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Bangladesh: Sheikh Hasina visits the United States of America, United Kingdom and Japan

Priya Gahlot



(Image Source: The Diplomat)

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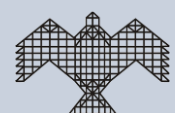
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What happened?

On 25 April, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, started her tri-nation tour to Japan, USA and UK. On the 26 April, she met Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, signed multiple deals on instruments on agriculture, rail, industrial upgrade, ship recycling, customs matters, intellectual properties, defence cooperation, ICT and cyber security cooperation. Four Japanese nationals were also handed Friends of Liberation War honour for their contribution to the liberation war of 1971.

On 29 April, Hasina visited the US, to attend a programme marking 50 years of the Bangladesh-World Bank partnership. Though no official meeting with the US government took place during the US visit, she met top business leaders.

On 04 May, she visited the United Kingdom. On 6 May, Hasina attended the coronation of King Charles III. During the UK visit, she also met other heads of state - Prime ministers of



Gambia, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Uganda, and presidents of Egypt and Rwanda, among others. Though she had no official meeting with Britain's Prime Minister, she interacted with British Prime Ministers Rishi Sunak and King Charles III.

What is the background?

First, Bangladesh's pitch for secular development and addressing human rights concerns. Sheikh Hasina's visit comes after Western countries questioning her government's credibility over human rights violations and the decline of democracy in Bangladesh. In the past, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has faced severe criticism from Western media and institutions over the authoritarian tendencies. The visit to the USA comes after December 2021 sanctions Bangladesh faced from the USA government on top security officials of Bangladesh's elite rapid action battalion over human rights violations, with USA ambassador Peter Haas getting heckled at Dhaka and the Hasina government facing criticism from US media houses made the visit the all more relevant.

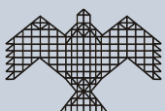
Second, the post-pandemic economic crisis. Bangladesh faced crises at foreign reserves where Bangladesh direly needed support from West-backed institutions like World Bank and IMF. At the same time, Bangladesh has been engaging with China in Belt and Road initiative along with Russia.

Third, upcoming elections the need to get global support. With the general election of Bangladesh taking place in January, these multinational trips bring more credibility for the Hasina government domestically. Hence, despite not being an official bilateral visit, this visit to USA and attendance at 50 years Bangladesh -World Bank programme becomes more significant. Sheikh Hasina's government in the past had faced issues with World Bank; the best example is the Padma Bridge case. In 2012 World Bank pulled out of a \$1.7 Billion loan pledge towards Padma Bridge, citing corruption. Padma Bridge is considered a dream project of the Hasina government, which was later completed using domestic funds and Chinese cooperation to construct the Bridge within the time frame. Hence the attendance of Prime Minister Hasina might help Bangladesh mend ways with World Bank further.

What does it mean?

First, power balancing by developing states in the global south. Current global shifts and power games across the world puts Bangladesh at crossroads; whereas a developing economy, Bangladesh cannot ignore the West while it also needs funding from China and Russia. While in Japan, Prime Minister Hasina took a stand against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, calling it a violation of international law and the UN charter. This statement in Japan comes at a juncture when recently Hasina herself approved a USD 318 million loan repayment in Yuan to a Russian nuclear power developer, in turn bypassing US sanctions on Russia. Her visit to Japan, the USA and the UK appears to be a power-balancing strategy. On the one hand, Bangladesh engages Russia in building a nuclear power plant in Rooppur while also balancing it with vocal criticism in Western countries.

Second, developing economies will prioritise infrastructure investments over ideological divide. Prime Minister Hasina's US visit might not have resulted in something substantial in Bangladesh-US relations, but it did ensure a World Bank pledge to provide a USD 2.25 billion loan for infrastructure projects. Japan is Bangladesh's most prominent developmental partner, further promising support in developmental work and pushing for regional connectivity under the Bay of Bengal Industrial growth corridor. Sheikh Hasina's visit to Japan, the USA and the UK might help her build her image and credibility domestically while



ensuring that Bangladesh balances the Indo-Pacific power politics by leveraging the power on both sides.

Also in the news...

Regional Round-ups

East and Southeast Asia This Week

US-Philippines: Joint patrols in the South China Sea

On 08 May, according to the statement made by the Philippines ambassador to the US, Jose Manuel Romualdez, the Philippines and US are set to begin joint patrols in the South China Sea later this year. The patrols were announced in February, and discussions on the matter are still ongoing. Australia may also join the combined maritime activities, as per the statement. During the recent visit of President Ferdinand Marcos to the US, the Pentagon issued guidelines clarifying the extent of US defence treaty commitments to the Philippines, specifically in relation to attacks in the South China Sea.

