

- Indo-Pacific Security and Bangladesh
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- Whitlam's Legacy in Australia–Vietnam Relations 50 Years on
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- Will it be Washington–Beijing Middle Course?



Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, issued directives to present humanitarian aid to Sudan worth \$100 million.

Rising Asia

April–June 2023 Issue 19



The US President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol make their way to the Oval Office

In Pictures: Asian Royals, Leaders Attended King Charles' Coronation



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, second row, third from left, join other Commonwealth leaders for a meeting with King Charles. (Pool via Reuters)



Crown Prince Akishino of Japan and Crown Princess Kiko. (Photo: Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs)



Indian Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar talks with King Charles. (Photo courtesy of the Indian vice president's office)



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and partner Jodie Haydon. – Reuters



Yang di Pertuan Agong and Raja Permaisuri Agong, the monarchs of Malaysia. © AP

King Charles was crowned, alongside his wife Queen Camilla, in a ceremony at Westminster Abbey on May 6, 2023. – Reuters





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Editor's Note



Japan is a longstanding development partner of Bangladesh. It is providing financial and technical support to Bangladesh for improving regional connectivity, transport infrastructure, power and energy, the metro rail and the Moheshkhali-Matarbari Integrated Infrastructure Development Initiative (MIDI). The growing presence of Japanese companies in Bangladesh is also the cornerstone for strengthening the economic partnership between both countries. Japan has generously donated through Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Bangladesh since 1972 and became Bangladesh's single largest donor.

Japan provided Bangladesh with \$2.6 billion dollar in aid, more than any other country, for the fiscal year 2020-2021. Since Bangladesh independence, Japan has made a total of \$24.72 billion dollar in contributions, roughly split between grants and loans. Japan provides assistance to Bangladesh in a number of fields, including energy production, social and economic development, and the development of both real and intangible infrastructure. Japan's ODA to Bangladesh has shown to be beneficial for both countries rather than exploitative.

There are still huge untapped business opportunities in Bangladesh. Japan can consider investing in joint ventures and technology transfer in various promising sectors, including agro-processing, shipbuilding, electronics, jute, energy, automobile, light engineering industries, defense equipment ICT in Hi-tech parks, industrial skill development and various service sectors to improve our productivity and the ability to cater to global market demands. Bangladesh and Japan announced a financial deal on August 2020, which included Japanese investments in seven Bangladeshi Megaprojects. The Bangladesh people would be the real winners once these projects are finished.

Japan recognized Bangladesh on February 10, 1972, soon after its independence. Warm friendship has been fostered between our two peoples since then. The deeper comprehensive economic engagements developed over the last 50 years between Bangladesh and Japan elevated our bilateral relationship towards a strategic partnership level. The Journey of strategic partnership will be further broadened by the recent Japan visit of our Honourable PM Sheikh Hasina. Japan is expected to remain a crucial and strategic partner for Bangladesh throughout its upcoming development journey, particularly during the fourth industrial revolution and beyond LDC graduation.

During the last state visit to Japan in April, 2023 PM Sheikh Hasina also discussed the Moheshkhali-Matarbari integrated Infrastructure Development Initiative (MIDI) and the Big-B Initiative for the development of Southern Bangladesh to connect the Bay of Bengal and its neighboring regions. We are believing that economic growth in the region can be boosted through augmented trade and investment between Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the North Indian States as well, via transit access to Bangladesh sea ports for all of the regions mentioned.

Best Regards

Nasim Mahmud

Chief Editor

Rising Asia Magazine (RAM)

Bangladesh, Dhaka



Australia Eyes Strengthening Defense Cooperation with Bangladesh to Promote 'inclusive' Indo-Pacific Region

Jeremy Bruer

Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh



Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Jeremy Bruer has said Australia is looking forward to strengthening their defence

cooperation with Bangladesh to promote a "secure, prosperous and inclusive" Indo-Pacific region.

"We have established a defence office in Bangladesh with a resident Defence Adviser to strengthen relationships between the defence forces of our two countries," he said.

This development was followed by Bangladesh's participation in Indo-Pacific Endeavour, one of Australia's key regional defence engagements, and Australia's participation in Bangladesh's International Fleet Review in 2022.

The High Commissioner said Australian businesses are increasingly interested in Bangladesh as demand rises for their high-quality products and services.

He said Australian businesses see further opportunities to diversify trade and investment with Bangladesh in textiles and apparel, agricultural products such as wool, agribusiness, fisheries, food and beverages, minerals, manufacturing, information and

communications technology services, skills development and education services.

Australia is also well-placed to supply energy resources, such as LNG, to help fuel Bangladesh's growing demand for electricity.

Jeremy Bruer also said, "Our nations also share a love of sport, especially cricket, and many Australians have played with, trained, coached and befriended Bangladeshi players. Our cooperation in arts and culture is also growing, with participation by Australian artists in arts and literary events in Bangladesh, and by Bangladeshis in Australian events".

On 26 January, Australia Day, Australians around the world unite to mark Australia.

It is a chance to acknowledge the past, recognise the present and look optimistically towards the future.

"Today, we reflect on what it means to be Australian, to celebrate contemporary Australia, to acknowledge our history and connect with other Australians. We reflect on our diverse society, including our landscape, our resilience and innovation, and our bright future," said the High Commissioner in a message.

Australia Day is a day to acknowledge, interrogate and reflect upon their history.

Australia doesn't date back merely to 1788.

For more than 60,000 years, Australia was cared for by the Aboriginal people, who represent one of the oldest continuing cultures on earth.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the traditional custodians of our lands and waterways.

They occupy a fundamental position in Australia's story.

For many indigenous Australians, Australia Day represents the complexities and hardship caused by European settlement. We recognise this history, and we respect and honour our first Australians on our national day.

"Today, Australia is an outward-looking country, strongly connected to the rest of the world. It is also the most successful multicultural society in the world, a country built on migration," he said.

People from over 200 countries, including Bangladesh, have chosen to call Australia home.

And, as a multicultural country, Australia has benefited from its belief in diversity, inclusion and tolerance – values we hold dear.

Australia and Bangladesh are old friends, sharing Commonwealth traditions and strong links.

"Australia is proud to have been one of the first countries to recognise the



newly independent nation of Bangladesh, in January 1972," said the High Commissioner.

Last year, they celebrated the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"Today, I recall with considerable satisfaction that Australia assisted Bangladesh's admission to the United Nations in December 1971, and with bipartisan support in our parliament," said the High Commissioner.

In January 1975, the then prime minister, Gough Whitlam, visited Bangladesh and met his Bangladeshi counterpart, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Father of the Nation.

"Our friendship will endure because of its strong and authentic foundation. The only foreigner ever to have received the Bir Protik – one of Bangladesh's highest awards for bravery – was an Australian citizen, William Ouderland. Ouderland organised and trained the guerrilla fighters of the Mukti Bahini and provided them with food and shelter and medicine."

Links between Australia and Bangladesh, including sporting links, go back a long way before Australia's support for Bangladesh's independence.

In 1877, one of the players in the Australian team playing the first Test match in history, Bransby Beauchamp Cooper, was born here in Dhaka, when it was part of British India.

Australia and Bangladesh enjoy close people-to-people links, nurtured over

many years of migration, and through sport and education.

About 80,000 people of Bangladeshi origin have settled in Australia, and we have welcomed thousands of Bangladeshi students studying in Australia's world class institutions.

"Our Australia Awards programme, which provides scholarships for Bangladeshi students to undertake master's degrees in Australia, has produced over 3,000 Bangladeshi alumni," said the High Commissioner.

He said many of them today are occupying important and influential positions, and making great contributions to Bangladesh's development.

Each year about 200 Bangladeshi nationals receive Australian Government scholarships to study masters degrees and short courses at Australian institutions.

Australia and Bangladesh are both active members of multilateral institutions such as the UN, WTO, the Commonwealth and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the only ministerial-level forum in the Indian Ocean.

"Australia continues to support Bangladesh in its role as IORA chair. We remain committed to the aims and purposes of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the promotion and protection of human rights," said the High Commissioner.

Australia is supporting a range of development investments to support Bangladesh's transition to a middle-income country.

This includes support for inclusive education, skills development, poverty alleviation, social protection and private-sector engagement.

Supporting and providing economic opportunities for the most disadvantaged and marginalised, including women and girls and people with disabilities, is a priority in all our programmes.

"Bangladesh has a young population. So investing in an educated and suitably skilled workforce is crucial to maintaining economic growth and recovery from the pandemic," said the High Commissioner.

The long-standing Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) with BRAC means that Australian aid reaches a large number of people throughout Bangladesh.

"We are contributing \$85 million from 2021 to 2026 to the third phase of the SPA. Our Social Security Policy Support program is supporting the Bangladesh Government's reforms to strengthen the social security system," said the Australian envoy.

"Additionally, we support more than 50 national and international NGOs through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), focusing on inclusive development across the country. We're also supporting viable private sector opportunities through Australia's Business Partnerships Platform and the forthcoming Emerging Markets Impact Investment Fund."

Australia recognises the impact on communities hosting over 919,000 displaced Rohingya, who rely on



humanitarian assistance to survive. Australia will continue to work to find a durable solution and to pursue accountability and justice for the Rohingya as a result of the abuses they have suffered.

