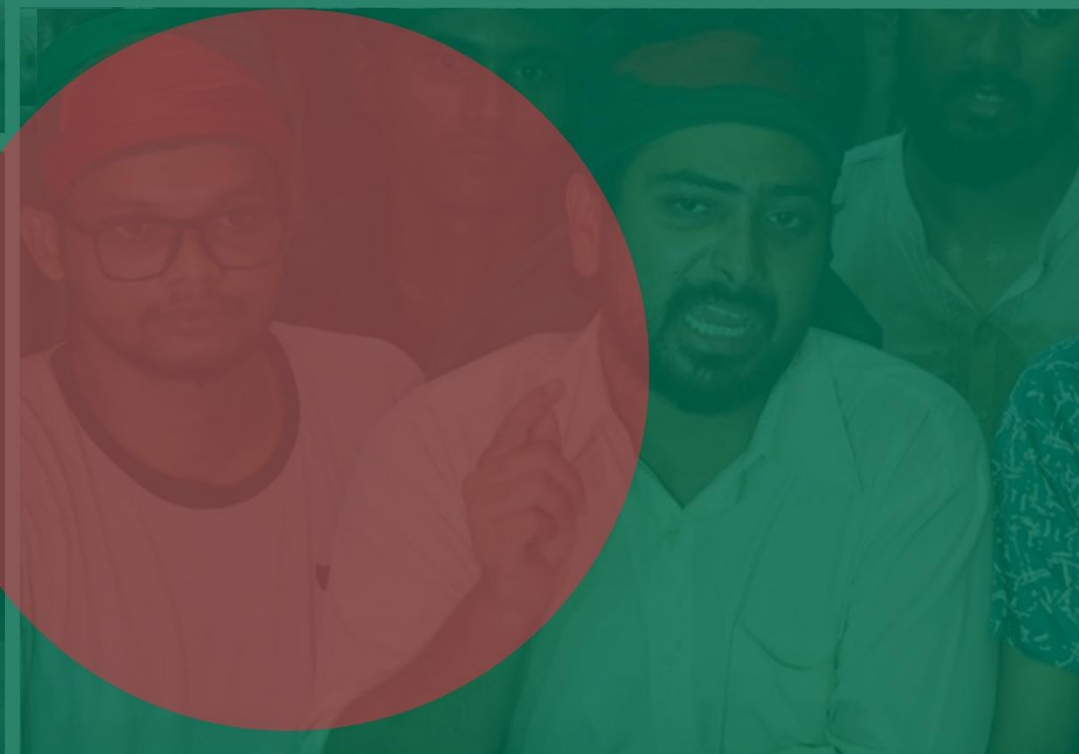
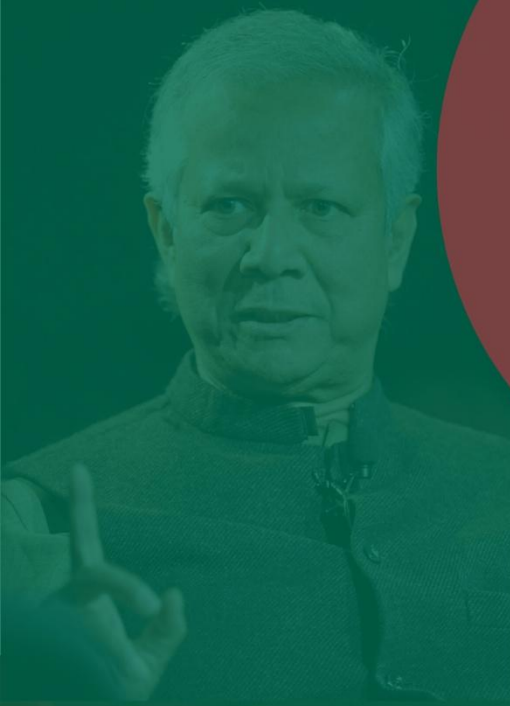


# CLAWS Newsletter



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by Anjali Manhas

## **Bangladesh Briefing – Issue no 18**

### **Political Developments**

#### **Bangladesh Court Convicts Sheikh Hasina and UK Labour MP Tulip Siddiq in Dhaka Land Corruption Case ([The Guardian](#)) , ([AP News](#))**

A Bangladeshi court has convicted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her British niece, Labour MP Tulip Siddiq, in a corruption case linked to a government land project in Dhaka. Hasina was sentenced to five years in prison, while Siddiq received a two-year sentence in absentia for allegedly using her influence to help family members obtain land; Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana was sentenced to seven years and identified as the main beneficiary. All three were fined and the land allocation was cancelled. Siddiq rejected the verdict as a “farce,” denied being a Bangladeshi citizen, and said she was denied due process, a position echoed by the UK Labour Party, which does not recognise the judgment. The ruling is part of a wider series of prosecutions launched by Bangladesh's interim government following Hasina's ouster in 2024, with Hasina already convicted in multiple corruption and human rights cases and currently living in exile in India.

