

# The Gen Z factor in geopolitics and the Bangladesh-US dynamics



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In his victory speech following the US presidential election last month, President-elect Donald Trump began by thanking his supporters and highlighting the unwavering support of his family, especially his youngest son, Barron Trump. Barron, who stood by his father's side during the speech, was acknowledged as a source of strength throughout the campaign, particularly his silent role in shaping the podcast strategy for the Trump campaign during the election. Barron masterminded the well-crafted campaign's digital presence, utilising podcasts as a key platform to engage with tech-savvy voters, with his calm presence offering a softening contrast to the fiery rhetoric of the election. This draws an interesting parallel to developments in Bangladesh, and both offer a glimpse into a future where youth-driven values can guide the direction of politics and trade.

The argument that those belonging to Generation Z, or Gen Z, is too immature to take on higher roles, overtaking more experienced generations, overlooks the fact that maturity and leadership are not solely defined by age or years of experience, but by fresh perspectives and the ability to address current challenges. Rather than criticising Gen Z for stepping into leading roles, it is more productive to guide them through the complexities of the future. By fostering intergenerational collaboration, older generations can equip Gen Z with the tools they need to lead effectively in an ever-evolving global landscape, navigating the nuances of decision-making, diplomacy, and long-term strategy. For instance, Gen Z in Bangladesh must grasp the complexities of global trade, including the influence of major powers like the US, China, Russia and the EU, each with its own economic priorities and strategies.

Gen Z should keep in mind that the US cannot afford to overlook a partner like Bangladesh given the country's pivotal position in South Asia's economic landscape. Bangladesh's geopolitical location along the Bay of Bengal places it at the crossroads of

vital maritime routes and in close proximity to other major players, including India and China. Supporting Bangladesh's economic stability aligns with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, offering a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and reducing excessive reliance on Beijing in an increasingly contested region. By understanding these complexities, Gen Z leaders can advocate for policies that not only drive growth locally, but also position Bangladesh as a bridge between aforesaid larger powers. Likewise, they must actively participate in international forums, harnessing its geopolitical influence to negotiate better trade terms, attract foreign green investments, and secure support on critical climate issues, especially given Bangladesh's vulnerability.

For the US, missing out on Bangladesh as a partner would mean yielding influence in South Asia to China and Russia, potentially limiting its own access to the rapidly growing South Asian market and diminishing regional strategic foothold. Conversely, by leveraging the Indo-Pacific Strategy and EU

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Global Gateway together with the potential BRICS and ASEAN alignment, Bangladesh can pursue a more autonomous development path that safeguards its economic interests and strategic flexibility. This multi-aligned approach empowers Bangladesh to tap into a variety of global resources, strengthening its economy while asserting its role as a key player in the geopolitical and economic order of Asia.

Bangladesh's growing role as a soft power leader within the Muslim world is a significant asset that enhances its strategic appeal to the US, especially amid shifting global alliances. As the world's third largest Muslim-majority country, Bangladesh is well-positioned to influence and engage with other Muslim-majority nations with a rich history of promoting religious tolerance and social stability. This moderate stance of the

challenges, including political reforms, economic stabilisation, and curbing external pressures. Recent steps taken by the interim government to introduce reforms in various crucial sectors signal a desire for a more transparent and autonomous leadership, making it an ideal time for the US to support Bangladesh's ambitions for a stable and sovereign future. Furthermore, by addressing the root causes of regional



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Gen Z should recognise that Bangladesh's growing maturity opens new opportunities for deeper US engagement given a renewed Trump presidency. No longer just a partner for development assistance or low-cost manufacturing, Bangladesh is increasingly a sophisticated strategic ally ready to foster a forward-looking relationship based on mutual economic growth and matured strategic alignment. Expanding trade and investment in emerging sectors, supporting the diversification of Bangladesh's economy, and increasing trade preferences could not only secure US interests in Asia, but also ensure that Bangladesh remains resilient in a region of growing strategic significance.

country offers a model that can resonate in regions susceptible to extremism, making it a potentially valuable partner for the US in promoting win-win stability across the Muslim world. For the US, which has often struggled to engage with Muslim-majority countries in ways that align with both security interests and values, Bangladesh's leadership in the Muslim world offers a resourceful bridge.

