



# JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Special Issue on  
Bangladesh and the World:  
Achievements and Futures



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Special Issue

**Bangladesh and the World:  
*Achievements and Futures***



**Department of International Relations  
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## CONTENTS

<b>Editor's Note</b>	<b>Maritime Regionalism and 'Inclusive Development': Opportunity and Challenges before Bangladesh in Anthropocene</b>
vi - xvii	Sanjay Chaturvedi
<b>Geopolitics of Bangladesh's Liberation</b>	159 - 184
Smruti S. Pattanaik	<b>Five Decades of Bangladesh-U.S. Relations: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation</b>
1 - 22	Sheikh Shams Morsalin & Abdul Hannan
<b>Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: From Chrysalis of a State to an Emerging Middle Power</b>	185 - 204
Lailufar Yasmin	<b>Japan-Bangladesh Relations in the Context of Free and Open Indo Pacific</b>
23 - 53	Hossain Ahmed Taufiq & Shakira Mahzabeen
<b>Negotiation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda: Role of Bangladesh</b>	205 - 242
Mustafizur Rahman	<b>Refugees, Migrants and the Bangladesh State: The Conundrum of Liberal International Order</b>
55 - 87	Syeda Rozana Rashid
<b>SAARC and Beyond</b>	243 - 267
Shamsher M. Chowdhury	<b>Intelligence Studies beyond Anglosphere: A South Asian Gaze</b>
89 - 103	ASM Ali Ashraf
<b>Bangladesh - Growing Regional Presence</b>	269 - 303
Sreeradha Datta	<b>International Relations Theories and the Global Order: A Review of Selective Classic and Contemporary Texts</b>
105 - 127	Md. Ali Siddiquee
<b>Bangladesh &amp; Regionalism: 'Taking Two to Tango', or Lingering in Limbo?</b>	305 - 327
Imtiaz A. Hussain	
129 - 157	



## Editor's Note

The Special Issue of the *Journal of International Relations* is published by the Department of International Relations at the University of Dhaka at a crucial juncture of Bangladesh history; when the country has all the rightful reasons to celebrate. Bangladesh is celebrating the birth centennial of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the 100 years of the birth of the University of Dhaka, and the 50 years of the independence of the country. Bangladesh, a country born out of a genocide, a post-colonial and post-partition state, today stands tall among the comity of nations. The dream of a *Sonar Bangla* (golden Bengal) premised on non-discrimination, freedom, equality, and justice continues to be the spirit of the people of this country. Bangladesh in its journey of 50 years has many reasons to be proud of: its struggles, resilience and achievements. The 'Bangladesh miracle' or the 'Bangladesh paradox' gives its people the sense of joy, pride and ownership to look back, reflect and carry their march towards the future.

On the economic front, the country has gained impressive track records of growth and poverty reduction in the last 50 years. According to the World Bank, Bangladesh is one of the fast-growing economies in the world<sup>1</sup>. Bangladesh has been able to maintain a stable economic growth of over 6% for more than a decade. It has also achieved certain milestones to become a

promising frontier country on many counts, that includes a dramatic decline in fertility rates from 7 to 2.03; steep declines in infant and child mortality; gender parity in access to education; and it is a global leader in disaster risk management. These milestones helped Bangladesh to steadily move upward from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category. Currently, Bangladesh is the 42<sup>nd</sup> largest economy of the world, projected to become the 26<sup>th</sup> largest economy by 2030<sup>2</sup>. According to the World Bank, Bangladesh has reached low-middle income country status in 2015 and will graduate from LDC by 2026<sup>3</sup>. The country has experienced large-scale investments in the infrastructural and manufacturing sectors. It is set to inaugurate some mega projects such as the Padma Bridge, Dhaka-Metro Rail, and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Karnaphuli tunnel. The benefits and spinoffs of these would change the socio-economic conditions of millions of people.