#### **BNP Signals Pushback Against NEIR, Casting Identity Regulation as a Threat to Electoral Democracy ([Daily Sun](#))**

On 7 December, senior BNP leader Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury stated that if the BNP returns to power, it would review and potentially roll back the proposed National Equipment Identity Register (NEIR) policy, signalling resistance to state-led identity and registration frameworks. Opposition parties have increasingly warned that such identity-related laws could be misused for surveillance, voter suppression, or administrative exclusion, especially ahead of national elections. This rhetoric indicates that identity regulation, voter registration, and electoral transparency are emerging as major political flashpoints, with the opposition framing these policies as threats to democratic participation and civil liberties.

#### **Dhaka Tribunal Issues Arrest Warrant Against Sajeeb Wazed ([The Washington Post](#))**

A special tribunal in Dhaka has issued an arrest warrant against Sajeeb Wazed, son of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, for alleged crimes linked to the 2024 mass protests. Wazed is

reportedly residing in the United States, raising potential diplomatic and legal challenges for Bangladesh, particularly in relation to extradition, mutual legal assistance, and judicial cooperation with countries hosting political exiles. The case adds a new international dimension to ongoing accountability proceedings against figures associated with the former Awami League leadership.

### **Bangladesh Politics on Edge as Khaleda Zia's Health Worsens and Tarique Rahman's Return (Prothom Alo)**

Bangladesh's political environment has been further sensitised by reports that BNP chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia is in critical condition and on ventilator support in Dhaka. Her son and BNP's acting chairman, Tarique Rahman, is expected to return to Bangladesh on 25 December 2025, a development carrying significant political weight. The situation highlights the intersection of humanitarian concerns and high-stakes opposition politics at a time of heightened political uncertainty and transition.

### **BNP Warns of '1971-Era Forces' Re-emerging Ahead of Elections, Calls for Democratic Unity (Prothom Alo)**

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir warned against trusting forces that opposed Bangladesh's independence in 1971, accusing them of rebranding themselves to gain political influence ahead of the upcoming elections. Speaking at an event marking Martyred Intellectuals Day, he said these groups are again misleading people in the name of religion, echoing tactics used during the Liberation War. Fakhrul framed the current political moment as a binary contest between forces defending Bangladesh's independence, sovereignty, and liberal democracy, and regressive elements seeking to undermine these foundations. He called for national unity to build a democratic and liberal Bangladesh, aligned with the political vision of Ziaur Rahman, Khaleda Zia, and Tarique Rahman, while warning that although "fascism has been driven out," no new form of authoritarianism should be allowed to emerge.

### **India Rejects Bangladesh's Allegations, Reaffirms Commitment to Sovereignty and Non-Interference (News on Air) (Dhaka Tribune)**

On 14 December 2025, India formally rejected allegations made by Bangladesh's interim government that Indian territory was being used for activities detrimental to Bangladesh's interests. New Delhi's response came after Dhaka summoned the Indian High Commissioner,



signalling that the issue had escalated into a serious diplomatic exchange rather than a routine clarification. India categorically stated that it has never allowed its soil to be used for hostile political, security, or subversive activities against Bangladesh. New Delhi reiterated its long-standing position of respecting Bangladesh's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and internal political processes, while also underlining its support for free, fair, and inclusive elections in Bangladesh.

### **President Shahabuddin Signals Post-Election Resignation Intent ([Reuters](#))**

Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin has said he intends to step down after the 12 February 2026 elections, citing humiliation and marginalisation by the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government. In an interview with *Reuters*, he said his role had been sidelined, noting the lack of meetings with Yunus for months, the removal of his press office, and the sudden removal of his portraits from Bangladeshi embassies, which he said stifled his voice and sent a destabilising signal. Although the presidency is largely ceremonial, Shahabuddin's position gained significance after the August 2024 uprising that forced Sheikh Hasina to flee and dissolved parliament, leaving him as the last constitutional authority. Elected unopposed in 2023 as an Awami League nominee—now barred from contesting the elections—he said he would remain in office until the polls and allow the next government to decide his future, while maintaining contact with the army chief to reassure against military intervention, highlighting growing institutional strain during Bangladesh's political transition.

