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# THE POLITICS OF LOCATION AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL INTEREST

The war in Ukraine and Bangladesh's  
choices

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## Abstract

The war in Ukraine has redefined the global strategic landscape, forcing countries to reconsider their strategies and short-term priorities in order to respond to a crisis that has reintroduced territorial conflict among state actors in the 21st century. This has tremendous geopolitical implications as well as impacts on the global food and energy supply chain. As the world faces a crisis of this magnitude, the West is now paying attention to the strategic choices of the rest of the world, particularly those of emerging voices. Bangladesh, in this context, emerges as a country whose choices must be laid out clearly.

In this article, I highlight Bangladesh's geopolitical concerns and the way they shape Bangladesh's foreign policy choices. Bangladesh shares the fifth-longest land boundary with India, which has its perks in Bangladesh's politics. India cannot remain oblivious to the strategic priorities of a rising Bangladesh, the latter being the second largest economy in South Asia, with the highest per capita GDP, several other actors waiting to make themselves visible. To Bangladesh, the repatriation of the Rohingyas, an internal issue of Myanmar's but imposed upon Bangladesh, is of the utmost importance. Bangladesh wants the international community to ensure the safe and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingyas.

This article also discusses Bangladesh's economic success as well as challenges certain to arise from the war in Ukraine. The conflict has created new concerns for Bangladesh in terms of food and energy security, even though it was one of the few nations to successfully tackle hunger during the pandemic; however the global rise in food grain prices stemming from the conflict has curtailed Bangladesh's ability to spend. In the area of energy, experts have pointed out that the challenges Bangladesh experiences are unconnected to the war and instead a result of delayed domestic response to the growing demand for energy in the country, coinciding with the conflict.

Unpredictable as ever, international politics is in a state of transition in the 21st century, old relationships being tested even as new ones

are formed. The difference now is that countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are no longer content to stay in the shadows, preferring instead to take an overt position in a bid to maintain an equal distance from the West and from Russia. An approach Bangladesh shares, always having maintained friendly relations with all countries of the world, following its foreign policy dictum—"friendship to all, malice to none". Bangladesh's goal is the development of its people, best served following its principle of 'growth without enmity'. Like all countries in the anarchic international system, Bangladesh is well advised to put its national interests first. Bangladesh's priorities lie in ensuring the development of the country (a long-term goal), repatriation of the Rohingyas in a sustainable manner and maintaining a positive outlook in its foreign affairs.

# 1 Introduction

In the tussle of international politics, South Asia has often been seen as a peripheral region, despite being home to two overt nuclear weapons states—India and Pakistan. Some even questioned whether South Asia qualified as an existent region. With the shift in geopolitical reality in the 21st century, South Asia no longer only exists, but also occupies a key position in global power calculations. As a corollary, smaller states of South Asia are also finding themselves in the midst of geopolitical centrality and being courted by the great powers. Bangladesh, an emerging middle power, is no exception. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfolding on 24 February 2022, the great powers have increased their engagements with the periphery and considered the reactions of the Global South to Russia's military activities. Some countries, including Bangladesh, did not vote in the first United Nations (UN) General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution condemning Russia's actions, while Bangladesh voted in the second UNGA resolution on maintaining the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

In this article, I explore the effects of the war in Ukraine on Bangladesh from varied perspectives. In its 50th year of existence, Bangladesh is at the cusp of change and transformation for the better, the war in Ukraine posing certain foreign policy questions for the country. With energy prices rising and supplies shrinking globally, Bangladesh has experienced challenges like no other in recent times. However, Bangladesh's position on the Ukraine issue and its reasons are often not clearly articulated. In this article, examining the country's politico-security outlook and economic challenges, I argue that Bangladesh has chosen to remain neutral and distance itself from an overt stance on the issue because of strategic priorities and ground realities for the country. I shall show that the Ukraine crisis has bearings on Bangladesh in matters that need in-depth scrutiny. It must be noted that Bangladesh has shown its overt support for a rules-based international order<sup>1</sup> and the people of Ukraine when it voted during the second UNGA Resolution. Bangladesh's stance, like any other country's, stems from prioritising and maximising its

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<sup>1</sup> Sloss, D. L., 2022. Introduction: Preserving a Rules-based International Order, In David L. Sloss (Ed.), *Is the International Legal Order Unraveling?*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-37.

national interest. In the next two substantive sections, I point out Bangladesh's politico-security outlook, considerations and priorities, and in the second section, I lay out Bangladesh's economic priorities. On the basis of these discussions, I conclude that for Bangladesh to meet its immediate and long-term goals, it requires an 'open' and a 'neutral' foreign policy stance, which the country has been pursuing since its inception as a sovereign country in 1971.

