

# CLAWS Newsletter



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by Anjali Manhas

## Political Developments

- Bangladesh Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman rejected speculations about a state of emergency or martial law in the country following the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, amid major protests. During an "Officer's Address" at Dhaka Cantonment, he warned against misinformation and urged the army to remain focused on supporting national stability. His remarks came in response to media reports, particularly from India, suggesting a possible military coup or emergency declaration. The Bangladesh Army dismissed these claims as baseless and criticized the Indian media for spreading unfounded rumours. (Strat News Global)
- Senior Bangladesh Army officers expressed their desire to return to barracks following general elections expected by December, emphasizing the restoration of democracy. During an Officers' Address with Army Chief General Waker-uz-Zaman on 24 March at Dhaka Cantonment, they defended the military against accusations of political interference and highlighted its role as a symbol of national unity. The army chief urged professionalism, calm, and patience amid tensions, warning against reacting to provocations and misinformation. He reiterated his commitment to stabilizing the country and holding free and fair elections within the previously suggested 12–18 month timeline. (The Business Standard)
- In April 2025, the Bangladesh government reinstated the phrase "except Israel" on its passports, reversing a 2021 decision to remove it in an effort to align with international standards. Despite the earlier removal, the travel ban to Israel for Bangladeshi passport holders had remained in place. The directive to restore the phrase was issued by the Security Services Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs on 7 April and addressed to the Department of Immigration and Passports. (The Business Standard)
- Exiled journalist Sumi Khan accused Muhammad Yunus' interim government in Bangladesh of worsening press repression after Sheikh Hasina's removal. Despite promises of reform, censorship, media shutdowns, and surveillance reportedly increased. Critics say the new regime continued Hasina-era suppression, while international groups warned that press freedom in Bangladesh was nearing collapse. (Northeast News)

## Military & Security

- The Bangladesh Army intensified its operations in Dhaka following mass protests by Islamic groups condemning Israeli actions in Palestine and violence against Muslims in India. Anticipating unrest, joint forces—including the army, police, and BGB—boosted security with increased patrols, checkpoints, and surveillance in key areas such as Baitul Mukarram Mosque, Rampura, and Gulshan. Influencer Pinaki Bhattacharya escalated tensions by launching a social media campaign against the Army Chief, accusing him of Indian influence. In response, the army restricted troop movements and the Chief of Army Staff convened a meeting with divisional commanders to assess the situation and plan countermeasures. (India Today)
- On April 7, 2025, Russian Deputy Defence Minister, Col. Gen. Alexander Fomin and Bangladeshi Chief of Army Staff Gen. Waker-Uz-Zaman held a meeting in Moscow during the latter's visit to Russia. They discussed future military cooperation and expressed a mutual commitment to strengthening the friendly relations between the armies and peoples of Russia and Bangladesh. The meeting took place in a warm and friendly atmosphere. (TASS)
- Three Russian warships—Rezkiy, Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov, and Pechenga—visited Chittagong Port in Bangladesh shortly after Bangladesh Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman's trip to Moscow. During his visit, Zaman met with Russian civilian and military leaders and toured arms manufacturing facilities. The visit included ceremonial events, tours of naval facilities, and interactions with navy personnel and students. The goodwill visit aimed to enhance bilateral ties and professional cooperation between the two navies. (First Post)
- Amid rising tensions with China and Bangladesh, India deployed its S-400 air defence system and Rafale fighter jets to the strategically important Siliguri Corridor. The decision followed increased air manoeuvres by China and Bangladesh near the corridor, which connects mainland India to its north-eastern region. This move coincided with the diplomatic shift of Bangladesh's caretaker government under Mohammad Yunus towards China and Pakistan. India also reinforced the area with BrahMos missiles, a multi-tier air defence system, and drone restrictions to protect the sensitive region. (Defence Security Asia)