### **Tarique Rahman Pledges Rule of Law, Anti-Corruption Drive as Top Priority if BNP Returns to Power ([The Daily Star](#))**

BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman said that if his party is voted to power, its top priority will be restoring the rule of law, ensuring law and order, and curbing corruption, arguing that these are prerequisites for addressing Bangladesh's broader problems. Speaking virtually at a BNP discussion with professionals and noted citizens, he said years of what he described as autocratic rule had normalised corruption and undeserved privileges across society, creating entrenched unhealthy practices that must be reversed. Tarique stressed that firm action to uphold the rule of law would help stabilise the country and enable further reforms, acknowledging that correct decisions are not always popular but are necessary to build a stable, secure, and accountable state capable of meeting public expectations.

## **Foreign Affairs**

### **Bangladesh Trade and Energy Ties with Azerbaijan (Dhaka Tribune)**

Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has called for closer trade, energy and economic cooperation with Azerbaijan following high-level talks in Dhaka with Leyla Aliyeva and Arzu Aliyeva, daughters of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The meeting focused on expanding bilateral engagement beyond diplomacy to include cultural, environmental and people-to-people exchanges, with particular emphasis on environmental protection and humanitarian collaboration. Azerbaijan has indicated plans to open a resident embassy in Dhaka after Bangladesh's upcoming election, a move expected to significantly deepen bilateral relations. The engagement reflects Bangladesh's broader foreign-policy effort to diversify economic and diplomatic partnerships beyond its immediate neighbourhood and strengthen ties with non-traditional partners.

### **Bangladesh Sends Humanitarian Aid to Sri Lanka (Dhaka Tribune)**

On 3 December 2025, Bangladesh dispatched a relief aircraft carrying around 10 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka following severe flooding and cyclone-related damage, signalling Dhaka's intent to project itself as a responsible regional actor in disaster response and humanitarian diplomacy. The move reflects a broader effort to strengthen goodwill and strategic ties with neighbouring countries through non-military engagement.

### **Bangladesh–China–Pakistan Trilateral Push (India Today)**

Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain has stated that it is strategically possible for Dhaka to join a regional grouping with Pakistan that excludes India, following recent signals from Islamabad about a Bangladesh–China–Pakistan trilateral framework. His remarks came days after Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar claimed that such a trilateral arrangement had already begun, with its first official-level meeting held in June 2025 in Kunming, China. The development reflects Bangladesh's accelerating diplomatic and strategic alignment with Pakistan and China since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, marking a departure from Dhaka's earlier balanced foreign policy that maintained close ties with India. Analysts view this emerging framework as part of a broader Chinese-backed effort to reshape

South Asian regional cooperation, potentially as an alternative to the largely dormant SAARC, and as an indicator of China's expanding strategic footprint in the region.

### **Key Defence Updates**

#### **Bangladesh Navy completes “Annual Naval Exercise-2025” with live-fire missile drills (Bangladesh Military Forces)**

On **1 December 2025**, Bangladesh Navy announced that its Annual Naval Exercise 2025 concluded successfully with live-fire missile launches in the Bay of Bengal. The exercise spanned several days and involved a variety of naval assets — frigates, corvettes, offshore patrol vessels, missile-boats, patrol craft, mine-sweepers, as well as maritime patrol aircraft, helicopters and special-forces squads. The drills tested naval warfare tactics, maritime boundary protection, sea-lane security, coastal defence, anti-smuggling and anti-piracy operations — underscoring the Navy's enhanced readiness in maritime and littoral security. The final phase was observed by senior military officials and advisers from the interim government, highlighting the strategic importance of the exercise.

#### **Armed Forces to assume security responsibility for Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) (The CSR Journal)**

The Bangladesh Army is set to assume full responsibility for security at the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) as the country prepares to commission its first nuclear reactor, marking a critical shift in safeguarding strategic infrastructure. The move follows high-level consultations with international nuclear and defence authorities, including engagements with the IAEA in **Vienna** and discussions with the French Defence Ministry in Paris, aimed at strengthening Bangladesh's nuclear security architecture and long-term safeguards. As Reactor-1 nears commissioning, the interim government under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus is prioritising upgrades to the plant's Physical Protection System, transitioning from a specialised security unit supported by law enforcement to direct Army control. Built with Russia's Rosatom and valued at USD 12.65 billion, the RNPP—featuring two VVER-1200 reactors generating 2,400 MW—is Bangladesh's flagship energy project, making enhanced military-led security essential to ensure operational safety, international compliance, and protection against emerging security threats.

