

# CLAWS Newsletter



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by Anjali Manhas

## INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

- 1. BNP Welcomes New Student-Led Party, Calls for Democratic Restoration:** Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir welcomed the formation of a new student-led political party, urging them to avoid conflicts. Speaking at a Doa Mahfil for Khaleda Zia in Uttara, he criticized the interim government, emphasizing the need for democratic restoration and fair elections. BNP leaders also attended the event (BBS News, Feb 01).
- 2. Injured protesters from the mass uprising in July of the previous year blocked the Shishu Mela intersection in Dhaka's Shyamoli on February 2, 2025.** These protesters, part of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, were demanding improved medical care, rehabilitation, and compensation. The blockade disrupted traffic in the area. Members of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement in Gazipur said that most of the injured were admitted to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical ( The Financial Express, Feb 02).
- 3. The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee have announced plans to launch a new moderate political party this month, following a week-long campaign titled *Apnar Chokhe Natun Bangladesh*.** The initiative aims to collect one lakh public opinions on the party's name, symbol, and vision. Movement convener Hasnat Abdullah emphasized that despite the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government, elements of the autocratic system remain. The new party seeks to institutionalize democracy and social justice, representing all citizens beyond ideological divisions. Leaders hope this consultative approach will shape a reformed political future for Bangladesh (BSS News, Feb 05).
- 4. Protests Erupt in Bangladesh as Hasina's Family Home Demolished:** Thousands of protesters in Bangladesh demolished Sheikh Hasina's family home, symbolizing their anger at her alleged authoritarian rule. Hasina, exiled in India, condemned the attack and accused the interim government of taking power unconstitutionally. Led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, the government seeks her extradition amid unrest and corruption allegations (The Associated Press, Feb 06).
- 5. Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader emphasized the need for "smart workers" over leaders to build a smart Bangladesh at the 75th anniversary celebration of Bangladesh Chhatra League at Dhaka University.** During his speech, the overcrowded stage collapsed, leaving several injured, though Quader remained unharmed. He urged Chhatra League to form committees swiftly ahead of the national elections. The event, led by Chhatra League leaders, concluded with a cultural program and a rally to Dhanmondi-32 (The Business Standard, Feb 06).

6. The interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, has appealed for peace and urged citizens to stop attacking properties of Hasina's family and Awami League leaders. Yunus's office issued a statement calling on citizens to restore complete law and order and ensure no further attacks occur on properties associated with Hasina and her supporters. The government warned that strict actions would be taken against anyone attempting to destabilize the country through provocative activities. The government has also expressed its commitment to protecting citizens and their property (Reuters, Feb 07).
7. Protest and Highway Blockade in Kushtia Over Gazipur Attacks: In response to attacks on Anti-Discrimination Student Movement leaders in Gazipur, activists staged a torch procession and blocked the Kushtia-Ishurdi highway. Chanting slogans against the Awami League and its affiliates, they demanded justice and the arrest of those responsible. Movement leaders warned of further action if their demands were unmet. Police officials engaged with the protesters, assuring an investigation. The blockade caused significant traffic disruption before demonstrators dispersed, apologizing for the inconvenience (Dhaka Tribune, Feb 09).
8. Bangladesh's "Operation Devil Hunt" Cracks Down on Unrest: Bangladesh's interim government launched "Operation Devil Hunt" to curb nationwide unrest, arresting 1,308 individuals. Led by joint security forces, the crackdown targets those destabilizing the country. A command center has been set up for rapid response. Former PM Sheikh Hasina remains in exile amid charges of crimes against humanity (National Herald, Feb 10).
9. Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad Yunus announced that Bangladesh's elections could take place in December after implementing key reforms. Speaking at the World Government Summit, he emphasized restoring law and order and rebuilding institutions. He revealed that 15 reform commissions have submitted recommendations, which will be discussed with political parties. Dr. Yunus highlighted economic challenges, citing \$16 billion stolen from banks and \$17 billion smuggled annually. He assured global support for rebuilding efforts and pledged to step down once reforms are complete (Dhaka Tribune, Feb 13).
10. The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami are increasingly at odds over election timing and proportional representation, signaling a strained relationship. While Jamaat insists on electoral reforms before national polls, BNP rejects proportional representation and demands swift elections to restore stability. The divide widened after Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus hinted at a December 2024 election. Jamaat, unregistered with the EC, continues to seek recognition, but BNP remains firm on prioritizing national polls over local elections (The Daily Star, Feb 14).

