



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

The dragon and the delta

A new chapter in Bangladesh-China relations



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There are rivers, and then there are currents. The rivers of Bangladesh—Padma, Meghna, Jamuna—run deep, shaping land, destiny and commerce. But currents, the unseen forces that dictate the flow of history, are harder to chart.

The tides of geopolitics, the undercurrents of trade wars, the ripples of power shifts—all dictate the future of nations. In this interplay, Bangladesh and China are not merely drifting neighbours; they are architects of a shared destiny, bound by history, ambition and a blueprint for the future.

Recent events have added urgency to this discourse. A 21-member delegation, of which I was a part, embarked on a journey to Beijing, not as idle emissaries but as active negotiators of Bangladesh's place in the unfolding Asian century. In meetings with high-ranking officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) and the foreign ministry, we presented a vision for an elevated partnership. The response? Enthusiastic endorsement.

What followed was not mere diplomatic pleasantries but a recognition: Bangladesh is ready to be more than a recipient of Chinese investments; it is ready to be a strategic collaborator, a manufacturing force, and a regional stabiliser.

Bengal's entanglement with China predates modern geopolitics. In the fourth century, Fa-hsien chronicled the culture of the Gangetic delta, and in the seventh century, Hiuen Tsang met King Harshavardhana, bearing testimony to ancient ties of scholarship and trade. Fifteenth century navigator Ma Huan, who sailed under Admiral Zheng He, described Bengal's bustling ports, its Muslim rulers, and the mercantile energy that linked it to the Chinese court.

In matters of spirit, even the revered Shah Jalal of Sylhet found a place in Chinese records, further cementing centuries-old exchanges.

These were not just transactions; they were threads in a grander fabric, one that today unfolds in the shape of economic corridors, industrial parks, and transcontinental supply chains.

As China ascends to the heights of artificial intelligence and high-tech industries, it leaves behind a vacancy—a space for manufacturing to migrate. Vietnam has seized the opportunity. So has Indonesia. Why not Bangladesh?

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traditional industries elsewhere. Bangladesh, with its labour force, its strategic location, and its deepening ties through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), must make the case for itself. The investments that were put on hold due to political uncertainties must be rekindled, and Bangladesh should position itself as the next re-export hub for Chinese goods, optimising trade routes, reducing costs, and sustaining China's access to global markets.

Of all the shadows looming over Bangladesh, none is darker than the crisis in Myanmar. The Rohingya crisis is not just a humanitarian catastrophe; it is a geopolitical fault line. Without stability in Myanmar, Bangladesh's security remains fragile.

China's influence in Naypyidaw is undeniable. Yet, for too long, Bangladesh has been a passive observer, waiting for Beijing to pressure the Myanmar junta into action. The delegation pressed the case: China must do more. The repatriation of the Rohingya, the

stabilisation of Rakhine state, and the assurance that Myanmar does not descend into prolonged chaos are matters that Beijing cannot afford to ignore. The response? A willingness to engage, to mediate, and to ensure that the next Bangladesh government finds a stable eastern frontier.

The world is in flux. The US, China and India form a triad of competing interests in South Asia. Bangladesh's geography has placed it at the crossroads of this rivalry, but geography is not destiny—policy is. Rather than picking sides, Bangladesh can be a bridge between these global powers, leveraging its historical closeness with India, its growing ties with China, and its strategic importance to the US.

This is not about neutrality but about active diplomacy—playing the role of mediator, connector, and stabiliser in an increasingly multipolar world.

The meetings in China were not just about rhetoric. They were about plans, commitments, and structured collaboration. The 11-point charter, adopted by the delegation and welcomed by the CPC, outlines the next steps: strategic alignment for regional stability; positioning Bangladesh in global trade shifts; strengthening logistics and trade routes; advancing technological partnerships; expanding trade and cultural exchange; building a sustainable industrial base; expanding military manufacturing ties; leveraging China's diplomatic influence for Rohingya repatriation; Teesta River water management; accelerating investment in transport and communications; and developing banking and financial collaboration.

The enthusiasm from China's leadership was not just symbolic. These initiatives are actionable, transformative, and most importantly, mutually beneficial.