In the meantime, the envoy said, they remain committed to helping Bangladesh and humanitarian actors to meet the needs of Rohingya and host community members in Cox's Bazar.

In 2022-23, Australia will provide AUD135 million (building on AUD480 million provided since 2017) to address humanitarian crises in Myanmar, as well as to support Rohingya refugees and host commu-

nities in Bangladesh, providing essential protection, education and health services for those most in need, including women, girls and people with disabilities.

Two-way trade between Australia and Bangladesh has grown substantially over the last decade, reaching AUD3 billion in 2021-22, with balanced imports and exports.

Bangladesh's exports to Australia are largely ready-made garments, leather accessories, processed food and jute. Bangladesh is Australia's largest chickpea market.

The Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA) signed with Bangladesh on 15

September 2021 was a significant achievement that recognised the strength and depth of the economic relationship.

Under the TIFA, both countries are working together to grow and diversify trade and investment opportunities.

Bruer said, we are proud of their shared history and of the warm, multifaceted and mutually beneficial relationship that exists between our two countries.

"I look forward to the next 50 years of friendship between Australia and Bangladesh," he said.

Courtesy: The Business Standard, Bangladesh.

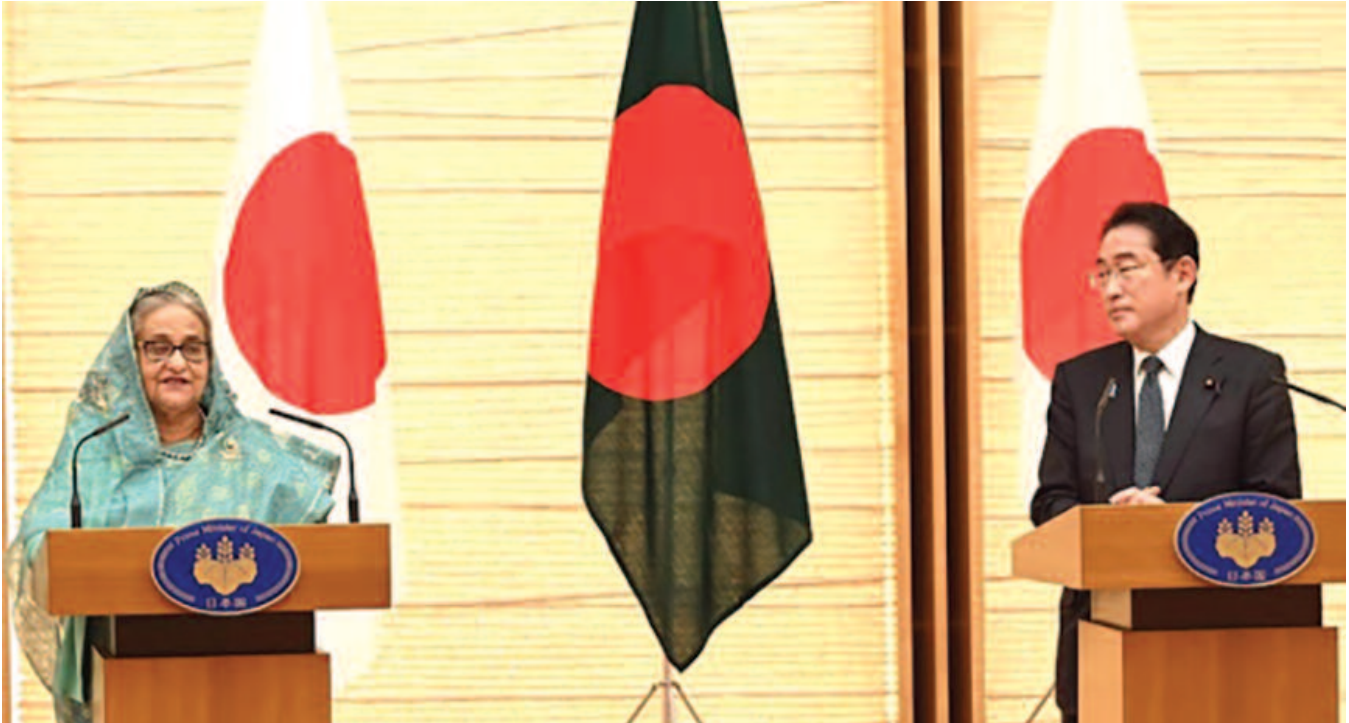
QUOTABLE QUOTE

Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity.” Also: “Intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

- Robert Alan Aurthur
American writer, artist and social activist; 1922-1978



Bangladesh-Japan Relations Turn into ‘Strategic Partnership’: Sheikh Hasina



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on April 26, 2023 Bangladesh and Japan have successfully elevated the bilateral relations to a “Strategic Partnership” from the existing “Comprehensive Partnership”.

“Prime Minister Kishida and I have discussed the entire gamut of our bilateral relations. We are happy that Bangladesh and Japan have successfully elevated the bilateral relations to a “Strategic Partnership” from the existing “Comprehensive Partnership”, she said.

The Prime Minister made the remarks in a joint statement after the exchanging of several instruments

signed between the two sides following bilateral talks with her Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida at the Prime Minister’s Office in Japan.

She added: “Today, Prime Minister Kishida and I concluded the Joint Statement on “Strategic Partnership”. I am confident that the excellent understanding, friendship and cooperation that exist between our two peoples and our governments would grow even stronger in the years ahead.”

“Our two sides have signed - agreements and memorandums which will further institutionalize our future cooperation in the areas of agriculture, customs matters,

defense, ICT and cyber-security, industrial upgrading, intellectual property, ship recycling and metro rail,” she said.

During the bilateral talks, the two sides discussed about Rohingya issue alongside MIDI ((Moheshkhali-Matarbari Integrated Infrastructure Development Initiative) and BIG-B initiative (The Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt) and Economic Partnership.

Sheikh Hasina said they have discussed about Rohingya crisis as the overdue presence of the Rohingyas has seriously been affecting the lives and livelihoods of the local communities in Bangladesh.



“We requested Japan to help finding a durable solution to the crisis by using its channel of communication with Myanmar,” she said.

The Prime Minister said Dhaka and Narita are going to start direct flight this year.

“We are happy to announce that the Dhaka-Narita direct flight is going to operate within this year,” she said.

The Prime Minister said they have also discussed about the MIDI and BIG-B Initiative for development of Southern Bangladesh for connecting the Bay of Bengal and the neighbouring regions.

“We thank the Government of Japan for being our one of the largest development partners. We are looking forward to conclude an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) in the days ahead,” she said.

The premier said, “It is always a pleasure to be in Japan- a beautiful country that is close to my heart.”

“I am particularly delighted to be able to undertake my official visit to Tokyo after we have completed the 50th anniversary of establishment of our diplomatic relations,” she said.

She also said that she is deeply touched by the hospitality that Prime Minister Kishida and the Government of Japan have extended to her and her delegation.

“Japan occupies a very special place in the hearts of the people of Bangladesh. Japan was among those



few countries that gave early recognition to Bangladesh on 10 February 1972,” she said.

She said the historic visit of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Japan in October 1973 laid the foundation of their lasting friendship.

Sheikh Hasina is visiting Japan after three years since she last visited in the country 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out.

Earlier, the Bangladesh premier arrived in the Haneda International Airport in Tokyo around 4:45pm local time on April 25, 2023 as she left Dhaka on a 15-day official tour to Japan, the USA and the UK on April 25 morning.

Japan welcomed the Bangladesh premier by rolling out the red carpet and also gave her the static guard of honour at the airport.

Source: Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)



Indo-Pacific Security and Bangladesh

Brigadier General (Retd) AF Jaglul Ahmed



Changed global geo-strategic environment has shifted the worldview from a Euro-Atlantic to an Indo-Pacific focus. Repositioning

of global economic and military power towards the Indo-Pacific has resulted in significant political, economic, and social changes in the Indian Ocean Region. The term Indo-Pacific is a geopolitical construct that has emerged as a substitute to the long prevalent “Asia Pacific”, which represents the eastwards shift of global development from Euro-Atlantic dimension. It is an integrated theatre that combines the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean and the land masses surrounding them. Though still and evolving concept, it is both a strategic as well as an economic domain comprising important sea lines of communication. Different countries interpret the region differently. United States describe it as a region that starts at the western shore of the America and ends at the shore of the Indian Subcontinent. For South Asia Indo-Pacific is much broader in expanse extending to the shore of African Continent.

Indo-Pacific region shares 44% of the world surface area; holds 65% of

world population; accounts for 62% of the world GDP; and contributes to 46% of world’s merchandise trade. The region not only represents a lucrative market but also lays the route of global supply chain system. The region has vast reserves of marine resources, Methane hydrates, Seabed minerals, rare earth metals, fisheries etc. Because of the vastness of the region and its richness of resources, there are not only traditional but non-traditional threats too. Broader security cooperation among all the members of any kind of security umbrella is of paramount importance to harness benefit to each nation and guard against all kinds of traditional and non-traditional threats.