A second Trump administration would have an opportunity to engage with Bangladesh as it aims to establish more accountable governance free from the undue influence of neighbouring powers. Bangladesh is currently navigating complex

crises, such as border tensions, refugee pressures and political interference, Trump could advance a cooperative framework that supports Bangladesh's national sovereignty. Moreover, the Yunus effect for Bangladesh stands as a powerful equation linking the US and Bangladesh through shared values of economic development, entrepreneurship, and social responsibility.

The role of a well-informed Gen Z in shaping Bangladesh-US trade relations through a growing demand for stability, sovereignty, and sustainability will only strengthen them, positioning them as a key catalyst for transformative change in future global trade dynamics.

## A wake-up call for India's strategic interests

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The political upheaval in Bangladesh on August 5, 2024 marked a turning point in the nation's history. A massive student-led uprising, backed by a wide spectrum of the population, toppled Sheikh Hasina's long-standing authoritarian regime. This movement culminated in the formation of an interim government led by Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus. The uprising was a response to years of frustration under Sheikh Hasina's administration, characterised by corruption, institutional decay, and the suppression of dissent.

During Sheikh Hasina's tenure, her policies often favoured India, granting it substantial economic and strategic benefits—at the expense of Bangladesh's own interests. Critics likened this dynamic to quasi-colonialism. In return, Hasina relied on India's support to maintain her grip on power, despite growing domestic opposition.

Despite Sheikh Hasina's total trust in India's support to safeguard her regime, she

had to face the reality that India ultimately declined even to dispatch an aircraft for her rescue. This turn of events highlighted the pitfalls of over-reliance on foreign powers rather than cultivating domestic legitimacy.

Her removal was seen as a strategic blow by India. Faced with an unfamiliar political landscape in Dhaka, Indian policymakers seemed uncertain about their next steps.

Following Hasina's ouster, a section of the Indian media delved into a widespread disinformation campaign, alleging that massive atrocities were being carried out against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh. Claims of killings, rape, and attacks on Hindu temples were circulated to depict as though Bangladesh was spiralling into chaos and extremism. However, most of these allegations were entirely unfounded.

For example, ABP Ananda, a subsidiary of West Bengal's *Anandabazar Patrika*, aired a video showing police brutality against students on August 5, but it was misleadingly presented as evidence of Hindu oppression. Similarly, a video claimed to be circulated by RT India showed attacks on Hindu temples in Bangladesh. However, verification revealed that the footage actually depicted a religious festival in West Bengal, India.

Despite the interim government's urging to extradite her, India continues to allow Sheikh Hasina—an alleged violator of human rights with an active arrest warrant issued by a competent court—to

disseminate propaganda and incite civil unrest in Bangladesh. By openly facilitating activities intended to demonise the interim government, India is disregarding international norms, undermining peace and security, and fuelling hostility.

Such misinformation campaigns not only distort reality but also risk inflaming communal tensions. The Indian media has

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even featured commentary advocating military intervention in Bangladesh under the guise of "protecting minorities" or securing strategic interests. Speculative suggestions include occupying areas like Chattogram or regions near the Siliguri Corridor.

Despite the provocative nature of these

claims, the Indian authorities have taken no action to discourage such rhetoric, raising questions about their adherence to international norms. However, India recently clarified that the government was not responsible for the activities of the media outlets that have been spreading disinformation.

Domestically, India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appears to be leveraging these narratives to strengthen Hindu nationalist sentiment in their favour. Opposition parties, including the Indian National Congress and Trinamool Congress, have echoed similar rhetoric to appeal to the Hindu majority electorate. This tactic may temporarily unify the Hindu vote but risks long-term damage to India's regional relationships.