The rivers in Bangladesh will always flow towards the sea, but the currents of history can be steered. The Bangladesh-China relations have entered a new era, one where Bangladesh is not just a recipient of investment but a co-creator of the future. The foundation has been laid; the agreements have been acknowledged. The challenge, now, is execution. Will Bangladesh rise to claim its place as a hub of manufacturing, defence co-production, and geopolitical mediation? Or will it allow others to dictate the terms of engagement? The moment demands action, vision, and leadership.

The tide is rising. Bangladesh must set sail.

Trump, trade wars, tariffs, and a new world order



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Recently, we've seen many news headlines regarding US President Donald Trump's plans to reduce the federal government and eliminate funding for organisations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), leading to massive job losses. But geopolitical analysts are another surprising profession impacted by Trump's leadership.

The explanation is straightforward: nobody can say what the US government will do next. As nations that have historically depended on the US for economic and security support have come to realise that they need to become more independent, this uncertainty generates profound changes in global geopolitics.

The Trump administration has undoubtedly brought about a significant shift in the world order. Over the past few decades, the US has contributed to developing a liberal, rules-based international system, but it seems less interested in continuing to hold this position. A new multipolar global order is thus taking shape, with regional actors like Japan and India and superpowers like China, Russia, and the European Union vying for influence to further

handle major global issues like climate change and refugee crises, like Bangladesh's own Rohingya situation.

The Trump-led Republican Party's political approach mirrors a more significant rightward movement in US and international politics, and holds the key to the solution. Western proponents of globalisation have neglected the plight of blue-collar workers for far too long. These workers fear losing their jobs to AI and cheap foreign labour. These worries have contributed to a rise in anti-immigration sentiment in wealthy countries. The political growth of the Global South or European security are far-flung concerns for many American workers. The main problem of the locals is the effects of foreign variables on local labour markets.

This stance, which attracted supporters of Trump's "America First" foreign policy, including many Bangladeshi expats in the US, was a significant factor in the Republican Party's electoral success.

The administration has made this requirement a top priority. The pace and character of US disengagement, rather than Trump's policy views, are the genuine global threat. The administration seems intent on

its reputation. Since the Budapest Memorandum was signed in 1994, Ukraine and the US have maintained a close partnership. Ukraine then had the third largest arsenal of nuclear weapons from the Soviet era, which it gave to Russia in return for security assurances from Russia and the US. The 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia was a breach of that agreement. By negotiating with Russia and putting pressure on Ukraine to give up territory that it has forcibly seized, the US is now also breaking its promises. Additionally, in exchange for the military assistance it has given Ukraine, Washington has asked Kiev to share its minerals.

This judgement arrived like a wrecking ball and further upended the delicate international order. Taiwan and other US allies dependent on American security guarantees are now highly alarmed. Canada and Europe are the most outspoken opponents of the Trump administration's policies. Singapore's defence minister compared the US to a landlord requesting rent, while the newly former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly denounced the trade war as dangerous. Furthermore, some NATO countries have said they can no longer depend on American defence.

The old order is disintegrating, whether we like it or not. Even with a lot of uncertainty, one thing is sure: waiting for the past to return is no longer an option. This is the time for those who care about international collaboration, climate change, and human rights. People must not waver, even if governments do. Alternative channels must be used if official



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

The way that US President Donald Trump has handled Ukraine is a significant shift in US foreign policy.

their national agendas.

Even though the Trump administration's actions can occasionally appear arbitrary, the president's overarching policy has not altered since his first term; it has just gotten more intense. Fundamentally, this approach gives the US financial interests precedence in international politics. The US has retained substantial international debt since the dollar is still the world's reserve currency. It also has a trade imbalance with its main allies. Regardless of the repercussions, the president has made fixing these problems his top priority.

One may wonder: when something is not broken, why strive to fix it? The US-led rules-based international order has cultivated one of the most prolonged periods of world peace and cooperation in history since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, concerted international action is needed to

pushing international boundaries to see how much the country can get away with. It is currently testing reciprocal tariffs on major trading partners to stop US companies from offshoring jobs. However, the aggressive strategy is like attempting to squeeze a square peg into a round hole.

The ongoing trade battle with essential allies like Canada and Mexico has recently caused a steep drop in the US stock market. This compelled Trump to halt the tariffs and re-evaluate his strategy. However, there are growing worries that he would eventually implement protectionist measures, even if doing so puts the economy at risk of experiencing another recession.

