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Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

CGS Centre for Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

praised Bangladesh's economic reforms and reaffirmed Canadian interest in expanding commercial partnerships. Professor Yunus highlighted Bangladesh's potential as a regional export hub and welcomed Canadian firms to invest and co-develop industries. Stressing the importance of global partnerships, he noted, "We're making steady progress, but we need friends like you." The Canadian delegation included executives from Bell, BlackBerry, Gildan, JCM Power, and Advantech Wireless.

May 06

Chief Adviser Seeks Deeper Investment Ties with Canada



Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus urged stronger investment ties during a meeting with Paul Thoppil, Canada's Indo-Pacific Trade Representative, at the State Guest House Jamuna. Leading a high-level business delegation, Thoppil

Bangladeshi Shot Dead by BSF

A Bangladeshi national, Md Sakib, was killed and an Indian national, Sujon Barman, injured when India's Border Security Force (BSF) opened fire near the Madla border in Brahmanbaria. The incident occurred during an alleged attempt to smuggle a motorcycle into Bangladesh. Sakib succumbed to his injuries en route to Dhaka. Sujon, a resident of Agartala, Tripura, received medical treatment and was detained by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) before being handed over to the police. A flag meeting was held between the BSF and BGB, though the outcome remains undisclosed. Authorities confirmed both the smuggling attempt and BSF's involvement in the shooting.

Dhaka Reaffirms Commitment to Peace in Talks with Pakistan

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain reaffirmed Bangladesh's commitment to peace during talks with Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar. Hossain emphasised conflict resolution through dialogue and cautioned against any escalation of regional tensions. Dar briefed Hossain on Pakistan's response to India's recent actions, including the suspension of provisions under the Indus Waters Treaty. Hossain noted that if India seeks clarification, Bangladesh will reiterate its message of peace. Both officials expressed interest in strengthening bilateral ties and agreed to explore greater cooperation in regional and international forums, underscoring a shared commitment to peaceful diplomatic engagement.

May 07

Bangladesh, Italy Sign MoU on Irregular Migration

Bangladesh and Italy have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on "Migration and Mobility" to tackle irregular migration and enhance cooperation on legal labour migration. The agreement was signed during the visit of Italy's Interior Minister, Matteo Piantedosi, and includes the formation of a joint committee to combat transnational organised crime and support law enforcement agencies. The MoU aligns with Bangladesh's labour export strategy and Italy's labour market needs. It complements the 2017 Standard Operating Procedures between Bangladesh and the EU on migrant returns. The two sides also discussed expanding quotas for Bangladeshi workers, improving security cooperation, and a potential official visit by Italy's Prime Minister.

Chief Adviser Welcomes UAE Investment

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus met with Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, UAE Cabinet Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, in Dhaka to discuss investment and visa opportunities for Bangladeshi nationals. Yunus welcomed investment proposals from the UAE across various sectors and expressed interest in expanding economic cooperation. The UAE has resumed issuing visas for Bangladeshi citizens, including bulk visas for business delegations and online applications for skilled workers. Sheikh

Nahayan reiterated the UAE's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties. Recent visa approvals include categories for marketing managers, hotel staff, and security personnel.

May 08

Avoid Escalation, Dhaka Urges India and Pakistan

Bangladesh has expressed serious concern over escalating tensions between India and Pakistan, urging both nations to exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could aggravate the situation. The foreign ministry issued a statement highlighting the importance of regional peace, stability, and diplomatic resolution. The conflict has intensified, with India reportedly striking nine sites in Pakistan and Pakistani-administered Kashmir, prompting preparations for a response from Pakistan. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar spoke with Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain, who reiterated Bangladesh's position: peace and dialogue must prevail. Dhaka restated that it does not support conflict and hopes for a diplomatic resolution.