## 2 Politico-Security Challenges

Bangladesh has followed a consistent foreign policy since its inception, drawing from the proclamation of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahman: Friendship to all, malice to none. With the war in Ukraine raging on, this foreign policy dictum has been questioned by policymakers and scholars. Concerns have been raised whether, in a contemporary international order, Bangladesh can maintain its policy of neutrality.

While questions of this nature are raised, I argue that those behind these concerns fail to identify Bangladesh’s own geopolitical reality and that the country has to be cautious in taking an overt position of ‘either-or’. First, we need to pay attention to Bangladesh’s locational reality, which can be distinctively elucidated in the following manner:

Locational Advantage	Locational Disadvantage
Bangladesh is India’s Neighbor	Bangladesh is India’s Neighbor
Bangladesh is Myanmar’s Neighbor	Bangladesh is Myanmar’s Neighbor
The Bay of Bengal & Great Powers’ Interests	The Bay of Bengal & Great Powers’ Interests

The matrices on either side of the table are the same and for good reason. That Bangladesh-India shares the fifth-largest land boundary is both a boon and bane for Bangladesh. Such a geographical reality makes it virtually impossible for Bangladesh to ignore the ‘India factor’ in its domestic and foreign policy calculations<sup>2</sup>. Despite this, Bangladesh has been able to forge a relationship with India in a manner in which Bangladesh’s strategic importance is well-recognized, keeping Bangladesh’s economic growth valuable to India. The relationship between the two countries is now founded on bilateral

2 Halim, M.A., 1996, Strategy, Geopolitics and Bangladesh Foreign Policy”, In Abul Kalam (ed.), Bangladesh: Internal Dynamics and External Linkages, Dhaka: The University Press Limited.

understanding and institutional collaboration<sup>3</sup>. A number of disputes exist, as is common between neighbours, causing Bangladesh and India to carefully evaluate each other's strategic choices<sup>4</sup>.

Myanmar, with whom Bangladesh began to develop its economic relationship after resolving the maritime boundary issue, fomented an internal crisis, causing its citizens to flee to Bangladesh. The Rohingya crisis, which has persisted for decades from a pre-Bangladesh period, touched its nadir in August 2017. On humanitarian grounds, Bangladesh chose to provide shelter to a large number of Rohingyas fleeing persecution by the Myanmar military junta. With the military junta disbanding the Aung San Suu Kyi government and seizing power, the possibility of an amicable and sustainable solution ensuring the safe return of Myanmar's nationals to their own country seems distant. This leaves Bangladesh with 1.2 million Rohingyas stranded within its borders and facing reductions in its connectivity with the Southeast Asian region. Nonetheless, Bangladesh completed a road connecting with Myanmar as part of a bilateral and a multilateral agreement to enhance connectivity between the two countries, which serves as Bangladesh's gateway to Southeast Asia. Needless to say, the issue of connectivity is now moot during the ongoing crisis.

Bangladesh's unfettered access to the Bay of Bengal has made evident its geopolitical significance to the great powers<sup>5</sup>. With the West paying increasing attention to the East and the rise of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical space, the Bay of Bengal has become a significant hotspot. Bangladesh's potential to provide sea access to the land-locked countries of South Asia, such as Bhutan and Nepal, and connect landlocked Northeast India makes it geopolitically appealing not only to India and China but also to other major powers worldwide<sup>6</sup>. Bangladesh's emergence as an agenda-setter at the UN,

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3 Chakma, B., 2015. Sheikh Hasina Government's India Policy: A Three-level Game?, *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 2(1), pp. 27–51.

4 Yasmin, L., 2021. Neighbours By Chance, Friends By Choice: Celebrating 50th Anniversary Of India-Bangladesh Relations, *Outlook Magazine*, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/opinion-neighbours-by-chance-friends-by-choice-celebrating-the-50th-anniversary-of-india-bangladesh-relations/378335>, accessed on 16 December 2022.

