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Bangladesh Foreign Policy Watch

cgs Centre for
Governance Studies



A Bi-Weekly Roundup of Key Events

Bangladeshi Man Killed by BSF in Thakurgaon

A Bangladeshi man, Nur Jamal, aged 40, was reportedly shot dead by India's Border Security Force (BSF) near the Ratnai border in Thakurgaon's Baliadangi upazila. BSF members allegedly opened fire on a group of 10-12 Bangladeshi individuals, with Nuruz-zaman losing his life. The body was initially held by the BSF, and two days later, following a flag meeting between the BSF and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), it was handed over to Bangladeshi authorities.

October 23

Bangladesh's Duty-Free Access Extended by WTO

Bangladesh is set to continue enjoying duty-free market access even after it graduates from the least-developed country category in November 2026. This decision comes as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has extended support measures for graduating nations. The aim is to provide a smooth transition for these countries. Previously, Bangladesh was expected to lose duty-free and quota-free market access, except for the European Union, in 2026 upon graduation. While the specific timeframe hasn't been determined yet, this decision is significant for Bangladesh and other graduating nations, allowing them to sustain economic growth and development. Negotiations are ongoing to secure an extension of special provisions for these countries within the WTO.

October 25

End Wars for a Better Future: Hasina Urges Global Leaders at Global Gateway Forum



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called upon global leaders to work towards ending wars, conflicts, and arms races to pave the way for a brighter future.

Speaking at the Global Gateway Forum 2023 in Brussels, she emphasized the importance of connectivity for peace and progress and urged preparations for future crises. She highlighted Bangladesh's appeal as an attractive investment destination in South Asia, strategically located to become a trade hub for 3 billion consumers. Hasina also underscored the significance of the EU-Bangladesh partnership, expressing commitment to strengthen strategic engagements, address issues of LDC graduation, and explore collaboration in various sectors such as green energy, pharmaceuticals, and education.

The European Investment Bank (EIB), operating under the European Commission, has approved a loan of €407 million to boost Bangladesh's renewable energy sector. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present for the signing ceremony at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels. The initial phase, named the "Bangladesh Renewable Energy Facility," encompasses a loan of up to €350 million, guaranteed by the EU, to support climate action investments in Bangladesh. During the event, the Prime Minister also appealed to the European Union to consider granting Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) benefits, extend humanitarian assistance to Rohingya refugees, and collaborate on promoting peace.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met with European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, to discuss the government's efforts to create a conducive environment for free and fair elections in Bangladesh. She highlighted initiatives such as establishing an independent Election Commission, implementing a biometric-based voter list, and transparent ballot boxes. Urpilainen expressed hope for free and fair elections in Bangladesh and discussed opportunities for deeper Bangladesh-EU cooperation in areas like energy transition, digital infrastructure, and human capital development. The Prime Minister also met with European Investment Bank (EIB) President Werner Hoyer and European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič, securing additional assistance for Rohingyas.

Bangladesh to Expand Labor Market in Libya with New MoU

Bangladesh has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Libya to broaden its labor market, send more workers through official channels, and ensure their safety. The agreement aims to prevent irregular migration of Bangladeshi workers to Libya. The MoU, titled "joint cooperation in the field of recruitment of workers," was signed by the Expatriates' Welfare Ministry and the Libyan labor and rehabilitation ministry. Bangladesh hopes for a "zero migration cost" policy for its workers in Libya and requests recognition of their certifications, remittance facilitation, and regularization of undocumented Bangladeshi workers. Around 1.22 lakh workers have been sent to Libya since 1976, and the recent lifting of the migration ban has led to an estimated 20,000-25,000 Bangladeshi workers in Libya.

October 26

Bangladesh Embassy in Saudi Arabia Set to Launch NID Card Service

The Bangladesh Embassy in Saudi Arabia is set to introduce National Identity (NID) card services for Bangladeshi expatriates in the Gulf nation. A substantial number of the approximately 2.8 million Bangladeshi expats in Saudi Arabia lack NID cards, causing challenges when accessing services in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Election Commission has completed technical preparations and provided training to embassy officials in Riyadh and Jeddah. The NID card service, offering smart cards, is expected to be launched soon, making Saudi Arabia the second country, after the United Arab Emirates, to provide this service for expatriate Bangladeshis.

October 27

US Reiterates Commitment to Democracy in Bangladesh, No Party Preference



Uzra Zeya, the US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, emphasized the United States' support for democracy in Bangladesh during a meeting with Salman F Rahman, Prime Minister's Adviser for Private Industry and Investment. Zeya reiterated that the US does not endorse any specific political party in Bangladesh and aims to ensure free and fair elections in the country. Both officials acknowledged that elections are the democratic means for changing the government. They also discussed strengthening economic cooperation, Middle East conflicts, and the Rohingya issue, with Zeya commending Bangladesh's hosting of over 1.2 million Rohingya refugees and pledging continued US support.

Bangladesh and Canada Collaborate to Boost Bilateral Trade

During the fifth Bangladesh-Canada Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) held in Ottawa, both countries agreed to work on expanding and diversifying their bilateral trade, which currently stands at approximately \$2.5 billion. The discussions encompassed global and regional matters, including climate change, peace, security, and transnational crime.

During the meeting, the Foreign Minister emphasized the need for "safe, voluntary, and sustainable repatriation." This gathering took place in preparation for the Global Refugee Forum, amid declining funding for Rohingya support, with only 40% of the budget secured so far. Despite ongoing voluntary repatriation efforts mediated by China, the Rohingya repatriation remains stalled.