## International Relations

- On April 4, 2025, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus for the first time since the 2024 uprising that ousted pro-India Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The meeting took place in Bangkok on the side-lines of a regional summit. Both leaders described the talks as constructive and aimed at rebuilding ties, which had deteriorated after Yunus assumed power and moved closer to China and Pakistan. Modi emphasized the importance of a stable and inclusive Bangladesh, while also raising concerns about minority rights. Yunus, in turn, criticized Hasina's inflammatory remarks from exile in India. The two also briefly discussed Bangladesh's pending extradition request for Hasina. (Aljazeera)
- India studied reports about a potential Chinese plan to build an airfield in Bangladesh's Lalmonirhat district, which was seen as a security concern, particularly for the sensitive Chicken's Neck area in West Bengal. The proposed airfield may have been discussed during the Bangladesh interim government's chief adviser Md Yunus's visit to China, although it was not officially confirmed. Lalmonirhat's proximity to key Indian districts raised strategic alarms, as no Chinese military aircraft had been stationed in the region before. In a separate development, Pakistani foreign minister Ishaq Dar and foreign secretary Amna Baloch planned visits to Bangladesh—marking the first ministerial-level trip from Pakistan to Dhaka since 2012—with expectations of signing several MoUs. (The Economic Times)
- On April 7, 2025, Philippine Ambassador Nina P. Cainglet met with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus in Dhaka. They discussed ways to strengthen bilateral ties between the Philippines and Bangladesh, focusing on trade, agriculture, and education. Ambassador Cainglet also expressed full support for Bangladesh's Interim Government on behalf of President Bongbong Marcos. (X Post by @ChiefAdviserGoB)
- On April 13, 2025, Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen reaffirmed China's commitment to strengthening ties with Bangladesh during a seminar at North South University. He described Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' recent visit to China as a symbolic and substantive milestone in Sino-Bangladeshi relations. The seminar, attended by diplomats, scholars, and officials including National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman, highlighted the visit's positive impact on cooperation in areas like education, healthcare, and people-to-people engagement. Speakers noted that the visit energized bilateral efforts toward

achieving Sustainable Development Goals and deepened the strategic partnership between the two countries. (Bangladesh First)

- On 14 April 2025, Bangladesh and Singapore held the Fourth Foreign Office Consultations in Singapore, where both countries reaffirmed their commitment to finalising a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by 2026. They discussed expanding cooperation in areas such as trade, energy, tourism, digital economy, agriculture, and human resource development. The Bangladeshi delegation, led by Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin, also pushed for increased Singaporean investment and support for initiatives like a Waste-to-Energy plant. Additionally, Bangladesh expressed interest in joining ASEAN trade frameworks and appreciated Singapore's support in becoming a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. (The Business Standard)
- Nicole Ann Chulick and Andrew R Herrup, deputy assistant secretaries from the US Department of State, visited Dhaka for a three-day trip, marking the first delegation from the Trump administration to Bangladesh. Their visit focused on various bilateral issues, including reforms in Bangladesh, the US-imposed reciprocal tariffs, US assistance in the Rohingya crisis, and the situation in Myanmar. During their stay, Chulick met with political leaders, including those from BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, as well as civil society representatives. Herrup's visit mainly addressed the Myanmar crisis, including drug trafficking, illegal arms trade, and the Rohingya issue. (Prothomalo)

## **Trade & Economy**

- Bangladesh, the world's second-largest ready-made garment exporter, offered to purchase US farm products like cotton duty-free to avoid reciprocal tariffs from the US. In a letter to then-President Donald Trump, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus requested a three-month delay in imposing the tariffs on Bangladeshi exports and proposed initiatives like launching Elon Musk's Starlink in Bangladesh and opening advanced tech sectors to US firms. The country faced a 37% reciprocal tariff that hit its textile sector hard. Yunus also highlighted plans to set up a bonded warehouse for US cotton, reduce tariffs on key US exports, and remove non-tariff barriers to boost trade ties. (The Indian Express)
- In April 2025, Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus wrote to U.S. President Donald Trump, requesting a three-month delay on a 37% tariff on Bangladeshi imports. Yunus highlighted Bangladesh's recent efforts to increase U.S. imports, including a deal to

buy U.S. liquefied natural gas and plans to import more American agricultural goods. He also cited trade reforms and the approval of Elon Musk's Starlink network as signals of openness to U.S. investment. The move came as Bangladeshi exporters, especially in the garment sector, prepared for the tariff's impact. (Reuters)