5 Yasmin, L., 2022. Bangladesh at 50: The Rise of A Bangladesh That Can Say No, *Security Nexus*, available at <https://apcss.org/bangladesh-at-50-the-rise-of-a-bangladesh-that-can-say-no/>, accessed on 10 December 2022.

6 Anwar, A. and Kugelman, M., 2021. America Should Bet on Bangladesh, *Foreign Policy*, available on

when it came to issues concerning itself, did not escape the notice of international observers<sup>7</sup>. Its location, once seen as India-locked, has now positioned it as an emerging middle power<sup>8</sup>.

The war in Ukraine took place in the context of Bangladesh's consideration as significant not only from a strategic point of view but also for its consistent economic performance, an issue I elaborate in the next section. Bangladesh's miraculous rise, transitioning from an aid-dependent to a trade-dependent country with a strategic vision clearly articulated, can be attributed to its close ties with the great powers of the world<sup>9</sup>. Bangladesh's policy of neutrality, cogent calculation and embrace of countries willing to partner with it have made this journey possible. It is a rare example of 'growth without enmity', instrumental in adhering to its primary objective of ensuring 'survival'. Its early years' efforts lay in combating negative perceptions of its identity in Middle Eastern countries vital for much-needed economic aid in rebuilding its war-ravaged economy. Bangladesh's survival required tricky political manoeuvring, as did the progress it has made this far. Questions about Bangladesh's adherence to its policy of neutrality miss its significance for the country—it has allowed Bangladesh, within merely five decades of its existence, to springboard from survival to emergence as a middle power. Such progress can be sustained if Bangladesh sticks to its dual-track policy of maintaining a meaningful relationship with all concerned parties. The current Foreign Minister articulated four priorities of Bangladesh's foreign policy, namely "(a) equitable market access, (b) expansion of our export basket, (c) transfer of critical technologies, and (d) employment of our professionals and workers in foreign economies"<sup>10</sup>. With its firm commitment to rules-based international order, Bangladesh has always spoken for people and nations, evidenced by its support for

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<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/01/us-bangladesh-relations-dhaka-india-china-bri/>, accessed on 16 December 2022.

7 Yasmin, L., 2022. Bangladesh at 50: The Rise of A Bangladesh That Can Say No, Security Nexus, available at <https://apcss.org/bangladesh-at-50-the-rise-of-a-bangladesh-that-can-say-no/>, accessed on 10 December 2022.

8 Brewster, D., 2021. A Rising Bangladesh Starts to Exert Its Regional Power, The Interpreter, Lowy Institute, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/theinterpreter/rising-bangladesh-starts-exert-its-regional-power>, accessed on 10 December 2022.

9 Yasmin, L., 2022. Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: From Chrysalis of a State to an Emerging Middle Power, Journal of International Relations, Special Issue, Vol. 15 (1-2), pp. 23-53, DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.56312/DJIR15e1n2e2i>.

10 Momen, A.K.A., 2021. Bangladesh's foreign policy compulsions, constraints and choices, The Daily Star, 23 August.

the people of Palestine and the people of Ukraine.

### 3 Addressing Economic Challenges

Bangladesh's economic rise has drawn attention, the country emerging as the second largest economy in South Asia with the highest per capita income in the region in 2020<sup>11</sup>. Despite having no foreign reserves to begin with and a war-ravaged economy and infrastructure, Bangladesh is now a poster child for economic success. To paraphrase Faaland and Parkinson's oft-cited articulation about Bangladesh being a 'test case of development,'<sup>12</sup> if Bangladesh can develop with such scarcity of resources, any country can. Interestingly enough, with Bangladesh on the verge of graduating to a Middle Income Country (MIC), very few countries have been able to emulate Bangladesh's success story. Bangladesh's phenomenal economic success has been possible through consistency in its macro- and micro-economic policies, a collaboration between the government and non-governmental sectors,<sup>13</sup> reaching out to the rural poor with policies on population control and aiming to reduce the fertility rate and integrating them with economic activities. More importantly, investing in women,<sup>14</sup> both in their education and income generating activities with the idea of "leaving no one behind,"<sup>15</sup> has been critical to its success. In addition, Bangladesh has paid attention to securing non-traditional threats to the security of its state, working to reduce

