

How should we read Bangladesh’s UNGA presidency against global and domestic realities?



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Bangladesh winning the presidency of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) is a moment of pride that perhaps could not have come at a more appropriate time, given the prevailing spirit of transformation in the wake of the July uprising. In other words, it represents a symbolic diplomatic victory for a post-July Bangladesh. The immediate practical benefit is undeniable: greater global visibility for a developing nation standing at a critical socioeconomic crossroads.

As Dr Khalilur Rahman, the foreign minister, assumes this prestigious role, the international community will likely turn a closer eye towards Dhaka. “The role of the president of the General Assembly is no longer simply procedural,” said outgoing UNGA President Annalena Baerbock, and at a certain level, beyond internal bloc politics and calculations within the UN system, Bangladesh’s presidency reflects some confidence in its potential for being a responsible and stabilising state. If we’re being optimistic, the diplomatic elevation could also be leveraged to bring tangible benefits to Bangladesh in the form of greater foreign direct investment, stronger bilateral trade and security agreements, and more strategic partnerships.

But beneath the polished veneer of this international triumph lies a complex web of geopolitical and socioeconomic challenges that also demand scrutiny. Bangladesh is currently facing significant economic headwinds, most notably the near-certain deferment of its LDC graduation and the looming pressure of the recently imposed US tariffs. To navigate these challenges, Dhaka has already entered into a comprehensive US-Bangladesh trade agreement. While perhaps an economic necessity to maintain market access, this pact, however, was rushed through just 72 hours before the February 12 elections, bypassing the traditional avenues of democratic debate. Consequently, it has sparked considerable domestic anxiety. Various groups remain deeply concerned about the concessions made regarding our sovereign policy space. To alleviate this



Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, the newly elected president of the United Nations General Assembly, addresses a plenary meeting of the body at the UN headquarters on June 2.

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domestic pressure, the BNP government last month signalled its willingness to review the treaty, but to what extent it will be able or willing to revisit its more contentious provisions remains uncertain.

Regionally, the chessboard remains equally concerning. A diplomatic realignment across South Asia is palpable. Pakistan is actively manoeuvring into a strategically advantageous position while our ties with India remain in a state of flux (despite recent positive messaging) thanks to some long-unresolved issues, including New Delhi’s continuous hosting of the fallen

autocrat and cronies of the Awami League regime. In this vacuum, Bangladesh must meticulously recalibrate its regional posture. We must secure our access to broader Asian markets. Revitalising a near-dormant Saarc, maximising our geopolitical footprint within BIMSTEC, and aggressively pursuing our bid to become an ASEAN sectoral dialogue partner are no longer optional strategies. They are vital for our economic future. Dr Rahman’s elevation to the UNGA presidency likely offers an avenue through which to project our soft power in the aid of these pursuits. It allows us to step confidently into new regional alignments so as to build robust, reciprocal relations with our neighbours.

Among the threats facing Bangladesh and the region, the Rohingya crisis remains a bleeding wound. The genocide in Rakhine State and the subsequent waves of mass exodus represent a most tragic and destabilising development of the modern era. For years, we have failed to secure meaningful repatriation

partly because there was no prominent international advocate consistently championing the issue on the global stage. It simply did not receive the global attention it required. Dr Rahman’s presidency may offer a hope, if not a guarantee, of momentum in this regard. While neutrality is a core component of a UNGA presidency, his elevation could nonetheless help open doors for Bangladesh to recast the Rohingya crisis as a global burden rather than a regional issue.

However, one must balance this optimism with a healthy dose of critical realism. The primary architect of this UN victory, Dr Khalilur Rahman, himself remains a deeply paradoxical figure in our national political landscape. There is no denying his sharp intellect; he is an experienced and highly astute bureaucrat. Yet, his rapid ascent in recent years has been largely devoid of a popular democratic mandate. His track record during the interim period also raised some concerns.

His tenure as High Representative for Rohingya affairs and as national security adviser fell short of public expectations. The Rohingya crisis saw no tangible breakthrough under his watch. Furthermore, his tenure as security adviser was frequently marred by internal frictions. His working relationship with our defence apparatus—the army, navy, and air force—also allegedly lacked the collaborative synergy required to safeguard a volatile nation in transition. Instead of consolidating our internal and external security frameworks, he often found himself at the centre of rumours of destabilising developments, effectively operating as a security adviser on paper.

Perhaps his most defining legacy from that turbulent phrase was orchestrating the aforementioned US trade deal shortly before the BNP integrated him into its cabinet framework. While the treaty arguably secured some strategic advantages, its non-inclusive nature set a troubling and undemocratic precedent for our foreign policy framework. Some therefore perceived him as a technocrat whose manoeuvres aligned more closely with global power blocs than with the organic aspirations of the Bangladeshi people, prompting questions about who exactly was lobbying for these outcomes and what degree of our sovereignty we may be silently trading in return.