Bangladesh, with its strategic location on the Bay of Bengal, its rising economic profile, its burgeoning population, its potential resource base, and its steadily growing military capabilities constitutes an important part of the centre of gravity. Bangladesh, as the second largest economy in the south Asian with 170 million people, needs more resources to achieve its human security goals. As a emerging economy and key player in the Indo-Pacific region, any kind of security or economic cooperations undertaken by any regional and global structure should provide manifold interests to Bangladesh. In fulfilment to “Vision

2041”, Bangladesh should focus for a common rule-based order for the region following principles like faith in dialogue, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and equality of all nations regardless of size and strength. Under the security umbrella of Indo-Pacific cooperation, Bangladesh should attempt to secure special privileged status in international trade, combat global environmental challenges, and help reaching a stable economy through acquiring advanced technology. The focus of Bangladesh should be to show respect to principles of International Relation, national sovereignty and equality between nations and peaceful resolution to international conflicts. Our goal should be to achieve partnership and dialogue to expand international trade, empowering existing structure on maritime affairs, freedom of navigation in accordance to UNCLOS and other international maritime conventions, etc.

Consolidation of rules based open and transparent multi-lateral security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region will secure inclusive economic growth, right to development, and overall prosperity to all countries joining any Indo-Pacific forum. The goal of Indo-Pacific cooperation should be to help all participating nations to achieve economic and security capacity to deal any kind of

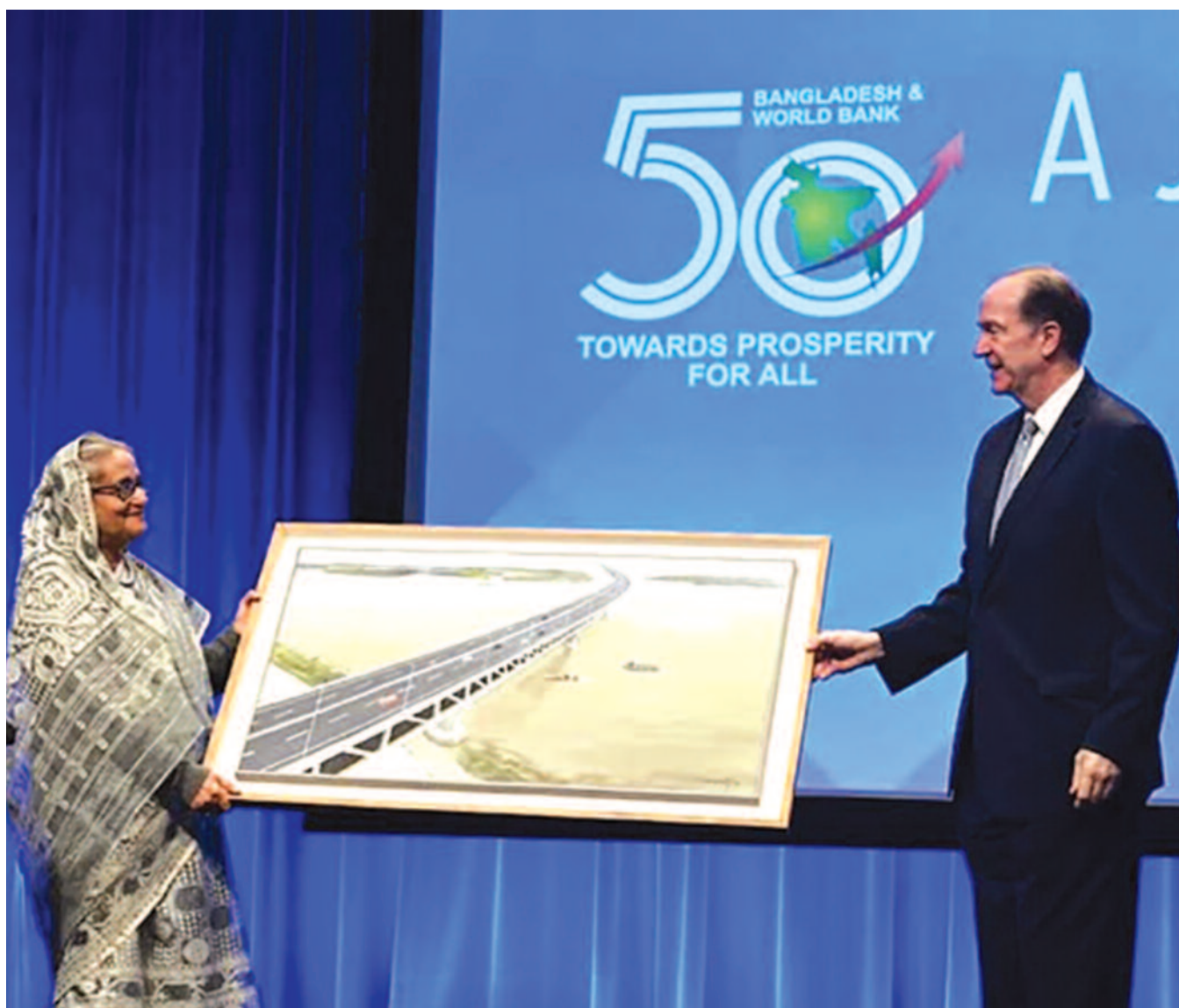
future crisis and vulnerability collectively and individually. Under the current global recession in view of post Covid economic situation and Ukraine-Russian war, Indo-Pacific economic cooperation should attempt to help all countries under

its umbrella to cope and receive assistance from the stronger economies. With the idea that, “connectivity is the arms race of 21st century” Bangladesh should maintain an active partnership with all the relevant actors through an inclusive out-

look to face the new cold war in Indo-Pacific.

Brigadier General AF Jaglul Ahmed (Retd) is an Executive Director of New Asia Group, and a regular contributor to *Rising Asia*.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presents a picture of the Padma Multipurpose Bridge to the World Bank president David Malpass at the World Bank headquarters in Washington DC, USA, on 1 May 2023. (BSS)





A New Frontier for Regional Cooperation

This confluence of two mighty oceans connected by the Straits of Malacca has become the most happening region in the world in the 21st century

Ram Madhav



Indo-Pacific is the flavour of the season. With the emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) as an

important regional mini-lateral platform, this confluence of two mighty oceans connected by the Straits of Malacca has become the most happening region in the world in the 21st century.

Although in news largely due to the evolving great power competition in the Indo-Pacific, Indian Ocean has its distinct identity and importance. From the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca, this third largest water body on earth is home to over 38 countries that house two billion people. Four of the top 10 most populous democracies are situated in the region.

This region became notorious in the past for rivalries in South Asia, conflicts in West Asia, religious extremism, piracy, and above all, the growing competition between India and China. It emerged as home for intense military competition among some of the powerful navies in the world too. While the US traditionally has strong naval presence from

Bahrain to Diego Garcia, China increased its naval strength and activity in recent years by building a number of ports, euphemistically called “the String of Pearls”. India and France too have multiple bases in the region. In the last decade, India’s naval presence has increased significantly through building maritime muscle and engaging in joint exercises with several nations including the US, Australia and Japan.

However, as the decades passed, the geo-economic, rather than geo-strategic significance of the region started dawning on the world. Over 80 percent of the world’s oil trade happens through this great ocean region, while over 70 percent of the container trade passes through it.

India, the largest country in the region that covers almost 40 percent of its waters and 70 percent of its population, is central to the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region. Its dependence on the Indian Ocean region is massive with almost 100 percent of its oil imports and 70 percent other trade happening through it. Besides, India has, over decades, developed major economic and strategic interests in the region including in mining, agriculture, marine economy and oil exploration. It is engaged in a port building spree from Iran to Mauritius to Myanmar

to Bangladesh.

The region enjoys another distinct feature, i.e., the strong civilisational and cultural connect. Most countries in the region, from Indonesia to Iran, and from East Africa to Asean, share historic civilisational bonds that are cherished to this day.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India provided dynamic leadership to this region through multiple initiatives including forging strong bilateral ties with all the important neighbours and announcing the SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region initiative. The BIMSTEC – covering countries in the Bay of Bengal region, is another important initiative that India took in building strong partnerships.

In the BIMSTEC neighbourhood, Bangladesh, the youngest nation in the region, is an important partner for India. Although it remained an underdog in the initial decades of independence due to internal strife, the country has bounced back in the last two decades to emerge as a regional powerhouse today.

Under the bold and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has today grown into a regional economic power. One of the most youthful nations in the world, Bangladesh today boasts of



the second highest per capita GDP in South Asia, surpassing even India. Although a reticent nation in its neighbourhood, Bangladesh has never shirked away from its international obligations. The United Nations acknowledges that Bangladesh is the “second biggest contributor of military and police to UN Peacekeeping”.

India recognises the potential of Bangladesh in playing a proactive role in the Indian Ocean region, since peace and stability in the region are vital to peace, progress and prosperity of 160 million Bangladeshis as well as 1.4 billion Indians. India earnestly wishes that time has come for Bangladesh as a major regional power to join forces with India for building a peaceful, stable, prosperous and inclusive Indian Ocean region, a life-line for the two countries.