India-Pakistan Tensions Drive Up Dhaka Airfares

Rising tensions between India and Pakistan have disrupted international air travel, forcing airlines, including those operating from Dhaka, to adopt longer and more expensive routes. Bangladesh's national carrier, Biman, along with international airlines such as Emirates, Qatar Airways, Etihad Airways, Turkish Airlines, and Singapore Airlines, have been rerouting flights to destinations like London, Rome, Istanbul, and Toronto. The closure of Pakistani airspace to Indian aircraft—and India's reciprocal response—has blocked a major air corridor, adding up to two hours of flight time and significantly increasing fuel costs. Aviation experts warn that without a swift diplomatic solution, these reroutings may become long-term, affecting connectivity between South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

UGC Seeks EU Support to Expand Higher Education

University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman, Professor SMA Faiz, has called on the European Union to increase higher education opportunities for Bangladeshi students through scholarships and joint research programmes with European universities. The appeal was made during an event at the

UGC auditorium in Dhaka, highlighting Erasmus Plus programmes in Bangladesh. EU Ambassador to Bangladesh, Michael Miller, attended the event as special guest, alongside UGC members Professor Mohammad Anwar Hossain and Professor Masuma Habib.

China Reaffirms Openness to Teesta Project

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen has reiterated Beijing's willingness to support the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP), clarifying that the final decision lies with the Bangladesh government. At a public lecture, he also dismissed China's involvement in any "so-called humanitarian corridor" in Myanmar's Rakhine State, reaffirming China's commitment to national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Emphasising the strength of Bangladesh-China ties, the ambassador noted that Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao would soon visit Dhaka with the largest-ever Chinese business delegation to enhance trade and investment cooperation.

The visit, the largest of its kind, aims to boost bilateral trade and economic relations. A trade and investment exchange will be held to facilitate cooperation between Chinese and Bangladeshi enterprises. The 15th meeting of the Bangladesh-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission will also take place.

May 09



EU, Mahmood Launch 'Power' Campaign

The European Union (EU) and Bangladeshi hip-hop artist Critical Mahmood have launched the "I've Got the Power" campaign, promoting renewable energy and celebrating EU-Bangladesh cooperation on sustainability. Mahmood's song of the

same name serves as the campaign's anthem. The initiative is part of the EU's Global Gateway strategy, including efforts such as the Bangladesh Renewable Energy Facility, which aims to generate 750 MW from solar and wind. EU Ambassador Michael Miller emphasised the transformative impact of clean energy, citing benefits for communities such as e-rickshaw drivers and aspiring athletes

India Accused of Pushing Intruders into Bangladesh

India has reportedly continued pushing displaced individuals into Bangladesh for a second consecutive day, prompting heightened vigilance by Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). On Thursday, BGB detained 25 individuals—15 in Moulvibazar and 10 in Dinajpur—allegedly forced across the border following demolitions in Assam. BGB increased patrols and checkpoints along the 70-kilometre Jashore stretch. Meanwhile, a joint BGB-BSF border survey in Sylhet was disrupted by protests over land claims. Tensions between India and Pakistan, including missile exchanges, are contributing to rising instability in border areas. On Wednesday alone, 123 people reportedly crossed into Bangladesh.

ADB to Provide Increased Concessional Loans

Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masato Kanda has assured continued concessional loan support to Bangladesh in a meeting with Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed. Emphasising Bangladesh's economic resilience, Kanda reaffirmed ADB's commitment to supporting inclusive growth, regional stability, and climate objectives. The country's cumulative ADB portfolio now stands at \$32.5 billion, including \$2.94 billion allocated for FY 2023–24. Bangladesh requested further assistance in areas such as river management, digital healthcare, tax reform, Blue Economy, sustainable urbanisation, and renewable energy, particularly in light of ongoing post-uprising reforms.

May 10

JICA Eyes Investment in Engineering and Technology Education

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has expressed interest in investing in engineering and technology education in Bangladesh. In a bilateral meeting with the UGC, plans were discussed for launching a project to improve

postgraduate education with a focus on research, innovation, and skills development. The initiative will facilitate research sponsorships and joint degrees between Bangladeshi and Japanese universities. UGC Chairman Professor SMA Faiz noted the lack of incentives in engineering and technology postgraduate education and called for more scholarships for Bangladeshi students in Japan to strengthen academic cooperation.

Yunus Praises Ceasefire Efforts by Modi and Shehbaz

Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has praised Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for agreeing to an immediate ceasefire following recent hostilities. He also acknowledged the mediation efforts of U.S. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Yunus reaffirmed Bangladesh's support for peaceful resolution of regional conflicts through diplomatic engagement.