On an international level, if India continues to view misinformation as a strategic tool to retain influence on Bangladesh by undermining the credibility of its interim government, it will be counterintuitive. This strategy overlooks a critical reality: the more pressure India applies, the more the people of Bangladesh, including its minority communities, unify against its interference. It reflects the same miscalculation India made by exclusively supporting the Sheikh Hasina regime, disregarding the will of the Bangladeshi people.

Bangladesh is not just a neighbour but a vital trading and security partner whose

stability directly affects India's northeastern states. Escalating tensions could destabilise the region, harm economic ties, and push Bangladesh closer to other global powers eager to fill the vacuum left by India's waning influence. India's dominant posture in South Asia has already strained its relationships with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal among others. A similar trajectory with Bangladesh risks further isolation, undermining India's long-term strategic objectives.

The recent visit by Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to Dhaka—four months after the interim government took office—provides some room for optimism, however. The Indian foreign secretary said they wanted to "carry on from where we left off" and that they "have to do business with the government of the day." Indeed, constructive engagement, based on mutual respect and shared goals, would benefit both nations. A stable and prosperous Bangladesh is critical for regional security and economic interdependence.

Hence, India should focus on fostering trust and rebuilding ties. By respecting Bangladesh's sovereignty and prioritising dialogue, India can strengthen its position as a reliable partner, safeguarding its interests in South Asia. To realise its aspirations for superpower status, India must prioritise cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and genuine partnership; only then can it secure its place as a stable and respected leader in the region.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

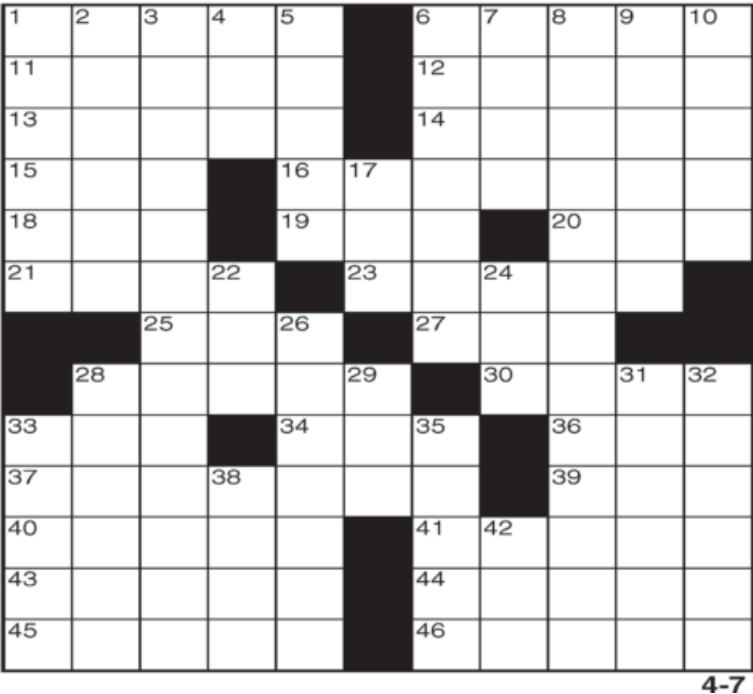
- 1 Barge setting
- 6 Sub system
- 11 Curaçao's neighbor
- 12 Tickle
- 13 Women, in hard-boiled tales
- 14 Buccaneers' base
- 15 Diminish
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- 8 Second-best in a tourney
- 9 Quaking trees
- 10 Goes through
- 17 Funny fellow
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- 24 Dawn goddess
- 26 Most slender
- 28 Lone Star capital
- 29 Corp.'s superior
- 31 Stir
- 32 Mill contents
- 33 Malia's sister
- 35 Sioux language
- 38 Cuts off
- 42 — Aviv



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	L	O	T			S	P	R	A	T
L	E	V	I			S	C	R	A	P
E	D	E	N			C	O	I	N	E
C	A	R	A	L	A	R	M			
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C	A	R	E	S	S			E	R	A
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			T	A	R	P	A	P	E	R
B	I	L	O	X	I			N	A	D
A	D	O	R	E	S			T	I	N
N	O	O	K	S				A	L	A

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