### **Bangladesh Signals Strategic Shift in Air Power with Eurofighter Typhoon LoI (Reuters)**

Bangladesh has taken a significant step in modernising its air force by signing a Letter of Intent (LoI) to procure Eurofighter Typhoon multi-role combat aircraft from Italy's Leonardo S.p.A., initiating formal discussions on the potential acquisition. Although the number of jets has not been disclosed, the deal—if finalised—would mark Bangladesh's first major purchase of Western-built fighter aircraft, indicating a clear shift in defence procurement strategy. The move comes amid broader aviation decisions by the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government, including earlier plans to buy Boeing aircraft that left previous Airbus commitments uncertain after Sheikh Hasina's ouster. With defence analysts estimating the Bangladesh Air Force operates around 200 aircraft, including nearly 50 fighters, the prospective induction of Eurofighter Typhoons would significantly enhance combat capability while reflecting Dhaka's intent to diversify suppliers, modernise its air fleet, and recalibrate strategic partnerships during a period of political transition.

### **Bangladeshi Peacekeepers Killed in Sudan Drone Attack (ALJAZEERA)**

A drone strike on a UN peacekeeping logistics base in Kadugli, Sudan, killed six Bangladeshi peacekeepers and injured eight others, all serving with UNISFA. UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the attack as "horrific" and warned that targeting UN peacekeepers may amount to war crimes. The Sudanese army blamed the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), while Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus expressed deep sorrow and pledged support for the victims' families. The incident highlights the growing risks faced by Bangladeshi troops abroad, reinforcing concerns over force protection as Sudan's prolonged civil war continues to destabilise UN operations.

### **Bangladesh–Netherlands Formalise Naval Defence Cooperation (Bangladesh Military Forces)**

Bangladesh and the Netherlands have formalised naval defence cooperation by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at strengthening collaboration in maritime security and naval capacity-building. The agreement focuses on areas such as training, technical cooperation, information exchange, and best practices in maritime operations, reflecting Bangladesh's effort to modernise its navy and enhance Bay of Bengal security. For the Netherlands, the MoU supports broader engagement in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain,

while for Bangladesh it signals continued diversification of defence partnerships beyond traditional allies amid evolving regional and security challenges.

### **Bangladesh–US Bilateral Defence Dialogue (Dhaka Tribune) , (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha)**

The 12th Bangladesh–US Bilateral Defence Dialogue was held in Dhaka from 10–11 December 2025 at the Bangladesh Armed Forces Division, continuing a defence engagement framework in place since 2012. Senior military and civilian officials from both countries participated to review and expand bilateral defence cooperation. The Bangladesh delegation was led by Brigadier General **Muhammad Ali Haider Siddiqui**, Director General (Operations and Planning) of the Armed Forces Division, while the US delegation was headed by Brigadier General **Sarah Roos**. ISPR stated that the dialogue seeks to deepen military cooperation and reinforce broader bilateral relations.

#### **Key Aspects of the Meeting**

- Strategic exchanges on regional stability and shared security challenges.
- Discussions on defence modernisation, technology cooperation, and equipment-related engagement.
- Enhanced coordination on training, professional exchanges, and UN peacekeeping operations.
- Cooperation in disaster response and humanitarian assistance.
- Review of joint drills, inspections, and exercises to improve operational coordination.

### **ISI Using Bangladesh as Covert Terror Launchpad (Swarajya)**

A new assessment cited by *Swarajya* warns that Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is leveraging Bangladeshi territory as a covert launchpad to revive terror networks targeting India, particularly in the Northeast and West Bengal. The report alleges that Pakistan-backed groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) are using safe passage, support structures, and radicalisation hubs inside Bangladesh to facilitate cross-border operations. The analysis highlights the sudden closure of a madrasa near Dhaka—previously flagged for radicalisation—as a key red flag, suggesting an attempt to erase evidence following arrests linked to recent terror investigations in India. According to the report, this points to active ISI-



linked networks exploiting political distraction in Bangladesh, with experts warning that Dhaka risks long-term national security consequences if its territory is allowed to be used for such activities.