The country has a GDP of over \$409 billion (€362 billion). Though primarily an agro-based economy in 1971, the composition has changed over the decades, with industry and services now accounting for the lion's share of economic output. Agriculture's share of GDP has dropped to just 13%. The ready made garment (RMG) industry emerged as one of the nation's success stories in recent decades. Bangladesh is the second-largest RMG manufacturer, only to be surpassed by China. The country earns over \$35 billion a year from exports. The sector employs 4 million people, the majority of whom are women. Female employment in the RMG sector, despite its many limitations and critics, is considered a major pathway for women empowerment. Bangladeshi migrant workers have also played major role in this process. Remittances constitute a vital sector of the economy. In 2021, Bangladeshi workers employed abroad transferred nearly \$24.7 billion as remittance.

Bangladesh has also earned kudos in the security sector. Its contributions to the United Nations Peace Keeping (UNPK) forces in terms human resources now ranks the highest. Currently, 6359 UN peacekeepers from Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force are deployed in UNPK operations. Since 1988,

Bangladesh has participated in 54 peacekeeping missions in 40 different countries over 5 continents with more than 175,000 personnel. In 2015, Bangladesh sent one of the world's three all-women peacekeeping units on a mission to Haiti<sup>4</sup>.

Bangladesh, once targeted and labeled as a cocoon of terror,<sup>5</sup> has successfully faced the challenges of 'image' and terrorism. In 2022, Bangladesh stands at the 40<sup>th</sup> position among 163 countries on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) and scored 4.411 out of 10, while the USA and the UK held the 28<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> positions scoring 4.961 and 4.770 respectively. It is notable that Bangladesh has fared better than the US and the UK in the GTI.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of human security, Bangladesh has done well too. It played a critical role in the negotiations process of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs encompass four critical pillars of sustainable and holistic human security, viz., human, physical, social and natural. As of 2020, the SDG score of Bangladesh is 63.51, while that of India is 61.92.<sup>7</sup> It may be noted that, Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK, Saida Muna Tasneem has received the Diplomat of the Year 2022 Award from the *Diplomat* magazine in London for her outstanding contribution to climate diplomacy<sup>8</sup>.

The dream of a *Sonar Bangla* however, has not been without challenges. The 50 years journey has been through many upheavals and twists and turns of history. The political history of the country has witnessed the gruesome killings of the Father of the Nation along with his family members on August 15, 1975, which remains a Black Day in the history of the nation. The country has experienced military coups, military regimes and quasi-military regimes. The country has experimented with presidential, parliamentary as well as election time care-taker forms of government. The political outfit of the country changed in the post-1975 scenario, from secularism the state moved towards religio-centrism under military and quasi-military regimes. The latter introduced religion as a factor in Bangladesh politics, by dropping secularism, which constituted a fundamental plank of the Bangladesh Constitution. Later, Islam



was declared as the State religion.<sup>9</sup> However, through the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment, secularism has been brought back to the constitution in 2010, but Islam remains the state religion. Critics point out the contradictions of the above, but one needs to contextualise and understand it within the arithmetic of electoral politics and the change in the political landscape over decades.

Friendship towards all and malice towards none has remained the core plank of Bangladesh foreign policy. This has enabled the country to choose the pragmatic path of strategic distancing and collaborating, as and when necessary in this age of 'high' geo-politics, based upon its perceived national interest. Bangladesh is the pioneer of regionalism in South Asia. Bangladesh at 50 can rightfully claim that its foreign policy has come of age.

Penned by renowned scholars of International Relations, national and regional, this special issue has 11 thematic articles and a review article on four books. The authors have tread through the foreign policy processes, diplomatic negotiations, institutions, concepts, and outcomes of Bangladesh foreign policy. Navigating through the birth pangs of Bangladesh, the politics of recognition, the milestones and stocktaking of 50 years, this volume takes us to the varied forms of regionalism—land-based to maritime—which introduces the reader to the changing notions of space, region and regionalism. The human security issues of SDGs, refugees and migrants, to intelligence studies garbed in 'secrecy' are well covered in this volume. The review article provides the reader with a peep into the varied literature on International Relations, both classic and contemporary.