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11 Sharma, M.s., 2021. Bangladesh rises to be South Asia's standout star as India, Pak fall behind, Business Standard, available at: [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/bangladesh-rises-to-be-south-asia-s-standout-star-as-india-pak-fall-behind-121060100237\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/bangladesh-rises-to-be-south-asia-s-standout-star-as-india-pak-fall-behind-121060100237_1.html), accessed on 13 December 2022; Das, S., 2021. Why Bangladesh should be seen as a South Asian economic miracle, South Asia Monitor, 7 June, available at: <https://www.southasiamonitor.org/spotlight/why-bangladesh-should-be-seen-south-asian-economic-miracle>, accessed on 13 December 2022; Byron, R.K., 2021. Bangladesh GDP growth 2nd-best in South Asia, The Daily Star, 9 June.

12 Faaland J. and Parkinson, J.R., 1976. Bangladesh: The Test Case for Development, London: Hurst and Company; Faaland J and Parkinson, J.R. 1976. Bangladesh: Gradual Development or Deepening Misery?, World Development, Vol. 4(9), pp. 739-747; Mujeri, M. K and Mujeri,N., 2020. Bangladesh at Fifty: Moving beyond Development Traps, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.

13 Mahmood, A., 2021. Bangladesh's Remarkable Development Journey: Government Had an Important Role Too, Brookings, 9 July, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2021/07/09/bangladeshs-remarkable-development-journey-government-had-an-important-role-too/>, accessed on 8 December 2022.

14 Evans, A., 2022. Why has female labor force participation risen in Bangladesh but fallen in India?, Brookings, 14 October, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2022/10/14/why-has-female-labor-force-participation-risen-in-bangladesh-but-fallen-in-india/>, accessed on 14 October 2022.

15 Hossain, N., 2019. The SDGs and the Empowerment of Bangladeshi Women, In Sachin Chaturvedi, et.al. (Eds.), The Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the 2030 Agenda, London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, pp. pp 453–474.

the child mortality rate, leveraging its huge population towards productivity by creating opportunities through manpower export and paying attention to a 'green revolution' aimed at the achievement of food security, among other measures<sup>16</sup>. Bangladeshi scholars have shown that Bangladesh followed its unique experiments in development rather than any unique Western path. This was quite evident in the manner Bangladesh tackled challenges emanating from the COVID pandemic, which demonstrated Bangladesh's arrival at solvency in food production and distribution as Bangladesh moved from only 'food security' to 'food and nutrition security'<sup>17</sup>.

This rosy picture of Bangladesh, however, is in flux in 2022. It has withstood the adverse effect of the COVID pandemic with its strength in ready-made garment production and supply and with a circular economy whose macroeconomic condition was scarcely affected by the break in the global supply chain. With the economic instability rising worldwide since the Ukraine conflict, Bangladesh cannot escape the latter's cascading effect. The war has had a detrimental effect on the global food and energy market, with Bangladesh's food- and energy-sufficiencies coming under attack. As international relations and energy expert Dr. Atique Rahman stated during an interview, "The war could not have taken place at a worse time for Bangladesh". He identified four crucial factors currently affecting Bangladesh: a) Price hikes of primary energy resources such as oil and gas in the international market, b) a global price hike of food and other essential goods, which has increased government spending, c) uncertainty about the ongoing nuclear power project in Rooppur, being built with Russian assistance and d) an increase in the seasonal demand for electricity between February to November<sup>18</sup>. It should be added that owing to increasing market prices, especially in the spot market (where energy is not only being sold at higher prices but also being bought off by European countries to ensure their own steady supply), Bangladesh's ability to purchase energy is also being challenged financially.

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16 Murshid, K.A.S. 2016. The Bangladesh story: Test case to paradox, The Financial Express, 25 April.

17 Global Hunger Index., 2022. Bangladesh's success in South Asia, EUREporter, 15 November, available at: <https://www.eureporter.co/world/bangladesh/2022/11/15/global-hunger-index-2022-bangladeshs-success-in-south-asia/>, accessed on 15 November 2022.

18 Dr. Atique Rahman, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. His interview taken on 13 December, 2022 as part of learning about energy issues pertaining Bangladesh in the present context.