Nepal Seeks Stronger Economic Ties with Bangladesh

Nepalese Ambassador to Bangladesh, Ghanshyam Bhandari, has called for stronger partnerships between Bangladeshi and Nepali businesses in trade, tourism, energy, and connectivity. Speaking at a business networking event in Dhaka, Bhandari highlighted growing momentum in economic cooperation, especially in energy trade and tourism. The event, organised by the Embassy of Nepal, included participation from business leaders, travel agencies, chambers of commerce, and media. During Khulna Day 2025, the ambassador also attended a children's art competition and a drama exhibition to promote cultural exchange.

May 11

India Pushes 92 More into Bangladesh

Between 7 and 12 May 2025, Indian authorities reportedly pushed 215 individuals across the border into Bangladesh, including 92 on the latest day alone. Most crossings occurred via Satkhira and Chuadanga. Although a US-brokered ceasefire is in place between India and Pakistan, these alleged push-ins continue. Many individuals showed signs of illness or abuse and required immediate medical attention. The BNP criticised the interim government for its silence on the matter and called for stronger diplomatic responses to India's actions.

USTR Seeks Reciprocal Tariffs from Bangladesh

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) has urged Bangladesh to propose reciprocal tariff reductions following the imposition of a 37% tariff on Bangladeshi exports by the U.S. on 2 April 2025. The move followed reports of Bangladesh maintaining a 74% tariff on U.S. goods. On 9 April, the U.S. reduced the tariff to 10% for 90 days to allow for dialogue. Bangladeshi business leaders have urged diplomatic engagement and called for increased U.S. imports to address the trade imbalance. The government is currently working with industry leaders to identify potential products for import from the U.S.

China's Modernisation Offers Lessons for Bangladesh

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen has suggested that China's experience with rapid economic development could provide useful insights for Bangladesh's own modernisation journey. Speaking at the launch of the Bengali edition of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, Yao emphasised China's ability to achieve growth without adopting Western political models. He encouraged Bangladeshi policymakers and academics to explore Chinese governance strategies, particularly in the context of maintaining stability while advancing economic goals. The event was part of broader efforts to strengthen bilateral understanding.

May 12

Arakan Army Abducts and Shoots Bangladeshi Fishermen

The Arakan Army, an armed ethnic group from Myanmar, abducted three Bangladeshi fishermen who had crossed into Myanmar's territory while fishing in the Naf River near Teknaf, Cox's Bazar. On the same day, two other Bangladeshi fishermen were injured by gunfire from the group while fishing beyond Bangladesh's border. According to officials, including the Teknaf Upazila Nirbahi Officer and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), fishing in the Naf River is currently prohibited on both the Bangladeshi and Arakan-controlled sides. BGB had issued warnings against border-crossing for fishing, but some fishermen reportedly disregarded the advisory, resulting in these incidents.

Yunus Calls for Regional Cooperation with Nepal on Economy and Hydropower

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus empha



sised the importance of a comprehensive regional economic strategy involving Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and India's northeastern states. Key areas for cooperation include hydropower, healthcare, and transport connectivity. The discussion included plans to expand beyond the existing tripartite power agreement under which Bangladesh imports 40MW of hydropower from Nepal via the Indian grid. Proposals include establishing a 1,000-bed hospital in Rangpur accessible to citizens of Nepal and Bhutan. Nepal's Deputy Speaker Indira Rana highlighted academic collaboration, citing that over 2,700 Nepali students currently study in Bangladesh. Both sides also stressed the need for improved road connectivity to lower trade costs and boost regional integration.

Denmark Proposes Circular Economy Partnership

Denmark has proposed strengthening cooperation with Bangladesh by promoting circular economy practices in the ready-made garment sector. During the third Bangladesh-Denmark Political Consultations in Dhaka, Denmark announced an additional \$5 million to support Bangladesh's ongoing democratic transition. Both countries agreed to establish a Joint Trade and Investment Committee to deepen economic ties. Denmark reiterated its commitment under the Green Strategic Partnership and lauded Bangladesh's progress on climate action. Areas of continued cooperation include governance, agriculture, maritime affairs, and climate resilience. Denmark also reaffirmed its support for Rohingya repatriation efforts and pledged to expand cultural and educational exchanges.

