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas echoed the words of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, stating that the US is committed to ensuring workers' rights and fostering communication with local and international stakeholders.

He reiterated the importance of the recent workers' wage movement, emphasizing that they are closely monitoring the situation and addressing the lack of reform in the National Wage Policy. Haas expressed that the US seeks an inclusive and sustainable bilateral relationship in the garment sector, extending from owners to workers.

December 8

Foreign Minister Urges UN Neutrality in Election Period

Foreign Minister Abdul Momen wrote a letter to Earle Courtenay Rattray, the head of the office of the UN Secretary-General, in late November. The primary request was for the UN to remain impartial and objective during the electoral period. The remainder of the letter commends the prime minister and the current regime for their efforts in promoting democracy and freedom for the nation's people. Although the letter was sent in November, it has only recently come to the attention of the media.

ADB Approves \$400m for Bangladesh to fight Climate Change

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a \$400 million policy-based loan to support the Government of Bangladesh in implementing its National Adaptation Plan, 2023–2050. This loan is the first subprogram of the indicative \$700 million Climate-Resilient Inclusive Development Program, which will help Bangladesh strengthen its climate resilience, transition to a low-carbon economy, mitigate its greenhouse gas emissions, and mainstream gender equality and social inclusion in the government's climate actions. The program will intensively support the government in operationalizing the Bangladesh Climate and Development Partnership launched recently at COP 28.

December 10

FM Addresses Global Trade Priorities at 21st Doha Forum

Foreign Minister Dr. Abdul Momen participated in the 21st edition of the Doha Forum with the theme 'Building Shared Futures.' During a high-level panel session on 'Nearshoring and Friend-shoring—Changing Priorities in Global Trade,' he emphasized the need to reconfigure supply chain pathways and the evolving patterns of global trade. The Foreign Minister led a 5-member Bangladesh delegation at the Doha Forum at the invitation of the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman bin Jashim Al Thani. The forum brings together global policymakers, government leaders, private sector representatives, civil society, and non-governmental organizations to discuss global challenges, promoting dialogue and diplomacy for diverse issues facing the world.

December 12

IMF Approves \$681 Million Tranche for Bangladesh

The IMF board has granted approval for the second installment of \$681 million for Bangladesh, resolving uncertainties arising from the country's failure to meet two required conditions. Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal confirmed the development, offering relief to concerns about Bangladesh's economy amid dwindling foreign currency reserves and heightened inflation. The disbursement, expected to cover about 15 days of import bills, addresses missed targets such as maintaining a minimum net international reserve and tax revenue. Despite falling short of the revenue goal by Tk 17,946 crore, the approval will aid in stabilizing the economic situation.

December 13

Washington Expresses Deep Concern Over Bangladesh's Political Climate"

The US State Department spokesperson, Matthew Miller, voiced deep concern over mass opposition arrests and reported prison torture in Bangladesh. He urged restraint and violence avoidance from all parties, emphasizing the need for a democratic environment leading up to the elections. Miller also addressed the use of AI in election-related disinformation, emphasizing global concerns about manipulating democratic processes. While inquiries on potential sanctions were unanswered, the US has consistently urged dialogue and fair elections, expressing concerns about past irregularities in Bangladesh's national elections.

Prime Minister Welcomes Spanish Investments Across Sectors

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed a warm welcome for Spanish investments in any sector of Bangladesh during a farewell call from Spain's ambassador, Francisco de Asis Benitez Salas. The ambassador conveyed Spain's interest in investing, particularly in agro-based industries. Both leaders expressed satisfaction with the existing relationship and anticipated further strengthening of ties.

US Allocates \$87 Million in Humanitarian Aid for Rohingya and Host Communities

The United States has pledged an additional \$87 million in humanitarian assistance for Rohingya and host communities in Cox's Bazar. USAID, in collaboration with the UN World Food Programme, will offer food and nutrition aid, infrastructure maintenance, disaster risk reduction, and livelihood support. This funding, combined with contributions from other donors, will enhance food rations for almost one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The US has contributed nearly \$2.4 billion since August 2017 to aid Rohingya refugees and host communities, with a significant portion allocated to Bangladesh.

December 15

Dhaka Addresses Labor Rights with US Officials, Commits to Ongoing Engagement

Dhaka has briefed Washington on Bangladesh's efforts to enhance labor rights during a meeting between Bangladesh Ambassador to the US, Muhammad Imran, and Julie Su, Acting US Secretary of Labor. The discussions, held in Washington DC on the sidelines of a US Department of Labor event, focused on Bangladesh's measures to improve workers' rights. The meeting follows the recent US presidential memorandum on advancing global labor rights. Both parties committed to continued engagement, recognizing the importance of addressing labor standards in Bangladesh. The discussions aim to foster mutual understanding and cooperation on labor-related concerns between the two nations.

December 16

US plans to increase the resettlement of Rohingyas from Bangladesh

The United States has declared the Rohingya situation a "priority," announcing plans to increase resettlement of Rohingyas, including those from Bangladesh, through the USRAP in fiscal 2024. The commitment, revealed at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, extends to encouraging third countries to expand Rohingya resettlement efforts. Through initiatives like Welcome Corps at Work, focusing on employment opportunities, and supporting educational programs, the US aims to enhance Rohingya refugees' lives. At the Global Refugee Forum, the US unveiled 26 commitments, showcasing its leadership in addressing the unprecedented global forced displacement crisis and reaffirming its dedication to the Global Compact on Refugees.

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