While the trajectory of the economy and its indicators were previously upward, Bangladesh now has to adjust to rising inflation because of rising commodity prices in the international market and is now in search of a stable energy supply line. Although it achieved full capacity in power supply<sup>19</sup>, Bangladesh is now planning to purchase power from Nepal<sup>20</sup>. Several experts opined that Bangladesh's energy crisis is a direct fallout of the conflict in Europe. The opposing side argues that Bangladesh's energy crisis is a result of shortsightedness in terms of diversifying its options, which coincided with the Ukraine crisis. The dearth of alternative native sources of liquified natural gas (LNG) exacerbated the situation for Bangladesh during the global crisis<sup>21</sup>. In terms of food security, Bangladesh has to devise new methods to confront current challenges, 'the breadbasket of Europe' now involved in a seemingly intractable conflict. Experts have warned that Bangladesh may face three challenges, namely the impaired wheat market, the rising cost of vegetable oil and the rising cost of fertilizer in the international market<sup>22</sup>. A recent study conducted by the World Bank indicates that "food security for 70% of Bangladesh's population has not changed in one year since June 2021"<sup>23</sup>. In other words, we are yet to see the full impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on food security in Bangladesh. The same study says that although Bangladesh's pandemic recovery has taken a V shape, the process has been uneven. This is an area in which Bangladesh needs to emphatically implement Industrial Revolution 4.0 and innovative methods to ensure food security for its people<sup>24</sup>.

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19 The Daily Star, 2022., 100pc population now under electricity coverage, 15 March.

20 Shrestha, P.M., 2022., Nepal notifies India on deal with Bangladesh to seek facilitation for power trade, The Kathmandu Post, 16 October, available at [https://kathmandupost.com/mon-ey/2022/10/16/nepal-notifies-india-on-deal-with-bangladesh-to-seek-facilitation-for-power-trade\\_](https://kathmandupost.com/mon-ey/2022/10/16/nepal-notifies-india-on-deal-with-bangladesh-to-seek-facilitation-for-power-trade_), accessed on 12 December 2022.

21 The Daily Star, 2022., Energy crisis: Govt strategy to blame, not war, 25 July.

22 Mamun, A., Glauber, J and Laborde, D. 2022., How the war in Ukraine threatens Bangladesh's food security, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), 20 April, available at: <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/how-war-ukraine-threatens-bangladeshs-food-security>, accessed on 10 December 2022.

23 Topader, R.A., 2022., Global food crisis and challenges, The New Age, 5 November.

24 Al-Amin, A.K.M.A., Lowenberg-DeBoer, J and Jahan, H., 2022. Russia-Ukraine war a wake-up call for Bangladesh's agriculture sector, The Daily Star, 18 May.

## 4 Analyzing Bangladesh's Priorities

Geographically, Bangladesh enjoys physical distance from the Ukraine crisis, which is small comfort in an interdependent world given the intricate web of relations between the countries involved. But one also must take into account Bangladesh's foreign policy goals and objectives, focussed on creating a self-sustained country based on trade and 'development diplomacy'<sup>25</sup>. In other words, Bangladesh's phenomenal economic transformation was possible because of its maintenance of a neutral foreign policy, taking a stand only on UN-mandated action against Iraq, during the latter's invasion of Kuwait. Bangladesh has never taken a stand without the UN Security Council's (UNSC) mandate, being a cornerstone of Bangladesh's foreign policy.

Less understood about Bangladesh is the way it has followed a trajectory different to that of many other countries, emphasizing the use of local resources, perspectives and methods of development. Bangladesh's stories are echoed to a lesser degree in international media, which still conveys the idea of a Bangladesh of the 1970s. This narrative fails to communicate Bangladesh's activity, indigenous innovation and tales of its resistance to natural disasters. Situated in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh experiences frequent cyclones, towards which it has developed resilience with the construction of shelters in the coastal areas, creation of message-sharing systems and engendering of awareness amongst the locals. The adverse effects of climate change cannot be fought by Bangladesh alone, but Bangladeshi scientists have been able to discover saline-water-resistant crops working alongside foreign scientists<sup>26</sup>. The Bengal delta, with rivers that change course rapidly and without warning, poses another unique challenge for the people of this country, who often

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<sup>25</sup> Yasmin L and Rahman, A., 2019. Linking Development and Diplomacy in the Context of Bangladesh in 21st Century, *Mirpur Papers*, 25(29), pp. 1-16.