- India withdrew the transshipment facility for Bangladesh's export cargoes to third countries via its land borders, a decision that disrupted Bangladesh's readymade garment exports. The move, announced by India's customs department on April 7, 2025, came due to delays and higher costs hindering India's own exports and creating backlogs. The withdrawal impacted trade with neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar. Bangladesh's garment sector, the country's largest export, was less affected as it prioritized direct shipping, but the decision hampered regional trade potential. The development followed the imposition of high U.S. tariffs on Bangladeshi goods and strained trade relations between the two neighbouring nations. Some experts argued the move might violate World Trade Organization rules. (Reuters)
- The Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025 was held in Dhaka, beginning on April 7, with the aim of promoting foreign direct investment by showcasing real opportunities across various sectors. Organized by the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), the four-day event brought together over 550 top-level delegates from more than 50 countries. Key international figures, including representatives from the UK, US, China, South Korea, and India, participated. The summit featured site visits to economic zones, breakout sessions on digital economy, textiles, agriculture, and healthcare, and included matchmaking sessions and roundtable discussions. Professor Muhammad Yunus served as the chief guest on April 10. Notably, an agreement with NASA was signed during the summit, and several investors were recognized for their contributions. (Dhaka Tribune)
- On April 10, Pakistan's Engro Holdings CEO Abdul Samad Dawood met Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus in Dhaka to explore investment in Bangladesh's telecom and energy sectors. Dawood praised the BIDA Summit, while Yunus welcomed the interest and encouraged future collaboration. (X Post by @ChiefAdviserGoB)

## **Technology & Innovation**

- Elon Musk's Starlink received a commercial licence to operate in Bangladesh on March 28, 2025. The service began trial operations by powering the livestream of the Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025 in Dhaka, which started on April 7. Starlink awaited a Non-Geostationary Satellite Orbit (NGSO) licence for full rollout. The move was part of Bangladesh's efforts to modernise its digital infrastructure, especially in remote areas. This development came amid rising trade tensions with the US, including increased tariffs on Bangladeshi cotton, and coincided with President Donald Trump's visit to Dhaka. (Business Today)
- On April 8, 2025, Bangladesh became the 54th nation to sign the Artemis Accords, committing to the safe, transparent, and peaceful exploration of space. The signing took place in Dhaka, with Bangladesh's Secretary of Defence Ashraf Uddin representing the country. NASA's acting Administrator Janet Petro praised the move, highlighting Bangladesh's growing role in space exploration. The Artemis Accords, established in 2020, are a set of principles aimed at guiding responsible behaviour in space, and have now been adopted by over 50 countries. (NASA)

## **Human Rights & Social Issues**

- On April 7, 2025, university students across Bangladesh participated in a global strike in solidarity with the people of Gaza. The strike aimed to protest the ongoing violence in Gaza, specifically Israeli military actions that had resulted in a significant death toll. Students from various universities, including Dhaka University, BRAC University, and Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology, declared their support for the movement by boycotting academic activities. Several student organizations, including the Bangladesh Chhatri Union and the Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Chhatri Dal, expressed solidarity with the strike, condemning Israeli aggression and calling for an immediate ceasefire. The strike was part of a global effort to demand justice for Palestinians and to protest the Israeli military's actions in Gaza. (The Daily Star)
- In the past, the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, who fled persecution and a brutal crackdown by Myanmar's army, depended heavily on humanitarian aid, primarily from the United States. However, U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to freeze foreign aid threatened to reduce this support, potentially leaving over 1 million refugees without

enough food or resources. The U.N. World Food Program warned that, without additional funding, it would have to cut food rations in Cox's Bazar, the area where the refugees lived, from \$12.50 to \$6 per month. U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres criticized the reduction in aid and urged continued international support. Refugees like Mahabub Alam expressed fear that the cuts would make survival impossible, especially as conditions in the camps were already dire, with many children suffering from malnutrition. The potential reduction in aid raised concerns about increased unrest and insecurity within the camps. (Associate Press)





## 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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