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Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

January 1

Bangladesh's relationship with the US won't be affected by the Yunus verdict, says Foreign Secretary

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen stated that Bangladesh's relationship with the US will not be affected by the verdict concerning Dr. Yunus. He emphasized that it is normal and obvious that an individual would not impact the relationship between two states. Furthermore, he mentioned that this is an ongoing legal process, and he does not wish to comment any further.

Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate and chairman of Grameen Telecom, along with three others, was sentenced to six months imprisonment and fined Tk 25,000 each in a case filed on charges of violating labor law. The court also granted Dr. Yunus a month's bail on condition of filing an appeal against the verdict.

January 2

Amnesty International Condemns Yunus Verdict as Abuse of Justice

Amnesty International strongly denounced the swift conviction of Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus in a labor law violation case as a blatant misuse of justice and an abuse of labor laws. The organization's statement on X, posted on Twitter, highlighted the apparent political retaliation against Yunus for his work and dissent. The human rights group expressed concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in Bangladesh, emphasizing that the trial's pace contrasted sharply with other labor rights-related cases. Despite the denial of government involvement by the ruling Awami League, Amnesty deemed the conviction a violation of international human rights law.

January 3

International Outcry Over Yunus Conviction as US Urges Fair Legal Process

The United States closely monitors Nobel Peace Prize winner Prof Muhammad Yunus's case, acknowledging global condemnation following his recent court conviction. A State Department spokesperson highlighted Yunus's significant contributions to combating world poverty and urged Bangladesh to ensure a fair and transparent legal process. Meanwhile, Kerry Kennedy, president of Robert F Kennedy Human Rights, called for an immediate reversal of the "unjust conviction," expressing solidarity. UN special rapporteur Irene Khan labeled the verdict a "travesty of justice," emphasizing the persecution of a Nobel laureate for alleged labor violations. Yunus and Grameen Telecom officials have denied charges, securing bail pending appeals.

US Delegation Meets Dhaka Police to Discuss Election Security

A joint team from the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) engaged with the Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner and Detective Branch chief to discuss security plans for the January 7 national elections. The team inquired about actions on opposition leaders and sought details on election conduct, candidate security, and complaint resolution. DMP Commissioner Habibur Rahman affirmed the police's professionalism, addressing the delegation's concerns.

ICG Report Warns of Escalating Conflict in Bangladesh Amid Flawed Elections

The International Crisis Group (ICG) stated that a flawed election on January 7 in Bangladesh could heighten tensions between political parties, potentially leading to post-election violence. The report anticipates continued blockades by the BNP, potential collaboration with other parties, and a repressive response from security forces and Awami League supporters. The ICG recommends delaying the election to facilitate dialogue between the major parties, urging the US and India to play a role. The report emphasizes the economic repercussions and calls for avoiding violence, emphasizing the need for compromise and trust-building between parties.

January 5

Amnesty International Urges Bangladesh to Uphold Human Rights

Amnesty International has called on Bangladesh to ensure that all arrests adhere to international human rights laws and standards, emphasizing the right to a fair trial, prompt appearance before a judge, and access to legal counsel. The global rights body made a 10-point recommendation, urging protection of protest rights and an end to violent repression of workers' protests. Amnesty demanded impartial investigations into deaths during October protests and accountability for custodial torture. It also recommended criminalizing enforced disappearance, ratifying relevant conventions, and amending cyber laws that stifle legitimate expression. The organization called for abolishing the death penalty with a moratorium pending full abolition.

January 7

Global Observers Laud Bangladesh Elections Despite Low Turnout

International observers from the US, Canada, Russia, and the OIC commended Bangladesh's national elections, labeling them as free, fair, and peaceful. However, it is important to note that these observers were invited by the incumbent government, raising concerns about their impartiality.



The delegates expressed satisfaction with the electoral atmosphere and process while congratulating the Election Commission. Some observers, including Canadian MP Chandrakanth Arya and American Global Strategies CEO Alexander B Gray, cited the professionalism of the administration and labeled the elections as transparent. Concerns were raised about lower-than-desired voter turnout, but overall, observers commended Bangladesh's democratic process. A total of 124 international observers monitored the elections, emphasizing transparency over turnout.

