

CLAWS Newsletter



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by Anjali Manhas

Diplomatic Engagements

Visit of UN Secretary-General António Guterres

One of the pivotal events was the official visit of UN Secretary-General António Guterres from March 13 to March 16, 2025. On this visit, Guterres highlighted the importance of international solidarity in addressing global challenges, particularly those affecting Bangladesh, such as poverty alleviation and the Rohingya refugee crisis. His discussions centered around strategies for enhancing humanitarian assistance and sustainable development in the country. Guterres underscored the pivotal moment Bangladesh is navigating as it pursues significant political reform alongside economic recovery. (UN Chief Affirms Solidarity with Bangladesh amid Political Transition, 2025). This visit followed an invitation from Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Professor Muhammad Yunus, and was closely watched as it focused on multiple significant issues, including humanitarian assistance related to the Rohingya refugee crisis (USANewsNY, 2025).

Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's Visit to China

Following Guterres's visit, Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Prof. Muhammad Yunus met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. (Daily Star, 28 March 2025). He also met Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang and Vice President Han Zheng on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia. (The Business Standard, 28 March 2025). The visit marked 50 years of China-Bangladesh diplomatic relations. (Dhaka Tribune, 30 March 2025)

March 26, 2025: Departure and Arrival in China

- Professor Muhammad Yunus departed from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, at 1:00 PM, accompanied by a delegation comprising Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain, Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, High Representative to the Chief Adviser Khalilur Rahman, Principal Coordinator on SDGs Affairs and Senior Secretary Lamiya Morshed, and Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam. (New Age)
- Upon arrival at Qionghai Bo'ao International Airport around 7:00 PM, Yunus and his delegation were received by Bangladesh's Ambassador to China, Md Nazmul Islam, and the Vice-Governor of Hainan Province. (New Age)

March 27, 2025: Participation in Boao Forum for Asia (BFA)

- Yunus attended the inaugural plenary session of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025 in Boao, Hainan Province. The BFA is a high-profile economic conference that brings together Asian leaders, global executives, and policymakers to discuss Asia's evolving role in the world. (Daily Observer)
- On the sidelines of the forum, Yunus engaged in discussions with CEOs of major Chinese businesses, focusing on attracting investment and encouraging the relocation of Chinese manufacturing enterprises to Bangladesh. (New Age)

March 28, 2025: Bilateral Meeting with President Xi Jinping

Yunus met with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. During this meeting, several key points were addressed:

1. **Loan Interest Rates:** President Xi expressed China's willingness to consider lowering interest rates on Chinese loans to Bangladesh, acknowledging Dhaka's requests for more favorable terms. (Reuters)
2. **Investment and Industrial Relocation:** Xi reaffirmed China's commitment to encouraging Chinese investment in Bangladesh and facilitating the relocation of Chinese manufacturing enterprises to the country. (Reuters)
3. **Trade Agreements:** Both leaders underscored the importance of initiating negotiations on a China-Bangladesh Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and optimizing the existing China-Bangladesh Investment Agreement to enhance economic cooperation. (Reuters)
4. **Water Resource Management:** Enhanced cooperation in water resource management was discussed, a key issue for Bangladesh, with China expressing readiness to assist in this sector. (Reuters)
5. **Belt and Road Initiative:** Xi highlighted China's readiness to collaborate with Bangladesh on the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative, exploring cooperation in areas such as the digital economy, green economy, maritime economy, infrastructure construction, and water conservancy. (Reuters)
6. **Cultural Exchanges:** An agreement on economic and technical cooperation and eight memorandums, primarily focusing on cultural exchanges, were signed during the visit. (Reuters)
7. Bangladesh reiterated its One-China Policy and opposed "Taiwan independence".

8. China pledged support for Bangladesh's development, sovereignty, and stability.

March 29, 2025: Engagements at Peking University and Return

- Yunus delivered a lecture at Peking University, where he was honoured with an honorary doctorate degree in recognition of his contributions to economic and social development. (Daily Observer)
- He also toured China's high-tech industrial parks, exploring potential partnerships in innovation-driven industries. (Daily Observer)
- Discussions were held with leading Chinese hospital chains, inviting them to establish hospitals in Bangladesh through joint ventures to improve the country's healthcare sector. (Daily Observer)
- Yunus and his delegation departed Beijing and returned to Dhaka on the same day. (New Age)

Key Points from the China – Bangladesh Joint Statement : [Source: Joint Press Release, China-Bangladesh, March 28, 2025, published by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

1. *Economic & Investment Agreements* : Eight agreements were signed, covering various sectors:

- Economic & Technical Cooperation Agreement
- Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on Media, Cultural Heritage, Health, and Sports
- China-Bangladesh Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations
- **Major Investment Announcements:**
 - China Industrial Economic Zone launch
 - Mongla Port modernization
 - Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP) with Chinese participation.
 - Bangladesh's hydrological data-sharing MoU with China

2. *Strengthening Bilateral Ties & Political Cooperation*

- Marked 50 years of diplomatic relations between China and Bangladesh.
- Both countries reaffirmed their Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership.