The Sixth Indian Ocean Conference

that was hosted in Dhaka on May 12-13 is bound to bring Bangladesh to the frontlines of the regional leadership that it richly deserves. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was the chief guest at the inauguration of the conference in the august company of the president of Mauritius, vice president of Maldives, and foreign ministers from over 20 countries including India, is the centre of attraction for the conference this year. Praised by many as the iron lady of South Asia with a record of crushing terrorism and insurgency and transforming Bangladesh into one of the peaceful developing nations in the South Asian neighbourhood, Sheikh Hasina is poised to embark on a new journey of leadership in the Indian Ocean region.

Indian Ocean Conference, hosted by the Delhi-based India Foundation, in association with the Ministry of

External Affairs, Government of India and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, is not any regional club or alliance. Led by the presidium of foreign ministers of India, Bangladesh, Singapore and Oman, it is a forum that brings together leaders “from the region” with the mission of making them leaders “of the region”.

There cannot be a better way of paying tribute to the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who declared that his country shall strive for “friendship with all, malice towards none”, than hosted this evolving “Parliament of Indian Ocean Leaders”.

Ram Madhav is president of India Foundation and former General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party, India.



INDO-PACIFIC OUTLOOK

Will it be Washington-Beijing Middle Course?

M Serajul Islam



THE foreign minister AKA M o m e n announced in a press conference on April 24 the 15-point Indo-Pacific Outlook. The

timing was significant. It had been announced just before the prime minister went on a bilateral visit to Japan on April 25 followed by a multilateral visit to Washington for the 50th anniversary of the World Bank and finally to London to attend King Charles' coronation. The prime minister will return to Dhaka on May 9.

Social media in Bangladesh has been abuzz leading to the prime minister's overseas trips, discussing the interest of the United States, Japan and India to bring Bangladesh into the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy and China's sensitivity about it. China, according to social media, has been consistently reminding the Dhaka regime not to embrace the Indo-Pacific Strategy because it believed, and rightly so, that it is a strategy to unite the nations in the Indo-Pacific against its alleged expansion in the region.

Washington's major goal in the Indo-Pacific for a long time has been to contain China. This is an irony because it was the United States under president Nixon and his successful ping pong diplomacy in 1971 that catapulted China from a devel-

oping country to a world powerhouse second only to the United States. The elder Bush and president Clinton placed China subsequently on the road to becoming the world's number 1 economic power in another decade.

China's current position in South Asia, of urgent importance to Bangladesh, is interesting. India had good relations with all South Asian countries sans Pakistan when Washington decided to make New Delhi its listening post in the region after 9/11. The situation has changed dramatically. India today has problems with all its South Asian neighbours that have worsened fur-

ther after Hindutva became the official mantra of the BJP government.

China, meanwhile, gained what India lost in South Asia. Today, China has friendly relations with all the South Asian countries. The withdrawal of US and NATO troops following the fall of Afghanistan in August 2021 to the Taliban has enhanced China's position in and influence on both South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

Bangladesh's social media viewed these developments against the backdrop of the country's next general election. The regime supporters alluded in social media discussions that the United States with India



US-China competition is entering a new phase. Image: Twitter



and Japan would lure Bangladesh into the Indo-Pacific Strategy and in return give the Awami League its 4th consecutive term. The discussions included the prime minister's just-concluded visit to Japan in the spin to further strengthen the allusion. The allusion was, nevertheless, created without a proper understanding of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, China's current strength in the region and its sensitivity regarding the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

The pro-regime supporters missed in their social media discussions the fact that the Indo-Pacific Strategy is not a strategic alliance that would give the US-Japan-India a massive strategic advantage if Bangladesh joined it. A White House document on IPS issues in September 2021 named among its main objectives, the promises to 'build a free and open Indo-Pacific' and 'connections within and beyond the region.' It also promised 'to bolster Indo-Pacific security' but this objective apart, the overall objectives of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, ironically, are no different from China's Belt and Road Initiative. The primary emphasis in both is on connectivity and not militarism.

Social media discussions that the United States would use the Indo-Pacific Strategy in the AL-led regime's favour were carried out also every time high-profile visitors from Washington visited Dhaka. There have been several such visits since president Biden assumed office. The mainstream media also joined these discussions. The visit in December

2022 of ambassador Donald Lu, assistant secretary at the US state department and one of the architects of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, has been the most significant visit from Washington in this context. The ambassador, while responding to a journalist, stated categorically that the Indo-Pacific Strategy was not a club to which a country could or would be asked to join to dismiss that Washington has been pressuring Dhaka to embrace the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Nevertheless, China has been apprehensive about the Indo-Pacific Strategy for good reasons as explained although the Indo-Pacific Strategy is not like the Quad, the other US-led grouping in the Indo-Pacific whose other members are Australia, Japan and India, that China has described as the 'Asian NATO'. The Quad, short for Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue, was established in 2007 as a 'diplomatic and military arrangement' as a response to 'Chinese economic and military power.'

Washington has made efforts since launching the Indo-Pacific Strategy in September 2021 to project it as an open-ended strategy without any formal structure, headquarters or membership to underline that it is not an alliance designed to contain China militarily. It quoted repeatedly president Biden's statement at the Quad Summit in September 2021 that 'the future of our nations... depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific enduring and flourishing in the decades ahead' to stress that the Indo-Pacific

Strategy was different from QUAD. Nevertheless, China continued to view the Indo-Pacific Strategy with suspicion. It has been particularly sensitive about Bangladesh joining the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

China sent a senior political figure every time an important visitor from Washington came to Dhaka and it felt that such a visit was in pursuit of encouraging Bangladesh to join the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The hour-long 'midnight visit' of the new Chinese foreign minister in between the visits of ambassador Lu and rear admiral Eileen Laubacher, a senior director of the National Security Council, in mid-December was the most significant of these visits from China.

Bangladesh's social media was hyper-active over the Indo-Pacific Strategy while preparations were under way for the prime minister's Japan visit. The discussions there suggested that Japan would win the regime towards the Indo-Pacific Strategy with promises of huge investments in Bangladesh's economic infrastructure. Three significant developments occurred before the prime minister's Japan visit. First, another special envoy, China's ambassador to ASEAN, visited Dhaka on April 6. Second, the Bangladesh foreign secretary went on an unexplained visit to Beijing on April 19. Finally, Dhaka announced its Indo-Pacific Outlook on April 24.

The three events have not been connected in any discussion either in Bangladesh's social or mainstream media. Nevertheless, there is little reason to believe that the Chinese envoy visited Dhaka for the Rohingyas that



was the reason given by both Dhaka and Beijing for the visit. The foreign secretary's trip has remained unexplained. And the Outlook's timing has not been explained either. Why would Dhaka announce the Outlook right before the prime minister was going to Japan?

The Outlook is, perhaps, Dhaka's choice of the middle course to keep both Beijing and Washington happy. Dhaka, perhaps, believed that the Outlook would convince Beijing that Bangladesh was not embracing the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Dhaka, perhaps, also believed that the Outlook would make Washington also happy that Dhaka had not moved entirely to the Chinese sphere of influence.

Bangladesh's Outlook, unfortunately, is neither a strategy nor a new foreign policy. It is instead an amalgam

of Bangladesh's foreign policy initiatives already announced or an expression of good intentions and practices in international and regional politics. It would, therefore, not abet China's apprehension about the Indo-Pacific Strategy completely. It may, however, allay the apprehension somewhat as it has signalled that Dhaka was not embracing the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The Outlook is, however, unlikely to convince Washington in the least that it would take Dhaka out of China's ambit.

Meanwhile, the prime minister's Japan trip has ended. Eight memorandums were signed in Tokyo that the Bangladesh media felt would raise Bangladesh-Japan relations to the strategic level. The Indo-Pacific Strategy significantly was not discussed formally or informally. Little, therefore, came out of the prime

minister's Japan visit to support the allusion that had been created in Bangladesh's social media leading to the visit that a plan was under way with India to give the AL-led regime another term on a quid pro quo basis.

Meanwhile, there is no good news awaiting the AL-led regime from Washington where the prime minister's stay would be restricted only to the events related to the World Bank's 50th anniversary. Thus, if the regime has been expecting to go to power for a fourth consecutive time through an election like those it held in 2014 and 2018 that would be endorsed by the western nations, it is standing between the hard rock and the sea.

M Serajul Islam is a former career Ambassador, Bangladesh.

U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Sung Y. Kim met with Admiral Yudo Margono, the Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (PANGlima) on March 8, 2023



Indonesia as ASEAN Chair 2023: The Dilemmas

Dinna Prapto Raharja

Indonesia picks up the theme “ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth”. President Joko Widodo stated that: “ASEAN needs to be stable and peace, an epicentrum for global stability. ASEAN also needs to be consistent in enforcing international law and avoid being proxy to anyone. ASEAN needs to be a region of dignity that upholds high humanity and democracy”. Dinna Prapto Raharja, former Indonesian Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, explores the challenges Indonesia faces as Chair of ASEAN in 2023.

Indonesia has a history of proactive engagement with ASEAN. More than that, Indonesia is known for its inspiring approaches that could reduce the chance of deadlocks in ASEAN. For instance, knowing that many countries often resort to the non-interference argument, Indonesia worked up the idea on having an ASEAN Community where ASEAN is not just about achieving economic growth, which may consequently leave some members behind, but also caring about gaps in economic development. This means discussing solutions for political-security and socio-cultural challenges countries are faced with along the growth such as transnational crimes, geopolitical challenges,



human rights, and the issues of marginalized groups.