Smruti S. Pattanaik in her writeup on *Geopolitics of Bangladesh's Liberation* explores the contending positions taken by the different powers and states in 1971 during Bangladesh's Liberation War, which gained its momentum and strengthened the resolve of the Bengalis for liberation due to the genocide unleashed upon them by the Pakistan army on the night of 25

March, 1971. Pattanaik views the birth of Bangladesh as one of the most significant geopolitical events that shaped the history of the sub-continent. Tracing through the geopolitics of the period, the author explores the contending positions of the US, Soviet Union and China. The stand taken by the Muslim countries too was as an impediment for the Bangladesh cause. As 10 million refugees fled to India, New Delhi signed a 25-year treaty with Soviet Union that changed Cold War geopolitics and shaped the constellation of power. In the immediate aftermath of Bangladesh's liberation, Bangladesh had to experience the politics of recognition. Pattanaik argues that, once referred to as an international basket case, the country has made rapid economic strides and has proved all the naysayers wrong.

Lailufar Yasmin's article on *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: From Chrysalis of a State to an Emerging Middle Power* explores Bangladesh's foreign policy strides as the country celebrates its fifty years. Yasmin makes a strong case for the assertiveness of Bangladesh, which the country attained through a combination of its diplomatic skills, development diplomacy, climate diplomacy and use of soft power. Bangladesh also made a prudent use of its newly gained water resources and geo political location, which coincided with the 'easternization' of world politics through the rise of China and Japan and the contestations between the two Asian powers, as well as China and the West. Yasmin suggests that Bangladesh has steered through global and regional powers rivalries and today has earned a rightful place for itself and has emerged as an agenda setter in its own affairs.

Mustafizur Rahman, a career diplomat, gives the reader a first hand glimpse into the negotiating process of diplomacy. His article on *Negotiation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda: Role of Bangladesh* details out the negotiations, the challenges and equalising environment of the negotiations that took place while drawing up the SDGs at the UN. His focus is on Bangladesh's role and positions taken during the negotiation process. The paper contends that while the Global Southern countries played a key role in shaping the SDG agenda and

negotiations process, the Bangladesh delegation was at the forefront in pressing for several development issues including climate change, migration, and transboundary water cooperation. The findings of the article have implications for the theory and practice of multilateral diplomacy and global governance.

Bangladesh is the forerunner in crafting out the idea of regionalism in South Asia. Shamsheer M. Chowdhury BB, a former foreign secretary of Bangladesh and an insider who had been involved with the process, in his article on *SAARC and Beyond* underlines the significance of SAARC as a regional body. Tracing through the evolution and landmarks of South Asian regionalism, Chowdhury argues that SAARC was able to make critical contributions in the realm of people to people connectivity, and SAARC had flagged the issue of terrorism even before the 9/11. It was the first regional institution that gave a platform for the leaders of the region to come together. The political and strategic rivalry between the two major powers, India and Pakistan, turned out to be the major stumbling block for SAARC, despite the specific clause of unanimity in decision making, and the clause of not bringing bilateral contentious issues in the SAARC platform. The author dismisses the critics who call, SAARC, a talking shop, by highlighting its long-term impact, and more critically for introducing the idea of a regional framework for South Asia. Chowdhury argues that looking beyond SAARC, does not imply its demise, rather the idea is to revive the spirit and process of SAARC. He strongly believes that, Bangladesh as the dreamer and initiator of SAARC has a responsibility to take this forward.

Sreeradha Datta writes on the unique geographical position of Bangladesh, which has provided the country with much leverage in regional and global arena. Her article titled *Bangladesh - Growing Regional Presence* argues that Dhaka has pursued its external relations with a focus on access to markets, concessions, and to bilateral and multilateral aid. She suggests that India and China are likely to continue to be the sheet anchors of Bangladesh foreign policy, but Bangladesh has

acquired a broader vision through leveraging its unique geography, showcasing its growth story, and its plans to move into a knowledge-intensive society, beyond apparel manufacturing. The growing importance of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean in the great powers rivalry has added to the geo-political leverage of Bangladesh in its foreign policy. Datta argues that, Bangladesh's ability to turnaround and effectively use its geographical position to its advantage has been rather fascinating and points to an identity that has grown beyond its regional confines