- Bangladesh reiterated its One-China Policy and opposed "Taiwan independence".
- China pledged support for Bangladesh's development, sovereignty, and stability.

3. Climate & Maritime Cooperation

- Agreements on flood prevention, disaster reduction, and water management.
- Bangladesh welcomed China's participation in hydrological data sharing & river management projects.
- Strengthening cooperation in the blue economy and maritime affairs.

4. People-to-People & Cultural Exchanges

- 2025 declared as the Year of China-Bangladesh People-to-People Exchanges.
- Expansion of cooperation in culture, education, health, sports, and media.
- Bangladesh appreciated China's medical facilities in Yunnan Province for Bangladeshi patients.

5. Global & Regional Cooperation

- Both nations committed to multilateralism and UN Charter principles.
- Agreement to promote Global South unity and cooperation.
- Bangladesh praised China's role in Myanmar peace talks & Rohingya repatriation efforts.
- China pledged continued support for resolving the Rohingya refugee crisis.

6. High-Level Engagement & Future Plans

- Prof. Yunus invited Chinese leadership to visit Bangladesh.
- Signed multiple cooperation agreements in economic, cultural, health, and media sectors.
- China recognized Bangladesh's governance reforms and stability efforts.

BIMSTEC Summit

Bangladesh is preparing for the upcoming Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit, scheduled for April 2-4, 2025, in Bangkok, Thailand. This summit holds particular significance for Bangladesh, as it is set to assume the chairmanship of BIMSTEC, providing an opportunity to lead regional initiatives and reaffirm its commitment to regional cooperation. Indra Mani Pandey, the BIMSTEC Secretary General, emphasized that under Bangladesh's chairmanship, the nation can spearhead efforts in various sectors, demonstrating its dedication to regional collaboration. This leadership role is expected to enhance Bangladesh's influence within the organization and contribute to the advancement of shared goals among member states. (Dhaka Tribune).

Anticipated Bilateral Engagements: In the lead-up to the summit, Bangladesh has expressed interest in engaging with key regional leaders:

- **India:** Bangladesh has approached India to arrange a bilateral meeting between Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the summit. However, reports suggest that a formal meeting is unlikely due to current strains in bilateral relations. (Economic Times) (Hindustan Times)
- **Myanmar:** Myanmar's junta chief, Min Aung Hlaing, is expected to attend the summit, marking a rare international trip since the 2021 coup. The Myanmar delegation has reportedly sought bilateral meetings with leaders, including Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Yunus, indicating potential discussions on pertinent regional issues. (Reuters)

Summit Objectives and Expected Outcomes: The summit aims to address various regional issues, including economic cooperation, connectivity, and security. Bangladesh's leadership is anticipated to play a crucial role in formulating strategies that benefit all member states. The assumption of the chairmanship is seen as an opportunity for Bangladesh to demonstrate its commitment to regional development and cooperation. (Dhaka Tribune)

Political Developments

Opposition Warns of Instability Over Election Delays

Bangladesh's main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), warned of potential instability and public resentment if national elections are delayed beyond December 2025. This statement followed suggestions by the interim government that elections might be postponed until 2026. The BNP emphasized the necessity of holding elections within the year to restore democratic governance. (Reuters)

Bangladesh Prioritizes Balanced Relations with Major Powers

Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain emphasized the importance of maintaining balanced relations with India, China, and the United States. He announced plans for a bilateral visit to China to discuss mutual interests, highlighting the significance of these relationships for Bangladesh's strategic and economic objectives. (Dhaka Tribune)

Strain in Bangladesh-India Relations Over Medical Visas

India significantly reduced the issuance of medical visas to Bangladeshi citizens, citing staff shortages and security concerns. This move strained bilateral relations, especially following the political transition in Bangladesh that saw the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus replace former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In response, China offered medical visas and increased investments in Bangladesh, indicating a shift in regional alliances. (Reuters)

Security and Humanitarian Affairs

Arrest of ARSA Commander

Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested Ataullah Abu Ammar Jununi, the commander of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), in Narayanganj near Dhaka. Jununi was charged with illegal entry, sabotage, and terrorist activities. Alongside him, five other individuals linked to ARSA were apprehended, and significant amounts of cash were seized. This operation marked a crucial step in Bangladesh's efforts to address security concerns related to Rohingya insurgent activities. (Associated Press)