Carefully crafted to win the hearts of ASEAN Member States, we then saw the birth of Bali Declaration II with the three pillars of ASEAN: political security, economic, and socio-cultural pillars. Next, knowing that most ASEAN Member States were skeptical about sharing their views on political security matters, arguing that it is a sensitive domestic matter, Indonesia voluntarily shared how the government responded to problems in Aceh and Timor Leste. Indonesia also invites non-government figures to represent Indonesia in the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights instead of avoiding talks with activists. Indonesia gave the examples that sharing and having dia-

logues with the members of the Community is a way to go in ASEAN.

The ASEAN 2023 theme suggests that Indonesia is confident in leading dialogues and actions on economic growth as much as it is on political and security issues. In the past, economic issues are known to be the theme chosen by the smaller countries with less open politics and yet fast-growing economies. Indonesia’s success in navigating the G20 meetings namely keeping the G20 intact despite the war in Ukraine and issuing a joint statement at the G20 Summit despite deep divides among members, have boosted President Joko Widodo’s passion to continue pushing the economic agendas from the G20 to ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific. But would this focus work?



Challenges for ASEAN 2023

The dire prospect of peace in Ukraine and the high inflation due to the rising price of food and energy sent notes of caution across the world, including to ASEAN economies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected that about 90 percent of advanced economies will see a decline in

move forward in a unified manner. Indonesia's Chair of Senior Official Meetings revealed that the goal for bringing up ASEAN as "epicentrum of growth" is to bring more respect for Southeast Asia countries and to play a bigger role on the global stage, to reaffirm its bargaining position and recover fully from the COVID-19 pandemic. From this angle,

tion despite their economic frictions leads to diverging bilateral preferences from ASEAN Member States. As we know some ASEAN Member States are quite dependent economically the US or China, and mostly do not want to invoke political security problems with neither the US, China, nor India.

China is ASEAN's largest trading



growth in 2023 while the major engines for growth would be China and India. Consequently, emerging and developing economies are expected to improve resilience and remove key growth constraints. Key initiatives in this pillar are the development of micro, small, and medium enterprises, and the promotion of ASEAN Integration among the developing members of ASEAN to

Indonesia's choice of theme is timely to secure ASEAN's place in the global arena.

Geopolitical Tensions

However, Indonesia's economic vision for ASEAN may face dilemmas caused by the tensions between the greater powers, China, the US and India. Engaging these three countries into a productive negotia-

partners since 2009 and by 2020; the total value of trade in goods between China and ASEAN has accounted a quarter of ASEAN's foreign trade. In terms of investment, China's FDI flow to the region accounts for 6.7% of the total FDI absorbed by ASEAN and this supports manufacturing, financial and insurance, wholesale, and retail as well as construction across ASEAN.



South China Sea

The tensions around the South China Sea is one example where economic dependence and security issues create dilemmas. Indonesia wants to make sure that its territorial integrity around the Natuna Islands is respected not only for political security, but also for the areas' wealth in natural resources. China, on the other hand, has not budged from its nine-dash line claim, now asserting control to more than 80 percent of the South China Sea[2]. If Indonesia only resorts to issuing an ASEAN Leaders' Statements or Declarations on the matter, it would be seen as another sign of a weak ASEAN. In Indonesia's statement from the 32nd ASEAN Coordinating Council Meeting and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat, issued on February 4, 2023, is suggesting that there is yet a new strategy to speed up the negotiations on the Code of Conduct. It says that the physical textual negotiation will start in March 2023 and the ASEAN Member States acknowledged the need for new approaches.

Myanmar

Two years after the coup, the situation in Myanmar is an issue too big to hide under the economic focus. At the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in February a follow-up on the Five-Point Consensus, the legitimacy of Myanmar's representation in attending ASEAN meetings, and the next steps for the Special Envoy

were expected to be addressed, but the output was a statement about creating a conducive environment for an inclusive dialogue. All while it seems obvious that the Five-Point Consensus has failed to curb violence and destabilization of Myanmar.

What can Indonesia do? Ideally, as a chair Indonesia could tap into its strength in having good bilateral relations with Myanmar and the neighboring countries to explore political solutions. Thus, not to solely rely on the ASEAN mechanisms. The dilemma here is to balance ASEAN's approach and Indonesia's approach. Will Indonesia have the courage to offer models of nation building for Myanmar to curb violence and destabilization? Given that Myanmar has been a graveyard for any Special Envoy, this year a new approach is needed. The clock is ticking. Humanitarian agencies face difficulties in protecting themselves and their logistics when penetrating Myanmar. Each humanitarian group must generate their own local contacts. The areas controlled by the Myanmar military junta shrunk since the coup but the size of territorial control of the alternative groups are not decisive enough to gain legitimacy over people in the entire country. Yet, the military junta continues to claim legitimacy over Myanmar, approaching groups for support for the general election despite rejection from the Myanmar public. Indonesia's intent to re-enact the plan to facilitate the voluntary return

of the displaced people of Rakhine back to Myanmar is premature under such unstable political condition.

Conclusion

Hard to say how Indonesia would manage the discussed challenges and tensions. We may look at how Indonesia conducted various quiet shuttle diplomacy to find politically acceptable solutions on the South China Sea, on Cambodia-Thailand conflict over the Preah Vihear Temple, on the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, and more. Engagements with civil society groups used to be livelier than today too.

There is hope that at some point we would feel the fresh air. After all, Indonesia is known for being brave to discuss sensitive issues. Though not ideal, President Joko Widodo recently acknowledged that there were gross violations of human rights in twelve (12) cases in Indonesia since 1965. President Widodo shared regrets for what happened and promised remedy to the victims. As Indonesia's Former Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa once said in his book *Does ASEAN Matter?* (2018), Indonesia has the view that "the risk of inaction far outweighed the risk of policy failure". We hope the same principle holds today.

Dr. Dinna Prapto Raharja is an Associate Professor in International Relations at Binus University, Indonesia.



Whitlam's Legacy in Australia–Vietnam Relations 50 Years on

Derek McDougall

After winning office in December 1972, former Australian Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam established diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in February 1973. While Whitlam is often credited with ending Australian involvement in the Vietnam War, this assessment of his history is a misunderstanding.

Most Australian troops were withdrawn from the Republic of Vietnam after the Tet Offensive in 1968 – a decision made by former Liberal prime minister John Gorton's government. The final Australian combat role ended in 1971 under former Liberal prime minister William McMahon's government. But with electoral success in 1972, Labor was set to make changes to Australia's Vietnam policy.

Whitlam's government withdrew Australia's remaining military advisers from the Republic of Vietnam and ended military conscription. Whitlam also distanced Australia from US Vietnam policy, establishing the basis for a new relationship with Vietnam.

Yet soon after the Labor government took office, the United States escalated its military involvement in Vietnam.

Tensions emerged between former US president Richard Nixon's



Chairman of the National Assembly Vuong Dinh Hue (R) meets Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Canberra on November 30, 2022 as part of his official visit to Australia. (Photo: VNA)

administration and Whitlam's government as Australia distanced itself from US policy. The United States hoped that its escalating military involvement would bring the DRV back to the negotiating table after peace talks, which began following the Tet Offensive in early 1968, were suspended in. While the United States concluded the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973 and then withdrew from the war, neither Vietnamese side observed the ceasefire. The war ended two years later

on 30 April 1975 with the fall of Saigon.

Whitlam's government did not withdraw its recognition of the Republic of Vietnam when it recognised the DRV. Australia maintained official relations with both the Hanoi and Saigon governments for over two years, effectively having a 'two Vietnams' policy. Reunification of Vietnam, forming the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, occurred in



1976. While not in government at this point, Whitlam prepared the way for Australia and Vietnam to move away from the destructive environment of war.

The exodus of refugees from Vietnam played a role in Australia–Vietnam relations. While Liberal prime minister Malcolm Fraser (1975–1983) welcomed the new arrivals, Whitlam did not. Whitlam saw the refugees as anti-communist and likely anti-Labor. Their arrival in Australia was seen as likely to complicate the development of a relationship prioritising foreign policy and economic interests. This has played out to some extent. The Vietnamese diaspora in Australia has advocated for human rights issues being an important part of Australia–Vietnam relations.

In 2023, Whitlam’s vision of Australia–Vietnam relations being anchored in mutual interests has been realised – even if he did not foresee the development of a large Vietnamese–Australian community. In geopolitical terms, Vietnam is important to Australia because of its membership of ASEAN – an organisation which Australia sees as an important regional interlocutor – and its position in relation to China. Vietnam has hedged its relations with China to protect its independence. Cooperative relations with Australia are useful for Vietnam. These ties are helpful to Australia, too, given Australia’s strategy of balancing against China.

Vietnam is a major economy in Southeast Asia. While Whitlam might have foreseen that Australia’s diplomatic engagement with Vietnam would facilitate trade and investment opportunities, he might not have expected the pace with which Vietnam has emerged as one of Asia’s new economic ‘tigers’. Vietnam has reached middle-income status. Vietnam is becoming a major manufacturing hub in the region due to the availability of cheap labour. In 2021, Vietnam ranked as Australia’s ninth largest source of imports and 19th largest export destination. Australian investment in Vietnam has also expanded – Australia was the 19th largest foreign investor in Vietnam in 2021.