The way that Trump has handled Ukraine is a significant shift in US foreign policy. How a country handles its allies is frequently used to assess

diplomatic channels are unsuccessful. Track 2 diplomacy and collaboration between academic institutions, industry leaders, civic society, and think tanks will be more critical than ever in maintaining global connectivity. We need to build bridges where governments are burning them at a time when established power structures are changing.

So be it, if the globe is turning into a multipolar place. We need to organise, adjust, and go forward. A broken world doesn't need to be broken. Those who continue to support international cooperation must build new partnerships, never give up on finding answers, and make sure that political shortsightedness does not sabotage global advancement. Indecision is not tolerated by history. The struggle for an equitable, sustainable, and peaceful world must continue, irrespective of how the map is altered.

CROSSWORD

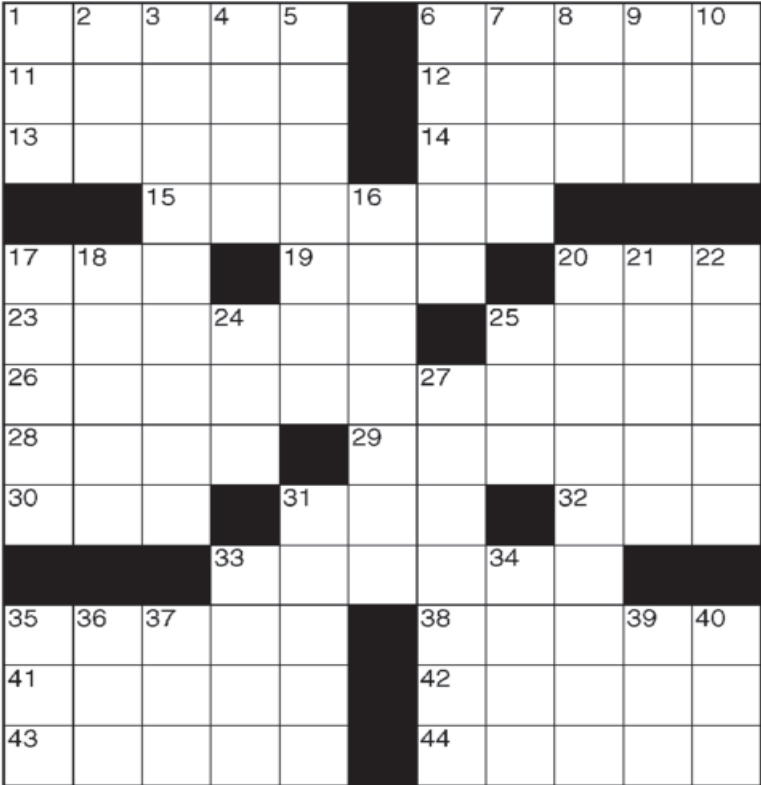
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ACROSS

- 1 Impromptu
- 6 Biased fellow
- 11 Singer Bryson
- 12 Find darling
- 13 Caruso, for one
- 14 Geography class aid
- 15 Friend of Jerry and Elaine
- 17 Track act
- 19 Dissenter's vote
- 20 Cook's measure
- 23 Out of bed
- 25 Project Artemis org.
- 26 Red-eye, e.g.
- 28 Needing aspirin
- 29 Mumbai money
- 30 Back muscle
- 31 Heir, often
- 32 Make tempura
- 33 Spicy Korean side dish
- 35 November birthstone
- 38 Dutch capital, with "The"
- 41 Furious
- 42 Cultural, in combinations
- 43 Gives over
- 44 Writer Ernest

DOWN

- 1 Fitting
- 2 Ruby of films
- 3 "Just hold on"
- 4 Bassoon's kin
- 5 Prince topper
- 6 Like some jeans
- 7 Not active
- 8 Sticky gunk
- 9 Ball
- 10 Summer shirt
- 16 Fled
- 17 Insipid
- 18 Writer Jong
- 20 Mixed martial arts bout
- 21 Theater worker
- 22 Fall guy
- 24 Bashful
- 25 Tiny taste
- 27 Midday meals
- 31 Tag numbers
- 33 Petruchio's love
- 34 Despise
- 35 Peculiarity
- 36 Refinery need
- 37 Knee protector
- 39 Dos precursor
- 40 Long, longer time



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