May 13

India Voices Concern Over Awami League Ban

India's Ministry of External Affairs has expressed

concern regarding the Bangladesh interim government's ban on the Awami League (AL), citing threats to democratic freedoms and the narrowing of political space. India reiterated its support for the swift organisation of free, fair, and inclusive elections in Bangladesh. The interim government recently banned all activities of the AL and its affiliates under the Anti-Terrorism Act, citing evidence of the party's involvement in criminal and destabilising activities. All AL-related public activity—including publications, rallies, and media campaigns—has been suspended until tribunal proceedings against party leaders and activists are concluded.

Qingdao Dongfang to Invest in Ishwardi EPZ

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) has signed a lease agreement with Qingdao Dongfang Packaging Technology Limited, a Chinese company, for investment in the Ishwardi Export Processing Zone. Qingdao Dongfang will invest \$4.5 million to produce 5.25 million dozen poly bags, hang tags, and paper tags annually. The investment is expected to create employment for 240 Bangladeshi nationals. As of 13 May 2025, BEPZA has secured \$480 million in investments from 32 local and foreign firms during the 2024–25 financial year.

IMF to Disburse Loan Tranche in June

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will release a \$1.3 billion tranche to Bangladesh in June 2025 under its \$4.7 billion extended loan programme. The disbursement was delayed due to disagreements between the IMF and Bangladesh Bank over adopting a crawling peg exchange rate system. Bangladesh Bank had resisted immediate reforms, citing inflationary risks and potential political fallout. Following an IMF staff review in Dhaka in April, the disbursement is now pending final Board approval. Bangladesh has received \$2.3 billion so far in three instalments under the programme.

May 14

Dhaka Lodges Protest Over Continued Indian Pushbacks

The Government of Bangladesh has formally protested to India over continued pushbacks of foreign nationals into Bangladeshi territory. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has ramped up surveillance, particularly in remote areas. During a recent flag meeting, Indian officials denied

responsibility. With India-Pakistan tensions simmering, authorities have advised farmers and fishermen to avoid border areas due to heightened security risks.

60 More Pushed into Bangladesh by India

BSF pushed another 60 individuals across the Bangladesh border via entry points in Sylhet and Moulvibazar. This raises the total number of push-ins to over 300 since 7 May. Bangladesh had formally requested India to cease such activities on 9 May. BGB Director General Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui stated that 202 individuals were pushed in between 7 and 8 May alone, including 39 Rohingyas. The incidents have triggered diplomatic and humanitarian concerns.

Zambia Opens Consulate in Dhaka

Zambia officially inaugurated its consulate in Bangladesh on 14 May 2025, aiming to boost trade and investment between the two nations. The launch took place during the Zambia-Bangladesh Business Forum, co-organised by Bangladesh's Export Promotion Bureau, Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, and the Zambia Development Agency. Officials highlighted Bangladesh's economic growth and Zambia's strategic location as a gateway to Southern and Central Africa, including access to markets in Congo, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. Key sectors for cooperation include agriculture, tourism, pharmaceuticals, ICT, leather, textiles, and renewable energy. Bangladeshi businesses were encouraged to engage actively with their Zambian counterparts to explore new opportunities.

May 15

Dhaka, Tokyo Outline Cooperation Ahead of Yunus Visit

Ahead of Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus's upcoming visit to Japan, Bangladesh and Japan have identified key areas for collaboration under the "Japan-Bangladesh Strategic Partnership." Japan aims to deepen engagement through its Big-B initiative, focusing on infrastructure development and expanding industrial value chains. Professor Yunus will attend the Nikkei Future of Asia conference (29–30 May), where he is expected to hold a bilateral meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba. At the 6th Japan-Bangladesh Foreign Office Consultations,

the two sides discussed economic ties, regional security, trade, the Rohingya crisis, and energy transition. Japan reaffirmed its support through concessional loans, duty-free market access post-LDC graduation, and multilateral cooperation, including humanitarian aid and human resource development.