UN Appeals for Rohingya Refugee Aid

United Nations agencies issued a joint appeal for \$934.5 million to support 1.48 million individuals in Bangladesh, including Rohingya refugees and host communities. The appeal highlighted the severe consequences of funding shortages, emphasizing the need for sustained international assistance to provide essential services such as food and education. (Reuters)

Reduction in Rohingya Refugee Rations

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) reduced monthly food rations for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar from \$12.50 to \$12 due to funding shortages. This slight reduction narrowly avoided a more significant cut, which could have exacerbated malnutrition among the refugee population. The U.S. pledged \$73 million to help bridge the funding gap in the short term. (Reuters)

U.S. Provides Financial Aid for Rohingya Refugees

The United States confirmed a \$73 million financial aid package for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh through the United Nations' food agency. This assistance aims to prevent cuts to essential food rations and was met with relief by the refugee community, especially ahead of Eid al-Fitr celebrations. Since 2017, the U.S. has contributed nearly \$2.4 billion in aid, underscoring its role as the largest donor for Rohingya assistance. (Associated Press)

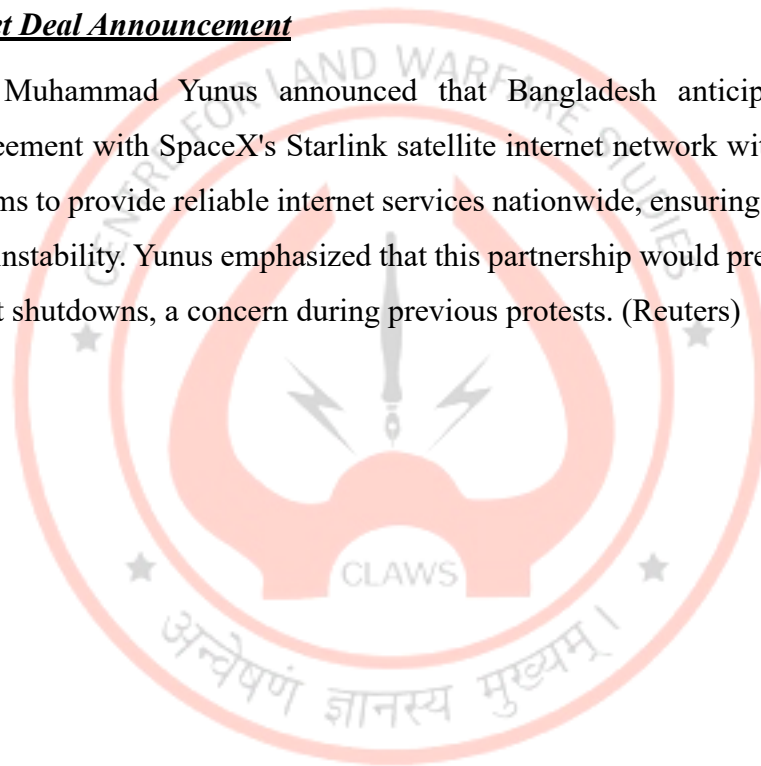
Economic and Technological Developments

China Considers Lowering Loan Interest Rates

During Muhammad Yunus's visit to China, President Xi Jinping expressed willingness to consider reducing interest rates on Chinese loans to Bangladesh. The discussions also covered enhancing Chinese investment in Bangladesh, relocating Chinese manufacturing firms, and initiating negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement. Additionally, both countries signed an economic and technical cooperation agreement and eight cultural exchange memorandums. (Reuters)

Starlink Internet Deal Announcement

Interim leader Muhammad Yunus announced that Bangladesh anticipates finalizing a commercial agreement with SpaceX's Starlink satellite internet network within three months. The initiative aims to provide reliable internet services nationwide, ensuring connectivity even during political instability. Yunus emphasized that this partnership would prevent government-imposed internet shutdowns, a concern during previous protests. (Reuters)



About the Author

Anjali Manhas is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), where she specializes in Defence and Strategic Studies with a focus on South Asian geopolitics. She completed her Master's in Defence and Strategic Studies from Rashtriya Raksha University, where she developed a strong foundation in security, international relations, and strategic analysis. Anjali's current research centers on Bangladesh, examining its security dynamics, regional relationships, and strategic posture in South Asia. Her work aims to contribute to policy development and strategic insights for enhancing regional stability and security. With a keen interest in defence and strategic affairs, Anjali is committed to advancing knowledge and fostering a deeper understanding of South Asian security issues.



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