Myanmar: Crisis worsens as military carry attacks

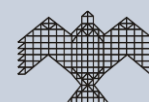
On 06 May, in Myinmu Township, at least 530 houses were set on fire, displacing many residents in Sagaing over the week. Htoke Taw village was raided by approximately 200 junta troops, resulting in the death of one man and injuries to two others. The troops shelled the village when locals attempted to extinguish the flames. Meanwhile, the military regime has imposed flight restrictions on foreigners traveling to specific towns in Myanmar, as criminal gangs based in China and Thailand have flooded the country's border towns, engaging in various criminal activities.

Japan: G-7 finance ministers warn economic uncertainty

On 13 May, the finance ministers from the G-7 group expressed concerns over economic uncertainty due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and inflation surges worldwide at a three-day meeting. The G-7 ministers pledged their support to Ukraine and the fight against Russia's unjustifiable aggression. The ministers called for the diversification of supply chains for critical clean energy products, to safeguard energy security and maintain macroeconomic stability. The Partnership for RISE launched in collaboration with the World Bank, was developed to support low- and middle-income countries to play a bigger role in the midstream and downstream in the supply chains of clean energy products. The meetings were a prelude to the G-7 Leaders' Summit in Hiroshima, where China's assertiveness and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are set as the agenda.

Japan: Public opposes military involvement in Taiwan conflict

On 13 May, The Indian Express reported on a recent opinion poll conducted by Asahi Shimbun daily newspaper, finding that 80 per cent of the 3,000 respondents were concerned that Japan would be dragged into the conflict if China were to attack Taiwan. More than half of the Japanese population believes that Japan should not get involved in any conflict if China invades Taiwan. The Japanese public is divided on what role the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) should play, with 56 per cent saying that the JSDF should only provide rear-echelon support to the US forces. Some analysts argue that Japan should assist Taiwan to maintain its control over the region. Other analysts are firmly opposed to any involvement in combat and prefer a diplomatic solution. They worry that Japan's involvement would lead to a repeat of the atrocities committed during World War II.



South Asia This Week

Islamabad High Court grants bail to Imran Khan

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has been granted bail by the Islamabad High Court in the Al-Qadir Trust case for two weeks and protective bail in three terrorism cases registered against him in Lahore. The court also prohibited authorities from arresting Khan until May 17 in any case registered in Islamabad after May 9. This decision comes a day after the Supreme Court ruled his arrest as "invalid and unlawful". Imran Khan's lawyer argued that the National Accountability Bureau's (NAB) actions were illegal and that the watchdog was "biased". The court accepted Khan's bail plea and instructed the NAB prosecutor general and Khan's lawyers to come prepared at the next hearing. Khan claimed there were threats to his life and that new cases were being registered against him. PTI lawyer Babar Awan claimed that a police team from Lahore had left for Islamabad to arrest Khan in "new cases". The court granted Khan protective bail in the Lahore cases for 11 days against surety bonds worth PKR 50,000 each, directing him to join the investigation.

Pakistan: Prime Minister criticizes judiciary over Imran Khan case

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, presided over a cabinet meeting and accused the judiciary of defending the ex-prime minister leader Imran Khan "like an iron shield". The meeting also saw the proposal of declaring a state of emergency proposed by the Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, rejected by mainstream political parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-F and Balochistan National Party-Mengal. During the meeting, Shehbaz Sharif expressed concern about what he called the "undue facilitation" given to Imran Khan by the Supreme Court when he was under eight-day physical remand in a corruption case. The Prime Minister rejected what he called "double standards of justice" being meted out to Imran Khan in the case and vowed to take every step to ensure the rule of law in the country. He also alleged that the judiciary had protected Imran Khan previously in corruption cases, including the Bus Rapid Transit Project, Billion Tree Tsunami tree plantation, and Malam Jabba development projects.

Middle East and Africa This Week

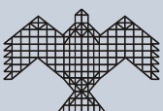
Syria: High-level talks held among Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iran

On 10 May, the foreign ministers of Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iran met in Moscow and carried out high-level talks on the restoration of ties between Ankara and Damascus. Cooperation in fighting terrorism and laying the groundwork for the return of Syrians were among the discussions. Syria's Foreign Minister stated that the government's priority is to remove the presence of all foreign militaries without which no development can be realized. On 10 May, Damascus was formally invited to attend the Arab League summit on 19 May as a sign of normalizing ties. These developments were sped up by the earthquake in Syria and Turkey and the Chinese brokered negotiations.