October 28

US to Review Violent Incidents in Dhaka for Possible Visa Restrictions



The United States has strongly condemned the political violence that unfolded in Dhaka, vowing to conduct a comprehensive review of all such incidents for potential visa restrictions. The US embassy in Dhaka issued a statement expressing its disapproval of reported incidents, including the killing of a police officer, a political activist, and the burning of a hospital. It also denounced violence against civilians and journalists, urging all sides to exercise calm and restraint. The clashes occurred around Nayapaltan during a BNP rally, escalating into a pitched battle between activists and police. In May, the US announced intentions to impose visa restrictions on individuals involved in undermining Bangladesh's democratic election process, a measure initiated in September.

Bangladesh Supports UN Resolution for Gaza Humanitarian Truce

Bangladesh voted in favor of a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a humanitarian truce in Gaza after the United Nations Security Council repeatedly failed to take action. The UN General Assembly resolution received the support of 121 countries, while 14 voted against it, and 45 countries abstained. Bangladesh stressed its unwavering support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

October 29

EU Calls for Peaceful Resolution Ahead of Bangladesh's National Elections

The European Union and its member states in Dhaka have expressed deep concern over the recent violence during an opposition rally in Dhaka, emphasizing the urgent need to find a peaceful path towards participatory and peaceful national elections. The statement follows violent clashes during the BNP's grand rally, which resulted in casualties, including the death of a police officer and a BNP activist. The international community is closely monitoring the situation in the lead-up to the elections, and the EU has chosen to send a seven-member delegation instead of a full-fledged election observer mission this year.

Foreign Loan Commitments to Bangladesh Surge Over 600% in Q1 but Disbursements Decline

In the first quarter of the current fiscal year, foreign aid commitments to Bangladesh increased significantly by over 600%, totaling \$2.88 billion. Of these commitments, \$2.79 billion took the form of loans, while \$90.53 million came as grants. Despite this surge in commitments, disbursements actually decreased by nearly 5% to \$1.28 billion in the same period. This ongoing issue of lower disbursements is attributed to project delays and an inability to meet conditions set by foreign lenders. The government has now called for accelerating project implementation to bolster foreign exchange reserves, which have dwindled significantly.

October 30

Seven Foreign Missions Urge Restraint Amidst Political Violence in Bangladesh

Seven foreign missions, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Norway, the UK, and the US, have jointly issued a statement calling for restraint and peaceful resolution in the midst of recent political violence in Bangladesh. They expressed deep concern over the violence that erupted during political gatherings in Dhaka on October 28 and extended their condolences for the lives lost and injuries sustained. The foreign missions called on all stakeholders to work together to create the conditions for free, fair, participatory, and peaceful elections in the country. The violence has resulted in several casualties, prompting calls for restraint and dialogue.

October 31

International Concern Over Political Violence Ahead of Bangladesh's General Election

Amid escalating violence preceding the upcoming general election, the United Nations, United States, and United Kingdom have issued a joint call for political parties in Bangladesh to abstain from violence and excessive force. UN reports reveal that, as of October 30 morning, the unrest claimed at least 11 lives, including two police officers, six opposition party members, and two bystanders. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasized the importance of respecting the right to free expression and peaceful assembly. The US State Department called for a thorough investigation of incidents surrounding the October 28 BNP rally, while the UK urged all stakeholders to foster conditions for a peaceful election.

Myanmar Delegation Visits Cox's Bazar to Foster Trust for Rohingya Repatriation



A 36-member Myanmar delegation led by Social Welfare Minister Saw Naing visited Cox's Bazar to engage with Bangladesh authorities and Rohingya refugees. The meetings aim to build trust and address repatriation concerns. Discussions included voluntary repatriation, citizenship, voting rights, and ensuring a dignified and sustainable return to their ancestral land. Despite repeated visits by Myanmar officials, Rohingya refugees remain skeptical about the prospects of repatriation, while Bangladesh continues to host around one million Rohingya refugees who fled violence in Myanmar in 2017.

November 1

Hasina and Modi Inaugurate 2 Rail Links and Rampal Unit-2

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated three development projects during a video conference event. The projects include the Akhaura-Agartala cross-border rail link, the Khulna-Mongla Port rail line, and unit-II of the Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant. Hasina emphasized the importance of the strong cooperation between Bangladesh and India and how it can serve as a global example for achieving mutual development. Modi praised the continuous strengthening of India-Bangladesh relations and pledged to support Bangladesh's journey to becoming a developed and prosperous nation by 2041.

Bangladesh Parliament Passes New Development Bank Bill

Bangladesh's Parliament passed the New Development Bank Bill, 2023, allowing the country to welcome funds from the lending arm of the BRICS group. It was approved through a voice vote. The bill's objective is to facilitate cooperation with the New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to support infrastructure and development projects in developing nations. Bangladesh joined the NDB in September 2021, becoming one of its eight member countries.

November 3

Bangladesh Exports Hit 26-Month Low

Exports earnings in Bangladesh fell to \$3.76 billion in October, marking the lowest figure in 26 months. This decline, down by 13.64 percent year-on-year, is primarily attributed to reduced demand in global markets due to higher inflation and geopolitical conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict. The ready-made garments sector, which accounts for over 80 percent of total earnings, also saw a significant drop of around 14 percent to \$3.17 billion in the same month. The external pressures on Bangladesh's economy persist, with declining export and remittance earnings affecting foreign currency reserves. Political uncertainty and rising production costs further add to the challenges.

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