Imtiaz A. Hussain in his writeup *Bangladesh & Regionalism: 'Taking Two to Tango', or Lingering in Limbo?*, points at the still footed Asian regional trading arrangements, which according to him, suffers from the residual remains of the Cold War. The Asian countries continued with the model of export led growth rather than following the import led substitution. Unilateralism led to competitiveness over cooperation. He poses the questions, why have Bangladesh's regional integrative efforts sputtered more than resonated? Will its sought-after Southeast Asian trade linkages stem from what is on the table than off of it? Hussain identifies the following among the constraints: (a) Bangladesh's export rigidities and the stubbornness to diversify consumption patterns; (b) infrastructural deficiencies impeding the necessary flows for regional growth; (c) security considerations impinging progress, limiting partner possibilities; and (d) mostly the absence of any South-South exchange *weltanschauung* to fall back upon.

Sanjay Chaturvedi takes the reader to another realm of regionalism in his essay on *Maritime Regionalism and 'Inclusive Development': Opportunity and Challenges before Bangladesh in Anthropocene*. The author argues that Bangladesh is placing emphasis on harnessing the opportunities of the Indian Ocean for inclusive development. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), according to Chaturvedi, provides a space for serious introspection by scholars and policy makers. Maritime regionalism opens up opportunities for critically rethinking the idea/s of development and sustainability in the

intersectionality of climate change, natural disasters, and human (in) security of small fishers. Bangladesh, as the current Chair of IORA is ideally placed to push these agendas forward at the sub-regional level through IORA and BIMSTEC, and explore the prospects of a UNEP Regional Seas Programme for the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME).

Moving on from diplomatic negotiations and policy planes, the next two essays take on the bilateral relations of Bangladesh with two important actors of international politics. Sheikh Shams Morsalin & Abdul Hannan's paper on the *Five Decades of Bangladesh-U.S. Relations: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation* analyses the Dhaka-Washington ties along two period lines: Dependency (1970s-1980s) and Engagement (1990-2000). While the first period marks Bangladesh's dependency on the Western economic assistance, the second highlights Bangladesh's steady economic growth and development and less dependence on foreign aid. Though the US opposed the Bangladesh cause in 1971, the relationship started developing since the US recognition of Bangladesh in 1972. The calamitous event of 9/11 brought South Asia into US strategic calculations, along with Bangladesh. Lately, the relationship is influenced by several systemic and domestic issues, i.e., the ever-increasing trend in bilateral trade, significant boost in the importance of the Indian Ocean region and the Bay of Bengal, involvement of China in both economic and military affairs of Bangladesh, the renewed relationship between USA and India, the complex Rohingya crisis and the political and economic developments of Bangladesh. The paper argues that the systemic constraints and domestic realities along with leadership perception played decisive role in shaping the Bangladesh-US bilateral relations throughout the past five decades.

Hossain Ahmed Taufiq and Shakira Mahzabeen write on *Japan-Bangladesh Relations in the context of Free and Open Indo Pacific*. The authors argue that Japan seeks Bangladesh's connectivity with the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific.' The signing of \$2.5 billion ODA in June 2019 was indicative of the Japanese desire. However, despite the huge size of Japanese assistance and

Japan's desire to bring Bangladesh within the yoke of connectivity, the bilateral trade between the two countries is minimal. Bangladesh suffers from a hefty trade deficit with Japan. Poor investment rating due to weak administration, poor infrastructure, lack of transparency hinders the partnership.

Syeda Rozana Rashid's paper on *Refugees, Migrants and the Bangladesh State: The Conundrum of Liberal International Order* walks the reader through the complexities in states' relations with refugees and migrants by locating Bangladesh's strategic position within the Liberal International Order. Rashid explores how and why Bangladesh with its manifold limitations in terms of size and demography, and with its pluses and minuses, trade a balance between its statehood and responsibilities in terms of sending its citizens abroad for employment and receiving Rohingya refugees into its territory. In a broader canvas, the paper depicts a conundrum of liberal international order that connects domestic and the international spheres projecting the murkier side of it to be resolved into the domestic sphere as a precondition for realising its promises in the international sphere.