<sup>26</sup> The Business Standard., 2021. Bangladeshi scientists discover complete genome sequence of salt, flood-tolerant rice, 23 December; Kamruzzaman, M. 2022. Bangladeshi scientists claim breakthrough in rice research, Anadolu Agency, 29 January, available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/bangladeshi-scientists-claim-breakthrough-in-rice-research/2488755>, accessed on 12 December 2022.

go destitute owing to land lost to the vagaries of its river system. Yet, even in the absence of academic knowledge, Bangladesh's farmers have found a way to tap into underground water as reservoirs for use in the dry season. Its creation widely considered accidental, this Bengal Water Machine has reduced flooding and stands ready to address hardships occasioned by extreme weather changes caused by global warming<sup>27</sup>.

To Bangladesh, what matters most is the international community's response to the Rohingya crisis and its continued support for the affected. The Ukraine conflict has diverted international attention from the Rohingya crisis and genocide<sup>28</sup>, which is a matter of concern for Bangladesh. The latest numbers suggest that humanitarian concern for the Rohingyas is on the decline. International institutions working in Bangladesh have been informed of a possible 20-30% drop in humanitarian support for the Rohingyas in 2023 from different countries as well as from the UN<sup>29</sup>. This development will only exacerbate Bangladesh's ability to manage 1.2 million Rohingyas, a concern that is not Bangladesh's alone. Any kind of instability induced by a lack of resources for such a number of stranded Rohingyas shall have regional implications. This, however, is lost on Europe in particular, as Bangladesh's problems do not directly affect the continent. The next graph conveys the nature of assistance reaching Bangladesh vis-a-vis the Rohingya issue and its decline:<sup>30</sup>

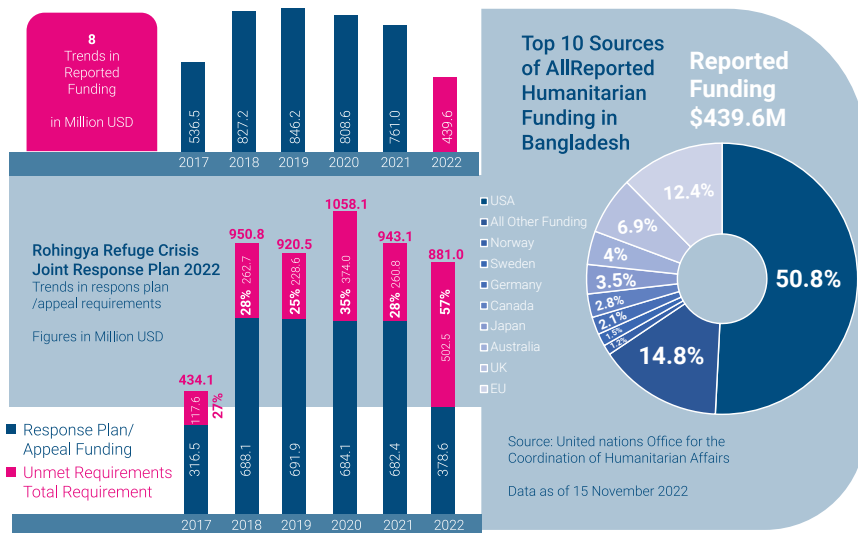
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27 Dinneen, J., 2022. Farmers in Bangladesh pump so much water it may help reduce floods, NewScientist, 15 September, available at: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2338117-farmers-in-bangladesh-pump-so-much-water-it-may-help-reduce-floods/>, accessed on 10 December 2022.

28 Min, K., 2022. A world obsessed with Ukraine must not forget the Rohingya, The Statesman, 27 May, available at <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/world-obsessed-ukraine-must-not-forget-rohingya-1503075857.html>, accessed on 13 December 2022. McIntyre, J and Simpson, 2022. A. Myanmar's genocide overshadowed by Ukraine, EastAsiaForum, 5 October, available at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/10/05/myanmars-genocide-overshadowed-by-ukraine/>, accessed on 5 October 2022.

29 Lohani, N., 2022. Dwindling humanitarian aid: With all eyes on Ukraine, the crises for Rohingyas and others deepen, The Business Standard, 17 November.

30 Ibid.



Infographic:TBS

## Food Basket Prices in USD

A number of such contributions finds its way to Ukraine, instead of Bangladesh, now a refuge to 1.1 million forcibly displaced nationals of Myanmar, making it the largest refugee camp in the world. The United States (US) has announced plans for the resettlement of Rohingyas in Bangladesh, whose effects are yet to be fully seen.