Australian aid to Vietnam further strengthens the bilateral relationship – the Cao Lanh Bridge over the Mekong River, which opened in 2018, was a major practical and symbolic achievement of Australian aid to Vietnam. The OECD lists Vietnam as the eighth largest recipient of Australian development assistance.

Vietnam and Australia are also among the signatories to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. Both countries share a commitment to trade liberalisation. Australian tourism to Vietnam has enhanced people-to-people links between the two countries. Vietnam

is the fifth largest source of international students in Australia. Vietnam is also a popular destination for Australian New Colombo Plan students and some Australian universities have established campuses in Vietnam.

In 2022, the governments of Australia and Vietnam announced their intention to elevate their relationship to a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ – an advance on the ‘strategic partnership’ agreed to in 2018. Australian and Vietnamese leaders’ regular bilateral visits and interactions underscore the increasing importance of the relationship.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has assisted the Vietnamese peace-keeping contingent in South Sudan. The ADF has provided training and equipment and supported the transport of the contingent from Vietnam to South Sudan.

In 50 years, Vietnam has moved from a ‘battlefield into a marketplace’. But while the ‘marketplace’ and people-to-people links provide solid ballast for the relationship between Australia and Vietnam, there is remarkable congruence in the contemporary geopolitical perspectives of the two countries. This goes beyond anything Whitlam would have envisaged.

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Saudi Arabia and Iran's Diplomatic ties with China's Initiative in a Complex Equation

Md. Zillur Rahaman



Geographically, Saudi Arabia and Iran are neighboring countries, which historically have similarities in various aspects, such as religion, culture and history, so good relations between the two countries should be maintained. But in reality it is completely opposite, for example, although both countries are Muslim-majority, Saudi Arabia is Sunni and Iran is Shia. Diplomatic ties between Tehran and Riyadh have been suspended since 2016 and in that year, Saudi Arabia executed 81 people sentenced in one day, mostly Shia Muslims. Protesters stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran to protest the execution of an influential Shia religious leader. Due to that incident, Iran and Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic ties. In addition, Iran and Saudi Arabia are at loggerheads over the eight-year-long war in Yemen. The Yemeni government is supported by the Saudi-led military coalition and opposed by Iran-backed Houthi fighters.

As the saying goes, in international politics there is no such thing as permanent enemy and friend. The course of world politics changes from moment to moment due to the influential decisions, actions and policies of the global heads of state. Due to national interests, arch-rival states can suddenly become important friends and close friends become arch-enemies. Because it is an accepted fact that every state becomes realistic in various calculations and political equations to protect the national interest. When the partisan behavior of the United States (US) and its allies failed to establish peace in the Middle East, the news of the re-estab-

lishment of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran through the mediation of Asia's superpower China has created a very good vibration in international politics. On March 10, 2023, both countries agreed to restore diplomatic relations through the mediation of China, removing all previous bitterness and hostile relations. Both countries have announced to open embassies very soon.

Saudi Arabia previously maintained good relations with the US and its European allies, while Iran maintained diplomatic relations with anti-US China and Russia. As the war in Ukraine creates a new polarization in





world politics and diplomacy centered on oil and the US dollar, China's initiative to reduce US influence in the Middle East has begun a new reckoning of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Four consecutive days of secret meetings, initially in Baghdad and later in China, were very significant behind this progress in relations. This move to place these two hostile states at the same table can be called a huge diplomatic achievement for China. After nearly 7 years of separation, the relationship could change the picture of the Middle East. This agreement to restore relations will no doubt reverberate throughout the Middle East and beyond. Moreover, the US undue delay and various blockades in the six-nation nuclear agreement with Iran, the country's diplomatic relations with China and Russia have played a strong role in creating new polarization.

It is customary in international diplomacy to welcome the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the long-standing dispute between these two hostile neighbors embroiled in a regional conflict. When Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore diplomatic ties after seven years, so did the rest of the world. World leaders from the UN Secretary General have welcomed this agreement with statements. But the exception was the response of two countries - the US and its great ally Israel. Both countries are Iran's arch-enemies in the geopolitical conflict in the Middle East, and Iran considers these two countries to be the number one threat to its country's security and

sovereignty. Iran has never recognized Israel as a state and considers the country a big enemy the Middle East to the establishment of a peaceful Palestinian state.

Then, according to previous estimates, naturally, Washington is very uncomfortable with this historic mediation by China. When news of the deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia first emerged from Beijing, it created a surprise and alarm in Washington. The main reason for this, however, is not the Iran-Saudi Arabia deal, but the main reason for their discomfort and apprehension is China's role in this deal. International analysts believe that it will be difficult for the US to accept Iran-Saudi peaceful relations. They may even try to make the deal fail. Because, the return of stability in the Middle East will have a major impact on the arms trade of the US. Because Saudi Arabia is their big arms buyer of US. Besides, their singular influence in the Middle East will also be hindered. This relationship is not only for China, but Russia's influence in the Middle East will also greatly increase, which is a major cause of concern for the US.

On the other hand, this agreement has also heated up the internal politics of Israel. It caused severe depression among them. Even the restoration of diplomatic relations is seen as a symbolic failure for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. According to the Israeli think tank Institute for National Security, this is a blow to Israel's ideas and efforts to create an anti-Iranian bloc in the

region over the past few years. Considering the Middle East as a 'zero-sum game', a diplomatic victory for Iran is bad news for Israel!

Finally, it can be said that if the Riyadh-Tehran distance is reduced through the mediation of China, peace can return to conflicting countries like Yemen, Syria, and Iraq and also create a big scope for business. This agreement indicates that the influence of China and Russia will increase as the influence of the US decreases in the Arab Gulf region. It is certainly the biggest change in Middle East diplomacy in recent years. The continuation of the deal between the two rivals has naturally had a positive impact on the volatile Middle East. Analysts think so, especially in Yemen, where there is a conflict between the Saudi-backed administration and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

In particular, countries such as Syria and Yemen, which have become battlegrounds for Saudi Arabia and Iran's power struggle, may be somewhat reassured by the announcement and naturally, if diplomatic relations are re-established between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and if there is a possibility of closer relations in the future, it will create a new pattern of geopolitical relations in the Gulf region. And it can be hoped that the troubled Middle East will become peaceful and the way to return to geopolitical stability will be opened.

Md. Zillur Rahaman, *Banker and freelance writer, Bangladesh.*



Saudi Arabia Offers \$100 Million in Humanitarian Aid to Sudan



Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, issued directives to present humanitarian aid to Sudan worth \$100 million.

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, issued on April 30, 2023 directives to present humanitarian aid to Sudan worth \$100 million.

The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center has been tasked with overseeing the delivery of the aid and organizing a popular donation campaign through the

“Sahem” platform.

The campaign is aimed at easing the suffering of the Sudanese people given the crisis they are enduring.

Advisor at the Royal Court and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia relief Supervisor General, Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Rabeeah, stressed that the assistance emanates from the keenness of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed to stand by the people of Sudanese

during their plight.

He expressed his gratitude for their noble stances, which are an extension of the Kingdom’s humanitarian role in standing with the needy across the globe.

He revealed that under the generous directives, relief, humanitarian, and medical aid will be provided to the displaced in Sudan.

Source: Reuters

G7 HIROSHIMA SUMMIT



On 19 May, 2023, the G7 Hiroshima Summit Session 3 “Foreign and Security Policy” was held from 6:55 pm for 100 minutes. The overview of the session is as follows:

1 At the beginning of the session, Prime Minister Kishida stated that any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force is unacceptable anywhere in the world and that it is essential to show the G7’s strong will to uphold the free and

open international order based on the rule of law.

2 The G7 leaders exchanged views on the situation in the Indo-Pacific region and reaffirmed that the G7 will continue to closely work together in responding to issues related to China as well as North Korea, including nuclear and missile issues and abductions issue.

3 Regarding nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, Prime

Minister Kishida touched upon the meaning of discussing nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in Hiroshima and stated that maintaining and strengthening the NPT is the only realistic path toward realizing a “world without nuclear weapons”, and reaffirmed the G7’s commitment to a “world without nuclear weapons.”

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan



COMMENTARY

Is America Postured for a Fight in the Indo-Pacific?

Dustin Walker



The Biden administration promised 2023 would be “the most transformative year” for U.S. force posture in the Indo-Pacific region in a generation. With a trio of major political announcements and a proposed budget boost, 2023 is off to a strong start. But there is no time for a scenic overlook of recent accomplishments. To achieve the transformative effect needed to bolster deterrence against China, the

Biden administration needs to keep its foot on the gas.

In January, the United States and Japan agreed to keep the U.S. 3rd Marine Division in Okinawa (instead of Guam) and to replace it with the new 12th Marine Littoral Regiment in 2025. The two countries also agreed to share ammunition storage at Kadena Air Base.

In February, the United States and the Philippines agreed to designate four new sites as part of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, or EDCA, which provides access for U.S. forces.

In March, the United States agreed as part of the AUKUS security partnership to increase U.S. submarine port visits to Australia and to rotate up to four Virginia-class submarines by as early as 2027.