ASM Ali Ashraf raises a critical question in his essay, which has often been garbed in many states under the rubric of 'sensitive'. While deliberating at a disciplinary level, the essay has wider policy implications. Ashraf writes on *Intelligence Studies beyond Anglosphere: A South Asian Gaze*. He traces through the evolution of intelligence studies. He argues that while it had evolved in the global North, it had stagnated in the global South. The paper raises the how and why of the development and the lack of development. Ashraf argues that the academic and professional communities in the global North have contributed to the development of Intelligence Studies by teaching a wide variety of core and elective courses and publishing their research on historical and contemporary issues in relevant journals. While the South Asian academia has a rich tradition of International Relations (IR) and Security Studies programmes, a culture of secrecy has impeded Intelligence Studies in the region.

Md. Ali Siddiquee's paper is a departure from the above articles. As the title suggests, Siddique gives the reader a glimpse of IR texts and readings. The article titled *International Relations Theories and the Global Order: A Review of Selective Classic and Contemporary Texts* reviews two classic and two contemporary texts which have influenced or have the potential to influence the theorising of International Relations and global order. The first text is authored by Hedley Bull, the oldest but a profound one. It marked a sharp departure from the overarching domination of the realist school of thought in the stream of IR theory, by underlining the society of states and the common interests among the states as the prerequisites for forming the order. The second book is authored by Alexander Wendt, where he forwarded his ground-breaking meta-theory of constructivism. Of the two contemporary texts, Ikenberry showed how and why the nature of liberal internationalism has changed over the last two centuries. He argued that liberal internationalism, the grand theory of IR, is pragmatic and has a reform-oriented outlook that made it survive and will continue to do so in the coming days to maintain a rules-based international order. The work of Adler proposed a theory of cognitive evolution that relied on the practices, background knowledges, and communities of practices that are constantly shaping and reshaping international social orders. Each work is ontologically and epistemologically intriguing and provided a fresher approach to look at IR by challenging and moving beyond dominant realist framework to understand global order and its different theoretical constructs.

The above narrations are indeed an exercise in the intellectual pursuit of the University of Dhaka for attaining intellectual excellence in research and teaching. The University of Dhaka has been in the forefront of all the political and democratic movements of the country. The Department of International Relations at the University of Dhaka was the first of its kind to be set up in South Asia, in July 1947, before the partition of the sub-continent. In many ways this Department has remained a pace-setter in the disciplinary and policy realms. The academic

curriculum of the department seeks a combination of hard and soft approaches to international relations, with a focus of building an indigenous knowledge base with the experiences and realities of the Global South. The primary aim is to change the *gaze*, and challenge the politics of knowledge production.

This Special volume is a step towards this end, as the University of Dhaka celebrates its 100 years.

*Amena Mohsin*  
Dhaka, 2022

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> World Bank Database,

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=BD>

<sup>2</sup> Md Fazlur Rahman, "Bangladesh to be the 26th Largest Economy: HSBC Report Says the Country Will Be the Biggest Mover in Global GDP Ranking in 2030", *The Daily Star*, 04 October 2018.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Database.

<sup>4</sup> For details, see United Nations Peacekeeping, Bangladesh,

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/bangladesh>, accessed on 21 May 2022;

And, "Celebrating 50 Years of Bangladesh: United Nations Peace Operations and Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, 26 March 2021,

<https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/celebrating-50-years-bangladesh/news/united-nations-peace-operations-and-bangladesh-2066693>

<sup>5</sup> Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 165, No. 13, 2002, pp. 14-17.

<sup>6</sup> Mohsin Bhuiyan and Tarif Ahmed Khan, "Bangladesh Less Prone to Terrorism Threats than USA, UK", 02 March 2022,

<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bangladesh-less-prone-terrorism-threats-usa-uk-379030>; Also, see Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP), *Global Terrorism Index 2022*, New York: IEP, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Soumya Bhowmik and Syed Mafiz Kamal, *India-Bangladesh Partnership in Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery*, *ORF Special Report*, September 2020, p.



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<sup>8</sup> "Saida Muna 'Diplomat of the Year'", *The Daily Star*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/saida-muna-diplomat-the-year-3014966>

<sup>9</sup> For details see, Amena Mohsin, *The Politics of Nationalism, The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, Dhaka: UPL, 1997.