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

- 11.** On February 2, 2025, Ms. IKUINA Akiko, Japan's Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, met with Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Chief Advisor of Bangladesh's Interim Government. She reaffirmed Japan's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties under the "Strategic Partnership" and supporting Bangladesh's development. She also highlighted Japan's growing business presence and sought cooperation on security for Japanese nationals. Dr. Yunus expressed gratitude for Japan's support and emphasized fostering closer cooperation (Ministry of foreign Affairs of Japan, Feb 02).
- 12.** US-funded projects in Bangladesh face uncertainty after a Trump administration order on Jan 20, 2025, mandating a 90-day review. This could halt projects, risking thousands of jobs amid Bangladesh's economic struggles, political transition, and climate disasters. The US disbursed \$450M last year for 96 projects, but cuts could impact health, climate, and LGBTQ rights. Over 1,000 icddr,b staff have already been laid off. Experts warn the freeze may push Bangladesh closer to China (The Daily Star, Feb 03).
- 13.** Bangladesh received over \$2 billion in remittances in January for the sixth consecutive month, thanks to a disruption in the flow of money through informal channels following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government last August amidst a student uprising (The Daily Star, Feb 03).
- 14.** Trade connectivity and economic engagement between India and Bangladesh are expected to strengthen ties between the two nations. India's High Commissioner Pranay Verma highlighted the importance of the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector in Bangladesh's socio-economic development and in promoting closer supply/value chain linkages between India and Bangladesh (Tribune India, Feb 04).
- 15.** Chief Adviser Prof. Muhammad Yunus has urged Canada to relocate its manufacturing units to Bangladesh, leveraging the country's young workforce. In a meeting with Canadian Minister of International Development Ahmed Hussen, discussions covered trade expansion through FIPA, student visa processes, and recovering illicit funds stashed in Canada. Hussen assured support, emphasizing Canada's stance against corrupt money. They also addressed Bangladesh's reforms, the upcoming election, and the Rohingya crisis (BSS News, Feb 10).
- 16.** Ireland has pledged full support for Bangladesh's Interim Government and its reform agenda to restore democracy, Irish Ambassador Kevin Kelly stated during a meeting with Chief Adviser Prof. Muhammad Yunus in Dhaka. Kelly, based in New Delhi, expressed Ireland's interest in strengthening trade ties and sending a team to assist in the democratic transition.

They also discussed regional politics, the Good Friday Agreement, and the Rohingya crisis, with Ireland reaffirming its commitment to supporting Rohingya refugees (BSS News, Feb 11).

17. Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain and Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar are expected to meet on the side-lines of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference in Muscat, Oman, on February 16-17. This will be their second meeting since Bangladesh's interim government was formed last year. The conference, organized by the India Foundation and Oman's Foreign Ministry, will see participation from 27 foreign ministers and delegations from 45 countries, aligning with Oman's Vision 2040 for regional cooperation and maritime partnerships (Dhaka Tribune, Feb 13).
18. Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus arrived in Dubai on Wednesday to participate in the World Governments Summit (WGS). He was welcomed by UAE Minister of Sports, Dr. Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi, who expressed gratitude for his presence and highlighted the summit's global significance. They discussed potential collaborations in sports and culture between the two nations. Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain, Bangladesh Ambassador Tareq Ahmed, and UAE Ambassador Abdulla Ali Khaseif AlHamoudi also attended the meeting (BSS News, Feb 13).
19. Italy's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Maria Tripodi, will visit Bangladesh from February 18 to 20, marking the first Italian ministerial visit in eight years. Discussions will focus on migration issues, trade, industrial cooperation, and cultural exchanges. She is set to meet key officials, including the Chief Adviser and Foreign Affairs Adviser. This visit also marks the first from an EU nation since Bangladesh's interim government took office (BSS News, Feb 13).
20. The 24th North Indian Ocean Hydrographic Commission (NIOHC) meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from February 11 to 13. A Bangladesh Navy delegation, led by Rear Admiral Mohammad Musa, attended alongside member nations, associate members, and observers. Discussions focused on hydrographic advancements, regional cooperation, and maritime security. On the final day, Bangladesh Navy was unanimously elected as NIOHC Chairman for 2025-2027, marking a significant milestone in strengthening regional hydrographic policies and enhancing Bangladesh's global standing (The Financial Express, Feb 13).
21. During a White House meeting, US President Donald Trump denied allegations of US deep state involvement in Bangladesh's recent regime change, leaving the issue for Indian PM Narendra Modi, who remained silent. The leaders focused on trade and defense, with India

set to import more US oil and gas and acquire F-35 jets. Trump emphasized increasing military sales, while Modi aimed to double US-India trade by 2030. Human rights concerns were notably absent from discussions (The Business Standard, Feb 14).

22. Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus wrapped up his visit to the UAE after attending the World Governments Summit in Dubai. He held key meetings with UAE ministers, discussing trade, investment, and lifting visa restrictions on Bangladeshi nationals. He invited Emirati firms to invest in Bangladesh, proposing an exclusive industrial park. The UAE trade minister expressed interest in making Bangladesh a halal manufacturing hub and plans to lead a delegation soon (BSS News, Feb 14).
23. Tensions along the Naf River have intensified after Myanmar's Arakan Army seized a timber-laden Teknaf-bound trawler on February 10 near Shah Porir Dwip. The rebel group also abducted four Bangladeshi fishermen, whose families remain in distress. While negotiations are ongoing for the trawler's release, no updates have emerged about the fishermen. Earlier, the Arakan Army had seized three cargo boats in January. Authorities are aware of the situation and working towards a resolution.

### **ECONOMIC AND SECURITY ISSUES**

24. Amar Ekushey Book Fair 2025: The Amar Ekushey Book Fair 2025 commenced on February 1, with Yunus inaugurating the event at 3 PM. With 708 publishers, 37 pavilions, and 130 little magazines, the fair will offer discounted books, cultural programs, and seminars. The layout has been adjusted due to the metro rail station, and security includes 300+ CCTV cameras. A plastic-free initiative will promote sustainability. The fair runs daily from 3 PM – 9 PM (extended hours on holidays) (Dhaka Tribune, Feb 01).
25. Bangladesh's economy is facing challenges, with GDP growth between July and December 2024 at less than 2 percent, and foreign direct investment falling by 71 percent in the three months after Hasina's ouster (Foreign Policy, Feb 04).
26. Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed stated that inflation is expected to decline to a tolerable level within the next three months (The Daily Star, Feb 04).
27. Bangladesh's merchandise-export earnings posted an 11.68-percent growth to US\$28.97 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year (The Financial Express, Feb 04).

## **SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

28. The Global Network Initiative (GNI) has raised concerns over Bangladesh's draft Cyber Security Ordinance, 2025, and Personal Data Protection Ordinance, 2025, citing a lack of transparency and inclusion. The proposed laws grant excessive executive power, broad investigatory authority to police, and disproportionate control to regulatory bodies over user data and content. GNI warns that without transparent consultations, these measures could exacerbate executive overreach, threatening freedom of expression and privacy in Bangladesh (Global Network Initiative, Feb 03).
29. A UN Human Rights Office report reveals that Bangladesh's former government, security forces, and Awami League-linked groups engaged in systematic human rights violations during the 2024 student protests. An estimated 1,400 people were killed, including children, with widespread reports of extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary arrests. Protesters, women, and minorities faced targeted violence, while security forces obstructed medical aid and concealed evidence. Retaliatory attacks also occurred as the government lost control. The UN urges criminal investigations, security reforms, and justice measures to prevent future abuses, emphasizing truth and accountability for national healing (UN Human Rights, Feb 12).
30. Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry has expressed gratitude to the UN Human Rights Office's Fact-Finding Team for its detailed report on human rights violations during the July-August 2024 student-led uprising. The report, based on forensic analysis and testimonies, confirms that around 1,400 people were killed, with security forces implicated in serious crimes. The investigation, conducted at the invitation of Chief Adviser Dr. Mohammad Yunus, concludes these violations amount to crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute (BSS News, Feb 13).

## **TECHNOLOGY**

31. Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus held a virtual discussion with Elon Musk to explore Starlink's expansion in Bangladesh. They emphasized its potential to bridge the digital divide, empower rural women, and boost entrepreneurship. Musk praised the Grameen Bank model and expressed interest in visiting Bangladesh for Starlink's launch. This collaboration aims to enhance education, healthcare, and economic growth, integrating Bangladesh into

the global digital economy with high-speed, low-cost internet connectivity (Dhaka Tribune, Feb 14).

### **ENVIRONMENT**

32. Environmental activists raised alarms over the growing threats to the Sundarbans at a rally in Mongla, marking Sundarbans Day. Organised by multiple environmental groups, the event highlighted the impact of climate change and unregulated industries, particularly the Rampal Power Plant, on the region's biodiversity and forest-dependent communities. Speakers urged urgent action, citing unchecked pollution, deforestation, and corruption as key issues endangering the world's largest mangrove forest (The Daily Star, Feb 14).



## 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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