Also in March, the Pentagon’s budget request included \$2.3 billion for military construction west of the international date line – a \$400 million increase from the prior year.

So far so good. But overcoming a decade-long “say-do” gap on Indo-Pacific posture and keeping pace with a rapidly evolving Chinese mili-





tary threat will require sustained urgency matched by robust investment.

Building on recent political momentum is critical. With Japan, we need ambitious defense diplomacy to secure new access for U.S. forces and to make shared use of bases, ports, airfields and other facilities the rule, not the exception. And after years of legal and political challenges, the U.S. and the Philippines need to make up for lost time and maximize the potential of EDCA sites through accelerated investment and expanded combined training and operations.

More posture dollars should be focused directly on achieving a more distributed and resilient posture. Most investment in the Indo-Pacific is dedicated to maintaining existing facilities or executing legacy posture initiatives, some of questionable relevance to the current or future threat. That investment is also geographically concentrated. West of the international date line, the Pentagon plans to spend 75% of fiscal 2024 military construction funds in Japan and Guam – up from 66% the previous year. Going forward, more investment is needed in the second island chain, Oceania and Southeast Asia.

Beyond politics and budgets, achieving a “transformative” effect on Indo-Pacific posture requires actually moving forces. The Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” was matched with two additional destroyers and fifth-generation fighters in Japan; an additional submarine and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense battery

in Guam; and rotational littoral combat ships in Singapore, among other moves. The Biden administration needs to demonstrate similar follow-through, and there’s plenty of options to do so.

The Air Force has operated fifth-generation aircraft for nearly two decades, but it has no plan to permanently station its most advanced fighters in the Indo-Pacific. The Air Force has promised to maintain a continuous fighter presence at Kadena Air Base in Japan, including fifth-generation aircraft, as it withdraws and retires F-15C/D aircraft. Beyond that, it has offered no specifics. Basing F-35As at Misawa Air Base in Japan would be a strong next step.

The Multi-Domain Task Force is central to the Army’s contribution toward joint operations in the Indo-Pacific. But while it has based MDTFs in Washington state and Hawaii, the Army does not yet plan to station an MDTF west of the international date line. The Army chief of staff recently hinted this may change. The Biden administration should ensure it does, including by prioritizing access for an MDTF in defense diplomacy with Japan.

The Navy has long pledged to send its most advanced ships and aircraft to the Indo-Pacific. However, of the Navy’s 20 commissioned Virginia-class submarines – critical to the U.S. military’s advantage over China – the Navy has sent 14 to Atlantic ports and just six to Pacific ports. And none of the Navy’s most advanced attack boats are homeport-

ed west of the international date line. While keeping pace with Russia’s submarine threat is critical, the Biden administration should rebalance that laydown by stationing Virginia-class submarines in Guam and San Diego, California.

The Biden administration should also accelerate investment in the logistics network that is essential for credible deterrence and effective warfighting. Fuel storage and distribution is critical, especially with the planned closure of Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility. But the Pentagon is kicking the fuel can down the road. The Defense Logistics Agency plans to spend at least \$360 million over the five-year Future Years Defense Program in projects for fuel facilities and storage west of the international date line. But it has requested no funding for those projects in next two fiscal years, and punted most projects to FY27 and FY28. Working with Congress, the Biden administration should accelerate these projects as able.

The weaknesses of U.S. force posture in the Indo-Pacific have contributed to the erosion of credible deterrence. But with sustained diplomatic urgency, robust investment and more advanced capabilities, a transformation of U.S. force posture can help restore and preserve credible deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

Dustin Walker is a nonresident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute think tank.



President Yoon Suk Yeol and U.S. President Joe Biden on April 26 hold a joint news conference at the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington. (Office of the President)

Korea and US Adopted Joint Declaration Form Nuclear Consultative Group

President Biden of the United States welcomed President Yoon of the Republic of Korea (ROK) on April 26, 2023, for a State Visit to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the U.S.-ROK Alliance. The two presidents reaffirmed their ironclad commitment to what has become a global alliance focused on deepening defense and security ties, expanding economic, commercial, and environmental

cooperation, increasing digital and technology collaboration—including in the space sector—and broadening development assistance, educational exchanges, and people-to-people ties. President Yoon Suk Yeol and U.S. President Joe Biden on April 26 officially adopted the Washington Declaration at their bilateral summit in Washington.

Through the declaration, both leaders pledged to "engage in deeper,

cooperative decision-making on nuclear deterrence."

The declaration said, "The two Presidents announced the establishment of a new Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) to strengthen extended deterrence, discuss nuclear and strategic planning, and manage the threat to the nonproliferation regime posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)."

"The Alliance will work to enable



Biden cheers as Yoon sings "American Pie" by Don McLean.

joint execution and planning for ROK conventional support to U.S. nuclear operations in a contingency and improve combined exercises and training activities on the application of nuclear deterrence on the Korean Peninsula."

"To commemorate this historic year for our Alliance, President Biden and President Yoon have committed to develop an ever-stronger mutual defense relationship and affirm in the strongest words possible their commitment to the combined defense posture under the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty."

"The ROK has full confidence in U.S. extended deterrence commitments and recognizes the importance, necessity, and benefit of its enduring reliance on the U.S. nuclear deterrent."

"The United States commits to make every effort to consult with the ROK on any possible nuclear weapons employment on the Korean

Peninsula, consistent with the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review's declaratory policy, and the Alliance will maintain robust communication infrastructure to facilitate these consultations."

"President Yoon reaffirmed the ROK's longstanding commitment to its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as the cornerstone of the global nonproliferation regime as well as to the U.S.-ROK Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy."

Through the declaration, both presidents sent a firm message to the international community of jointly standing against all threats to the common national security of the two countries.

"President Yoon affirmed that the ROK will apply the full range of its capabilities to the Alliance's combined defense posture. This includes working in lockstep with the United States to closely connect the capabili-

ties and planning activities of the new ROK Strategic Command and the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command," it added.

"President Biden reaffirmed that the United States' commitment to the ROK and the Korean people is enduring and ironclad, and that any nuclear attack by the DPRK against the ROK will be met with a swift, overwhelming and decisive response." He added that the U.S. commitment to extend deterrence to Korea is backed by Washington's full range of capabilities, including nuclear.

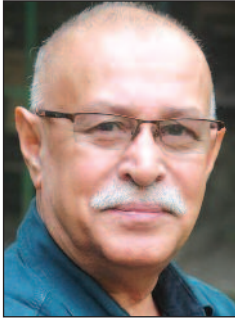
Both leaders also agreed to "strengthen standing bodies for consultations on extended deterrence, including the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group, to better prepare the Alliance to defend against potential attacks and nuclear use and conduct simulations to inform joint planning efforts."

Source: Washington Post



Is Bangladesh Slowly Embracing an Indo-Pacific Strategy?

Saleem Samad



Bangladesh is visibly and invisibly leaning towards the superpowers including the United States, China and Russia. But it also has friends and allies in the Middle East. India has been a proven friend, which has partnered Bangladesh's development.

Bangladesh is now inching closer to embracing the Indo-Pacific Strategy, despite the country's professed non-aligned foreign policy.

However, Bangladesh has never strayed from its founding principle of nonalignment and wisdom drawn from its independence hero Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which can be summed up as Friendship to all and malice toward none.

Bangladesh essentially aims to balance relations with rival states. Many explain that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina does not keep eggs in one basket. Thus, she wants to maintain diplomatic, economic and strategic partnerships albeit "unequally" with the United States, Russia, China, European Union, Arabs and of course India.

A month ago, the private news agency United News of Bangladesh (UNB) wrote that Dhaka has finalised a draft of its Indo-Pacific

Outlook focused on objectives that mirror those of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The draft plan dwells upon the need for a free, secure, and peaceful region, according to Foreign Policy's South Asia brief prepared by Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Programme and Senior Associate for South Asia at the Wilson Centre, a nonpartisan research enterprise based in Washington DC.

Bangladesh It appears is moving closer to a full embrace of the Indo-Pacific Strategy pursued by the Americans and its partners in the region, which revolves around countering China. This move comes as the US and a few key allies have signalled that Bangladesh should be a part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, according to the brief.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in New Delhi recently unveiled a new plan for the region, calling for strategic collaborations with Bangladesh, including a new economic partnership agreement.

A deep-sea port under construction in southern Bangladesh is shaping up to be a strategic linchpin for Japan and India as the Quad partners aim to counter Chinese influence, writes Nikkei Asia, an influential Japanese economic and finance media outlet.

Dhaka has friendly ties with the USA, and other members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

(known as the Quad) including India, and Europe.

Development of the deep-sea port of Matarbari - a natural gateway to both South and Southeast Asia will put a Japan-backed facility just north of Sonadia, another prime location on the Bay of Bengal where China was expected to develop a port. But the Chinese facility did not materialise. Dhaka silently dropped the idea a few years ago, which caused diplomatic hullabaloo with Beijing.