Syria: Returns to Arab League after 12 years

On 07 May, the Arab League decided to restore Syria's membership after ten years of suspension due to civil war. Following the "Jordanian initiative", Arab states voted for the inclusion of Syria in the League. Syria called for "mutual respect" after its readmission. The devastation caused by the earthquake and Chinese efforts towards restoring ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran accelerated Syria's return to the Arab fold. While numerous opposition groups have criticised the normalisation of ties with Damascus, Arab League considers it as the way forward.

Zimbabwe: Digital currency backed by gold introduced in the country



On 08 May, the Central Bank of Zimbabwe introduced a digital token as a legal tender, backed by gold reserves held by the Central Bank. The currency is said to be a form of electronic money that allows the holders of Zimbabwean currency to exchange it in return for gold-backed tokens. The aim of this introduction is to reduce the volatility of the Zimbabwean currency, which over the past year, declined significantly, with USD 1 now worth approximately 1,000 Zimbabwean dollars, compared to 150 Zimbabwean dollars a year ago. The increased inflation rate has been the scenario in Zimbabwe for the past ten years. President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who assured a middle-income economy by the year 2023, is unable to restore confidence in the local currency yet.

Zambia: Discusses economic ties with France

On 10 May, French President Emmanuel Macron and Zambia President Hakainde Hichilema discussed the restructuring of Zambia's debt and economic diplomacy between countries in France. Hichilema said: "Our continent, Africa, has been lagging. We must do something dramatic to lift Africa. We cannot continue with the old ways. And that's why, in our talks with President Macron, as I said, it was a debt issue, but also for investment, for trade." He added that Zambia was ready for business, and the country has opportunities to offer in sectors including energy, minerals, and agriculture. Further, he stated that he is not anyone's puppet and that he works with other nations to promote mutual interests following the accusation of him being used by Western nations.

South Africa: Supplies Arms to Russia, accusation by US

On 12 May, BBC reported that US ambassador Reuben Brigety accused South Africa of supplying weapons to Russia, claiming that a Russian ship, Lady R, was loaded with ammunition and arms in Cape Town last December, which concerns the country's stated non-aligned stance on the conflict. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's office denied the allegations and said there was no evidence to support the claim. Previously, South Africa abstained from a UN vote condemning the invasion. It also refused to join the US and Europe in imposing sanctions on Russia. South Africa has long-standing ties with Russia because they are members of the BRICS alliance.

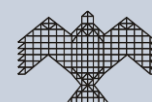
Morocco: Strengthening bilateral ties with Portugal

On 12 May, the 14th Portuguese-Moroccan meeting took place in Lisbon. Moroccan Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch and Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa discussed bilateral relations and signed agreements on cooperation, environment, education, and science. Prime Minister Costa emphasized the significance of the labour mobility agreement.

Europe and the Americas This Week

Germany: Debate on funding refugees

On 09 May, Deutsche Welle reported a debate in Germany between the federal and state governments on increasing financial support for asylum seekers and refugees. This year alone, Germany reported a 78 per cent increase in the influx of asylum seekers as the war in Ukraine persists. Finance Minister Christian Linder calculated that the federal government contributed EUR 29.84 billion last year (2022), and EUR 26.65 billion has been earmarked for this year. It is also paying EUR five billion in social benefits for people who have fled from other countries. The 16 states demand that the federal government increase its contributions as the number of refugees increases, which has decreased in recent years. The federal government does not appear keen on increasing funds; rather, it wants the state governments to take the initiative, as they receive huge shares of federal tax, and some of them have surpluses. The government is also planning to reduce the number of incoming



refugees. Chancellor Olaf Scholz has suggested pushing refugees back to Moldova and Georgia by declaring them safe countries of origin.

Russia: Putin justifies Ukrainian invasion on Victory Day

On 09 May, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed troops fighting in Ukraine during Moscow's Victory Day parade. He justified his invasion of Ukraine and accused "Western globalist elites" of provoking conflicts. Putin said Russia's future rests on soldiers fighting in Ukraine, calling it a "real war" unleashed against Russia. The parade had 3,000 fewer soldiers and less military hardware. The EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said: "Russia had "dramatically failed" in the war," during a news conference in Kyiv, whereas German Chancellor Olaf Scholz urged support for Ukraine.

Turkiye: Homeland Party's presidential candidate withdraws

On 11 May, Homeland Party's presidential candidate, Muharrem Ince, withdrew his candidacy. The withdrawal of Ince is advantageous for the National Alliance coalition under Kemal Kilicdaroglu as Ince was a strong contender. According to Deutsche Welle, Kilicdaroglu was leading in polls but was unable to cross the 50 per cent threshold to win the elections in the first round. Ince's withdrawal could help Kilicdaroglu win in the first round. According to Metropoll, 49 per cent of Ince's support will shift towards Kilicdaroglu while 22 per cent will shift towards Erdogan.