January 8

Congratulations Pour In for Bangladesh's Awami League Victory



China, India, and Russia extended warm congratulations to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the Awami League's fourth consecutive win in the 12th national polls. Expressing commitment to strengthen ties for mutual development, they hailed the elections as free and fair. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a letter and a phone call, affirmed enduring ties and pledged support. Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen presented symbolic gifts and reiterated China's commitment to a robust strategic partnership. Representatives from other nations, including Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan, conveyed their congratulations to Prime Minister Hasina.

US Declares Bangladesh Elections "Not Free or Fair," Expresses Concerns

The United States Department of State declared Bangladesh's January 7 parliamentary elections "not free or fair," expressing regret over non-participation by all parties. Washington expressed concern about arrests of political opposition members and reported irregularities on election day.

The US urged the government to investigate violence reports, holding perpetrators accountable. While noting the Awami League's victory, the US remains committed to supporting Bangladesh's democratic aspirations and emphasized respect for human rights. Earlier, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken introduced visa restrictions on individuals undermining Bangladesh's democratic process. Bangladesh's embassy warned of potential US actions under a global labor rights memorandum.

January 9

International Envoys Congratulate Bangladesh's Awami League on Election Victory

Ambassadors and high commissioners from Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Argentina, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, and other countries paid a courtesy call on Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, extending congratulations on the party's victory in the 12th National Parliamentary Election. The envoys conveyed messages of felicitation from their respective heads of state and expressed optimism about Bangladesh's development under Prime Minister Hasina's leadership. They reiterated their commitment to fostering cooperation with Bangladesh. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation group countries also extended congratulations, and Sheikh Hasina thanked all friendly nations for their continuous support to Bangladesh's progress and development.

Canada Expresses Disappointment Australia Regrets Lack of Inclusivity In Bangladesh Election

Canada has expressed disappointment over Bangladesh's January 7 parliamentary elections, stating that the electoral process fell short of democratic principles. Canada calls on authorities to transparently work with all parties for democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. Australia regretted the environment where not all stakeholders participated meaningfully and substantially. Australia urged Bangladesh to strengthen democratic institutions, ensuring human rights, rule of law, and development. The European Union (EU) also regretted the non-participation of all major parties in the election, calling for a timely investigation of reported irregularities and condemning election-related violence. The US and UK previously declared the election not free and credible.

Bangladesh Passport Ranks 97th on 2024 Henley Passport Index

The Henley Passport Index 2024 has placed Bangladesh's passport at 97th position, one place lower than the previous quarter. The ranking, based on visa-free travel destinations, places Bangladesh above Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in South Asia. The passport allows visa-free travel to 42 destinations. Maldives tops South Asia at 58, with access to 94 countries. France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Singapore, and Spain share the top spot with visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 194 destinations, marking the highest count in the index's 19-year history. Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, and Yemen rank lowest.

January 10

World Economic Forum Invites PM Sheikh Hasina to Annual Meeting

Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, has extended an invitation to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the 54th World Economic Forum annual meeting in Switzerland from January 15-19, themed "Rebuilding Trust." Schwab congratulated PM Hasina on her election victory and expressed confidence in Bangladesh's economic potential under her leadership. He praised the bold reforms and economic advancements, stating that the World Economic Forum looks forward to collaborating closely with the government. Over 100 governments, major international organizations, global companies, and influential entities will participate in the annual

World Bank Forecasts Slower Growth For Bangladesh Amid Economic Challenges

The World Bank projects a slowdown in Bangladesh's economic growth to 5.6% in FY2023/24, citing elevated inflation and low foreign exchange reserves. The global lender warns that import restrictions and rising input costs may hinder private investment, with potential risks from slower export growth to Europe. The report emphasizes Bangladesh's resilience in public investment but notes challenges in private investment due to continued import restrictions. However, the World Bank forecasts a rise in GDP growth to 5.8% in FY2024/25 as inflationary pressures recede. The South Asia region is predicted to have a "still-robust" 5.6% economic growth, with India leading.

January 12

Foreign Ministry Protests International Civil Society Organizations Statement on Election Fairness

The Bangladesh foreign ministry has objected to a statement by six international civil society organizations (CSOs), including the Asian Network for Free Elections and World Alliance for Citizen Participation, questioning the fairness of the January 7 national polls. The CSOs called for a re-election, citing concerns about the election's adherence to democratic principles. Bangladesh's foreign ministry labeled the allegations "false and baseless," asserting that the parliamentary election was held in a "free, fair, transparent, and festive atmosphere." It also criticized the CSOs' statement as misleading and unacceptable, accusing them of encouraging anti-democratic forces.

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