Some leading pundits tend to declare a strategic victory for India in a South Asian great game between big powers. Anu Anwar, a research associate at the Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies at Harvard University, told Nikkei Asia the Sonadia port deal with China did not succeed because of India's opposition, which the [government] in Dhaka could not simply override due to its overreliance on Delhi. Also, India's tag-team partner, Japan is also considered a winner in this scenario, though some observers see no game at all, says Faisal Mahmud and Ryohtaroh Satoh in a joint article in Nikkei Asia.

In New Delhi, Kishida said the industrial value chain from the deep-sea port in the Bay of Bengal and the hinterland of landlocked northeast states [so-called Seven Sisters] of India which neighbours China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, will be immensely beneficial from "the



growth of the entire region. Japanese, Indian and Bangladeshi officials also discussed the plans with G. Kishan Reddy, India's federal minister for the northeast, welcoming Japan's initiative, Reuters reported.

An Independence Day message from US chief executive Joseph R. Biden to Sheikh Hasina has caught the attention of many political observers. Bangladesh is scheduled to hold parliamentary elections in January next year, Biden "reminded of the deep value both of our nations' people place on democracy, equality, respect for human rights, and free and fair elections." The message ended with the slogan 'Joy Bangla' (Victory for Bangladesh), which enthralled masses in Bangladesh.

A series of statements from the chief executive of the United States and other bigwigs of the country demonstrates that the stars are shining brightly over Bangladesh's sky. In fact, US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken flattered Bangladesh and said the country is "quickly becoming a regional leader."

On the occasion of the 52nd anniversary of the Independence of Bangladesh, the United States Congress introduced a resolution on 29 March recognising and commending Bangladesh and its remarkable socioeconomic progress under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, official news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) reported. The resolution said Bangladesh has successfully maintained a moderate Muslim society and curbed extrem-

ism in the country, but falls short of describing Bangladesh as a secular and pluralistic nation.

Despite the heart-warming tete-a-tete messages, Sheikh Hasina last week in the parliament in Dhaka did not hesitate to lambast America: "They are lecturing us on democracy and human rights. What's the situation in their country?"

Amid the dilemma to decide or not to decide on a strategic partnership, China has stepped up its influence in Bangladesh through mega-infrastructure loans, which US officials have privately described as "bad deals" for the country.

It's indeed an intriguing question as to why Bangladesh wishes to be associated with the Indo-Pacific Strategy and its goal of countering China. No doubt, participation in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy would bring Bangladesh closer to key trade and investment partners.

China is also a major supplier of arms to Bangladesh. So, getting Dhaka's buy-in to the US-sponsored Indo-Pacific vision would be a strategic victory.

The current governments in Bangladesh and India are very close, and New Delhi is likely to have encouraged Dhaka to embrace the strategy, according to the brief by Wilson Centre.

Even as Bangladesh embraces the Indo-Pacific Strategy, it is still trying to placate China. Dhaka's draft Indo-Pacific Outlook stipulates that it seeks to avoid rivalries and has no security goals, read the brief.

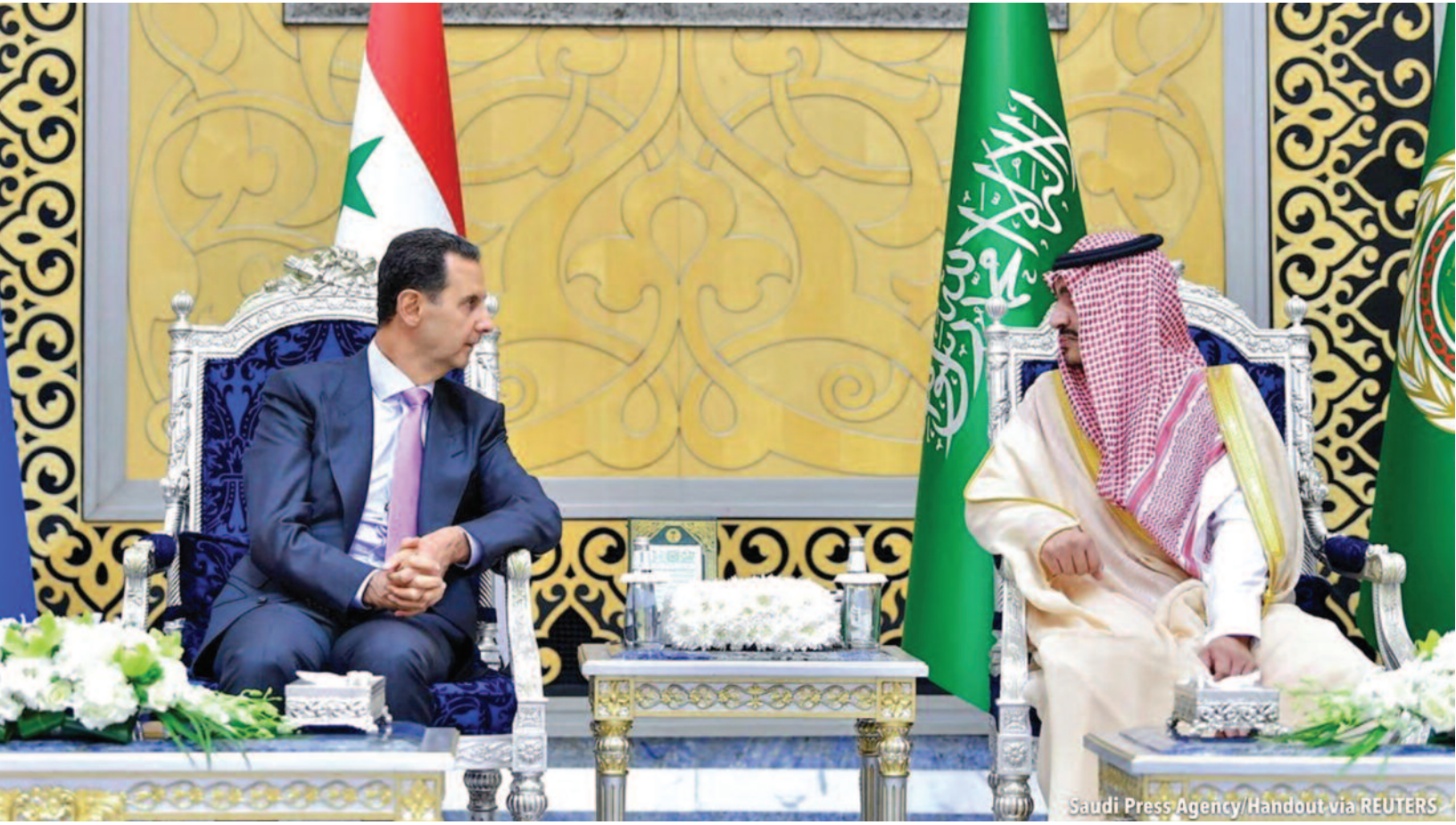
The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - includes many states that have cordial relations with China - opted for the same term in its Indo-Pacific coalition. Dhaka has also not indicated that it would join the Quad. Several visits of high-profile dignitaries in recent times from the United States, United Kingdom and European Union enforce that "these countries would want Bangladesh to take part in the Indo-Pacific Strategy read the brief.

Kugelman said Bangladesh has become a battleground for great power competition. It is strategically located, bordering India and serving as a gateway to both South and Southeast Asia. China is definitely concerned about the development of a regional strategic alliance. A few weeks ago, the Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen to Bangladesh squarely blamed Washington for pushing Dhaka into the US-backed Quad against China.

To deepen relations with China, Bangladesh could certainly back off from the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. Bangladesh appears to believe its interests aren't compromised by stretching the limits of nonalignment, according to the brief.

In the coming years, when the dozens of mega-projects funded by Japan, China, Russia and India are finally implemented, it could be understood which superpower and regional powers wins the heart and minds of Bangladesh.

Saleem Samad is an award-winning independent journalist based in Bangladesh.



Saudi Press Agency/Handout via REUTERS

Arab heads of state were attended on May 19, 2023 Arab League summit in the Saudi Red Sea resort town of Jeddah, including the president of Syria for the first time in more than a dozen years. The crises in Syria and Sudan are expected to be major topics of discussion at the meeting.

Arab leaders began arriving in Jeddah

on May 18 in the lead-up 32nd annual Arab summit, was hosted by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

Among those Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has not attended an Arab League summit since 2010, the year before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war.

Arab League foreign ministers restored Syria's membership in the body at a meeting in Cairo earlier the month of May this year.

Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal al-Miqdad told journalists in Jeddah that Syria is a key player in the Arab League.

Source: Voice of America



Syria's President Bashar al-Assad arrives to attend the Arab League Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, May 18, 2023.

In Pictures: 42nd ASEAN Summit in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia on May 10, 2023



(L-R) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister Don Pramudwinai, Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo, Laos' Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, Brunei's Prime Minister Hassanal Bolkiah, Cambodia's President Hun Sen, Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and East Timor's Prime Minister Taur Matan Ruak pose for family photo during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Labuan Bajo on May 10, 2023. — AFP



Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim is greeted by Indonesian President Joko Widodo.



Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh (right) meets with Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. on the sidelines of the ongoing 42nd ASEAN Summit.



Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh (C-R) walks with Indonesian Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin (C-L) upon his arrival at the Komodo International Airport, Indonesia.



Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn attended the Retreat Session of the 42nd ASEAN Summit held in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia.

In Pictures: Thailand's Art and Culture