UK: Storm Shadow missiles to Ukraine

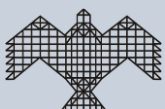
On 11 May, The Guardian reported UK's decision to send Storm Shadow missiles to Kyiv to enhance its much-anticipated counteroffensive that is going on. According to Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, this decision is "a calibrated and proportionate response" to the Russian invasion. These missiles will allow Ukraine to push back Russian forces outside its sovereign territory. Some of the missiles are delivered while the rest are en route to Ukraine, told Wallace. The missile was developed by both UK and France and has a range of about 560 kilometres. According to Politico, the missiles have the capability to strike eastern and southern Ukrainian regions under Russian occupation. The US is supportive of UK's decision and has substantiated it. In a press briefing in Moscow, the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov exhibited Moscow's contrariety toward UK's move and refrained from divulging the details.

Finland: Visit of Lieutenant General Janusz Adamczak

On 02 May, the Director General of the NATO International Military (DGIMS) Lieutenant General Janusz Adamczak visited Finland for a three-day visit till 05 May 2023. He met with various military officials and discussed security priorities and opportunities for military integration. In his meeting with the Finnish Military Representative of NATO, he said that as Finland is stronger and safer within NATO, it is stronger and safer with Finland as an ally. His visit included taking part in exercise ARROW 23 where he observed and appreciated the military strength of Finland and six other allies. He also met with the Chief of Defence Command of Finland and discussed the advancing NATO integration that has security and military implications for Finland and NATO. He later visited the Finnish Air Force Command, Finnish Border Guard, and the Finnish Defence Forces and discussed the full integration of Finland into NATO.

Russia: Reuters report Russian retreating in Bakhmut

On 12 May, Reuters reported Russia's admittance of fallback at Bakhmut. According to the spokesman of the east group of Ukrainian forces Serhiy Cherevatyi, 17.3 square kilometres of area have been liberated by them. Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov



said that the Ukrainian offensive included 1000 troops with 40 ranks. He added that 26 attacks have been repelled by Russia. According to Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Ukrainian assumed higher ground at Bakhmut and the regrouping of Russian forces was a 'rout.' Prigozhin said that the Russian troops are collapsing at North and South Bakhmut.

Canada: PM Trudeau's responses to China's retaliation

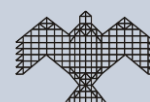
On 10 May, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that Ottawa will not be intimidated by China's action of expelling a Canadian diplomat. Trudeau said: "We understand there is retaliation, but we will not be intimidated, we will continue to do necessary to keep Canadians protected from foreign interference." It is feared the latest tension between the two would lead to economic repercussions for Canada as Beijing is the second biggest trading partner of the country.

The US: House of Representatives introduces new resolution

On 10 May, Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib introduced a House resolution recognizing the ongoing Nakba and Palestinian Refugees' Rights. The mass displacement of Palestinians during the period of Israel's formation (1947–1949), known as the Nakba, is still occurring today as a result of Israel's ongoing ethnic cleansing. The resolution honors the Nakba and promotes a better understanding of the tragedy and calls on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to continue its support for over seven million Palestinian refugees' rights.

About the authors

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About Global Politics:

The course provides an introduction to contemporary world affairs. The primary objective of the course is two – first, to enhance the understanding of contemporary global developments, with an attempt to comprehend the larger picture. Second, to identify trends leading forecasts on contemporary world affairs.

The Course will also invite senior scholars within and outside NIAS – also from within and outside India to provide lectures on contemporary world affairs.

The World This Week



6 February 2021

Biden's new US foreign policy priorities, Russia-EU tensions over Navalny, and China's redline on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan



30 January 2021

The Daniel Pearl case in Pakistan and the new vaccine complications in Europe



23 January 2021

The US returns to the Paris Agreement, and India reengages the region through a Vaccine diplomacy



16 January 2021

North Korea's Party Congress, Houthis as terrorists, and Elections in Uganda



9 January 2021

Disorderly transition in the US, Breakthrough over Qatar, Enrichment in Iran and Arrests in Hong Kong



27 December 2020

The Year of COVID, Protests and Elections



20 December 2020

India-Bangladesh reset and China's Chang'e-5 success



13 December 2020

Morocco recognizes Israel, Maduro consolidates in Venezuela and No-deal Brexit gets real

About TWTW

The World This Week is an academic initiative of the Global Politics course at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. The alert, published every Saturday aims to provide its readers with a ready reckoner of major developments during the week under three heads - what happened, what is the background and what does it mean. The Alert also provides an opportunity for the young scholars at NIAS and its partner institutions to follow and comment on contemporary global developments.

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