Dhaka Rises in Popularity Among Malaysian Travellers

Dhaka has emerged as an increasingly popular destination for Malaysian and Indian tourists, according to a new report by the Mastercard Economics Institute (MEI). Overseas spending by Malaysian travellers rose 3.5%, while Dhaka ranked 13th among the fastest-growing destinations for Indian visitors, with a 31.2% increase in 2024 compared to 2019.

The Asia-Pacific region continues to attract high tourism volumes, with Tokyo, Osaka, Shanghai, and Singapore leading the list. Currency fluctuations and travel affordability are influencing traveller decisions. Tokyo has now become the top global destination for the summer season. Meanwhile, Chinese travellers are favouring visa-friendly, value-oriented destinations such as Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. MEI's findings aim to inform strategic tourism planning across the region.

May 16

World Bank Approves \$270 Million Flood Recovery Aid

The World Bank has approved \$270 million for Bangladesh under the B-STRONG Project to support post-flood recovery and strengthen climate disaster resilience. The project will benefit an estimated 1.6 million people across Sylhet and Chattogram by upgrading infrastructure such as shelters, roads, bridges, and embankments.

It will also enhance flood forecasting systems and provide temporary employment, skills training, and financial assistance to over 380,000 people. Approximately 65,000 farming households will receive support for climate-smart agriculture. The initiative includes disaster preparedness training, emergency drills, and new equipment. To date, the World Bank has committed over \$45 billion to Bangladesh since its independence.

Malaysia to Prioritise Recruitment of Bangladeshi Workers

Malaysia is set to recruit around 8,000 Bangladeshi workers who missed previous deadlines due to flight shortages, with the process to be managed by Bangladesh Overseas Employment Services Limited (BOESL).

Malaysia plans to hire 100,000 to 150,000 foreign workers and has been urged by Bangladesh to prioritise its nationals. Malaysia reiterated its commitment to ethical recruitment, including social protection and training.

However, it also requested that Bangladesh withdraw allegations concerning trafficking and money laundering to safeguard Malaysia's international reputation. Bangladesh is pushing for a fair and inclusive recruitment process involving all agencies, the issuance of multiple-entry visas, improved regulation of undocumented workers, and safeguards against exploitation and fraud.

BGB Foils Attempted BSF Push-In at Brahmanbaria

An attempted push-in of around 150 people by India's Border Security Force (BSF) was thwarted in Brahmanbaria, with local residents and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) responding swiftly to intelligence alerts.

Announcements via mosque loudspeakers helped mobilise residents to gather at the border, while BGB increased patrols in response. Since 7 May, nearly 400 individuals have been pushed into Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has lodged formal complaints through diplomatic channels. Authorities remain on high alert as tensions along the border continue to rise amid escalating India–Pakistan hostilities. The push-ins have involved both Rohingya and Indian nationals.

May 17

Adviser Demands India Be Held Accountable for Biodiversity Damage

Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Farida Akhter has demanded that India be held accountable for ecological damage caused by its unilateral withdrawal of upstream river water. Speaking at an event in Rajshahi to mark the 49th anniversary of the historic Farakka Long March, she stated that

millions of Bangladeshis are affected by the degradation of biodiversity and livelihoods resulting from India's actions.

Akhter urged Bangladesh to demand its rightful share of transboundary river waters when the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty expires. Other speakers, including academics and environmental researchers, echoed her concerns, highlighting the impact of water scarcity on ecosystems, agriculture, and public health.

May 20

Norway Reaffirms Support for Bangladesh's Interim Government



Norwegian State Secretary Stine Renate Håheim reaffirmed her country's support for Bangladesh's interim government during a meeting with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna. Conveying greetings from Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, she praised Yunus's global stature and stressed Norway's commitment to Bangladesh's democratic transition. Professor Yunus highlighted economic recovery efforts, Norway's historic role in development, and urged continued support for Rohingya refugees. Håheim acknowledged the humanitarian challenges and expressed interest in expanding bilateral ties beyond aid, aiming for a deeper and more dynamic partnership between the two nations.

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