### **Rohingya & Border Security Updates**

Use of children in cross-border smuggling: Indian border security agencies reported the use of minors in high-value smuggling operations along the Indo-Bangladesh border. In one notable case, a 12-year-old boy was caught smuggling gold worth ₹1.64 crore, highlighting the growing exploitation of children by transnational smuggling networks. **(Hindustan Times)**

Indian security agencies have busted a cross-border smuggling operation involving the illegal movement of cumin seeds from India into Bangladesh using riverine routes in the Dhubri sector of Assam. Two smugglers were arrested during the operation, highlighting how traffickers are increasingly exploiting porous river borders to bypass land checkpoints. Authorities noted that such smuggling networks often operate under the cover of night and involve local intermediaries familiar with river channels. The incident has prompted heightened surveillance along riverine stretches of the Indo-Bangladesh border, underlining ongoing challenges in countering non-traditional cross-border crimes despite increased border security measures. **(Time of India)**

India and Bangladesh conducted a prisoner exchange, with Bangladesh releasing 47 Indian fishermen and India returning 32 Bangladeshi fishermen, under a 2013 bilateral agreement. The swap took place at the Indian Maritime Border Line under Coast Guard supervision and involved the return of seized fishing trawlers. The exchange highlights ongoing cooperation to manage maritime boundary violations, while also drawing attention to humanitarian concerns following the death of an Indian fisherman in a Bangladeshi prison. **(Times of India)**

Worsening humanitarian conditions in Rohingya camps: Reports indicate severe deterioration in living conditions in Cox's Bazar camps, with thousands of Rohingya families lacking basic necessities such as food, soap, shelter, and healthcare due to sharp reductions in international aid. Infant and child malnutrition is rising rapidly. **(The Guardian)**

Limited food relief under 'Grain from Ukraine' initiative: On 3 December 2025, around 3,000 tonnes of sunflower oil arrived in Bangladesh for distribution in Rohingya camps under

Ukraine's humanitarian programme. While helpful, agencies stress that such shipments offer temporary relief and do not offset broader funding shortfalls. (**UkrAgroConsult**)

Seven Rohingya individuals, including women and children, were detained by security forces at Hilara railway station in Cachar district, Assam, while attempting to illegally enter India with the apparent intention of crossing into Bangladesh. The group had reportedly entered India illegally from Bangladesh months earlier and had been working in Hyderabad before enforcement actions against undocumented migrants prompted them to try to return home. They were intercepted based on specific intelligence, taken into custody for questioning, and face legal proceedings under India's immigration laws. (**Times of India**)

A *Guardian* report highlighted that thousands of Rohingya refugees are attempting dangerous sea journeys from Bangladesh toward Malaysia and beyond, often falling prey to traffickers, violence, extortion and perilous conditions. In 2025 alone, over 600 Rohingya have died or gone missing at sea, with minors especially affected as they flee camp hardships and lack of opportunities. (**The Guardian**)

### **Election Updates**

#### **Announcement of 2026 National Election & Referendum Schedule (**The Daily Star**)**

Bangladesh's Election Commission (EC) formally announced the schedule for the country's 13th National Parliamentary Election and the July Charter referendum, to be held together on 12 February 2026—the first time Bangladesh will conduct twin national polls. Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin made the announcement in a televised address, marking the official start of the electoral process following the 2024 mass uprising.

Under the timeline, nomination submissions close on 29 December 2025, scrutiny will run from 30 December to 4 January, and candidates may withdraw by 20 January. Final candidate lists and symbols will be published on 21 January, with campaigning permitted from 22 January until the morning of 10 February. Polling will take place from 7:30am to 4:30pm, extended by one hour to allow voters to cast ballots for both the parliamentary election and the referendum.

The EC has prepared 42,761 polling centres and 244,739 booths for approximately 127.6 million voters; training of polling officials is underway. Expatriate voters will cast ballots through postal voting after online registration. The announcement formally initiates the

electoral process, shifting Bangladesh into a structured but politically sensitive pre-election phase under the interim government.

### **Operation Devil Hunt Phase-2 Launched Ahead of National Election (Dhaka Tribune)**

The interim government will immediately launch Operation Devil Hunt Phase-2 nationwide to tighten security ahead of the February 2026 national election, focusing on preventing subversive activities and recovering illegal and looted firearms. Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said the move follows concerns over election sabotage, including the recent attack on July movement figure Osman Hadi, which authorities see as an attempt to disrupt the polls. Law enforcement agencies have been ordered to make swift arrests, with the government pledging zero tolerance for violence and a firm commitment to protecting the electoral process and key activists.





## 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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