# 5 Mitigation and Policy Recommendations

The war in Ukraine began while the globe struggled to find its footing following COVID-19. As COVID transformed into an epidemic, it would have effects on the economy that would be more complex and multilayered than any economic shocks the world had experienced before.

Having provided context in the preceding passages, this study now presents a number of recommendations. First, it is time for the West to think about an amicable solution to the war in Ukraine. Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State, has suggested learning from history since the outbreak of the conflict, pointing out the need for a negotiated peace to avert the possibility of a world war<sup>31</sup>. Europe is now indeed considered a geopolitical risk for Asia<sup>32</sup>, wherein the latter emphasizes growth and development, as opposed to the strategic games pursued by Europe. This also has a larger impact on the rest of the world in terms of the global food supply and the energy market, which are of critical importance for the survival of underdeveloped and developing countries.

Bangladesh, as discussed earlier, prioritises fulfilment of its development goals and its preparation for a different economic arrangement once it graduates from its Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026. The country shall receive a three-year grace period to come to terms with new challenges, but it would be wise to cultivate options given the world now experiences black swan events with greater frequency. Bangladesh has initiated talks to establish free trade areas (FTA) with individual countries. Its strategic importance and location have attracted the interest of many nations. The European Union (EU) recognises Bangladesh's socioeconomic transformation

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31 CNBC., 2022. It's time for a negotiated peace in Ukraine, Kissinger says, 19 December, available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/12/18/its-time-for-a-negotiated-peace-in-ukraine-kissinger-says.html>, accessed on 20 December 2022.

32 Bland, B., 2022. The west looks like a political risk to Asian allies, Financial Times, 5 July, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/7e537f34-0b5a-418b-bc82-a5d3e24b805f>, accessed on 28 November 2022.

and has identified the need for a fresh evaluation of its relationship with the country. In the very first political dialogue between the EU and Bangladesh, the joint statement averred that “[B]oth parties underscored that every effort must be made to end the war in Ukraine and emphasised in this context the importance of upholding international law and the UN Charter”<sup>33</sup>. At the same time, Bangladesh needs increasing commitment from its partners in mitigating the challenges posed by hosting the Rohingyas. The international community must come forward with specific plans of action and support Bangladesh’s efforts in responding to these multifaceted challenges. This is an issue on which Bangladesh cannot compromise, with the war in Ukraine weakening the world’s commitment to the Rohingyas.

Bangladesh also needs its partners’ assistance in meeting its development goals, especially in the wake of the war in Ukraine. The EU can provide technical assistance and knowledge transfer, as it has done in Vietnam. Additionally, creating the EU’s soft power in Bangladesh through public diplomacy and people-to-people contact could help build a critical mass and a long-term investment in Bangladesh. Faculty collaborations, student exchanges and bringing more technical experts from EU countries to Bangladesh would be beneficial for both Bangladesh and the EU and build a sustainable relationship.

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33 Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh., 2022. Bangladesh: First Political Dialogue with EU takes place, 24 Novembre, available at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/bangladesh-first-political-dialogue-eu-takes-place\\_en?s=164](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/bangladesh-first-political-dialogue-eu-takes-place_en?s=164), accessed on 24 November 2022.

## 6

## Concluding Observations

Bangladesh's foreign policy objectives and goals are a reflection of its internal goals and objectives and long-term vision. While contemporary challenges require adjustments to its foreign policy dictum, domestic issues and changing times also play an influential role in determining its foreign policy priorities<sup>34</sup>. These changing times are evident in Afro-Asian and Latin American countries' embrace of a new type of neutrality and non-alignment. These countries choose not to follow dogmatically any roadmaps from the West, rather basing their policies on their national priorities, Indonesia being a prime example of this approach in Asia<sup>35</sup>. Bangladesh, similarly, cannot shun its development partners by embracing binary choices in international politics that contradict the fundamentals of its foreign policy objectives. Au contraire, Bangladesh is being courted by the great powers thanks to its strategic location, being geographically close to both India and China<sup>36</sup>. The effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict are yet to fully unfold. In such conditions, Bangladesh must focus on building its resilience in the manner that the honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has emphasized, with Asian countries working together towards their goals and eschewing external assistance.

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