That said, we must acknowledge that Bangladesh’s global image has often been enhanced by non-political figures. Trailblazers such as Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, and Nobel laureate-turned-Chief-Adviser Muhammad Yunus have consistently elevated our international standing. Dr Rahman’s recent achievement undeniably adds to this record. It serves as a reminder that despite our deep political fractures, Bangladesh possesses the human capital required to shine on the global stage.

But exceptional individuals or achievements cannot permanently substitute for robust, accountable democratic institutions. As Dr Rahman departs to fulfil his duties in New York for one year, a vital opportunity presents itself at home. The government should appoint a strong, elected political representative to helm the ministry of foreign affairs in his absence. This is essential to operationalise the “Bangladesh First” foreign policy doctrine championed by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman. As for the UNGA presidency, it is up to Bangladesh to extract the maximum advantage possible from what could prove to be an important diplomatic instrument.

Some reflections on post-election governance and emerging challenges



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Politics often unfolds in ways that defy conventional wisdom. Few examples illustrate this better than the remarkable journey of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman. Following the events of the 2007 “1/11” political upheaval, Tarique Rahman was arrested, allegedly tortured, and later forced into exile in the UK for nearly 17 years. During this period, his mother, former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, endured lengthy imprisonment, protracted ailments, and severe political restrictions. Many believed that BNP had become politically irrelevant and that Tarique Rahman’s future in politics was over. There were several attempts by the Hasina regime to split the BNP. But Rahman, while in exile, guided his party leaders and held the party together through virtual meetings and video messages.

Then came the student-led uprising of July 2024, which began as protests against a discriminatory job quota system and then rapidly morphed into a nationwide movement against Hasina’s authoritarianism. The violent crackdown that followed left over a thousand people dead and many more injured. Ultimately, Sheikh Hasina had to flee the country to her sanctuary in India. Against this dramatic backdrop, Tarique Rahman returned home on December 25, 2025 to a rapturous welcome. Days later, his mother passed away, turning his homecoming into a moment of both political significance and profound personal grief. The massive public participation in her funeral, together with the senior leaders of South Asian countries present, reflected not merely public sympathy but also

the unmistakable political mood of the nation.

The interim government led by Dr Muhammad Yunus subsequently held the parliamentary election of February 2026, fulfilling its promise of restoring democratic transition. The BNP secured a landslide victory, largely due to Tarique Rahman’s relentless nationwide campaigning and his message of “Bangladesh First.” So, how did the BNP, and indeed the prime minister, perform during these past months? It is reasonable to say that BNP’s first few months in office have been anything but easy.

Tarique Rahman’s new administration inherited a deeply fragile state structure: weakened institutions, economic distress, widespread corruption, deteriorating law and order, and a bureaucracy suffering from years of politicisation. Simultaneously, global instability and rising energy prices amid the Middle East crisis intensified domestic economic pressure. Bangladesh, like many developing nations, has been struggling to absorb the shockwaves of international conflict and soaring fuel costs.

The government has also faced unexpected crises at home,

including a serious measles outbreak causing death to over 600 children across the country. To its credit, the administration responded quickly enough by mobilising the health sector and accelerating vaccine procurement. However, perhaps the greatest challenge lies not outside the government or power structure, but within. Even before the election, reports had emerged of extortion, land grabbing, criminality, and abuse of power by individuals claiming political affiliation, including some associated with the now ruling party. Tarique Rahman has publicly warned against such misconduct, but warnings alone will not suffice. Public trust can evaporate quickly if partisan corruption and impunity return under a new banner.

The recent horrific incidents of sexual violence against women and children have triggered widespread outrage and shaken public confidence. Citizens are demanding not only justice but also visible state measures to protect the vulnerable and uphold the rule of law. Following the rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in Dhaka’s Pallabi on May 19, the prime minister rushed to the victim’s house to convey his condolences and sympathy to the grieving parents, assuring appropriate punishment to the perpetrators at the fastest possible time. And true to his word, the stage is now set for a June 7 verdict.

At the same time, the government has undertaken several potentially promising initiatives. These include financial support programmes for marginalised citizens, reforms aimed at making education more employment-oriented, and efforts

to revive struggling banks, industries, and factories. Such measures may help stimulate economic recovery, provided that accountability duly accompanies financial assistance.

In foreign policy, in spite of unsubstantiated rumours, the government appears determined to pursue a more autonomous course under the banner of “Bangladesh First.” Since the fall of the Awami League regime, Bangladesh has faced sustained criticism and hostile narratives from sections of the Indian media and political establishment. Nevertheless, the interim administration, and now the elected government, have asserted Bangladesh’s sovereign right to conduct an independent foreign policy based on national interests.

The recalibration of relations with China, Japan, Pakistan, and the United States reflects this broader strategic repositioning. Simultaneously, Dhaka appears interested in resetting ties with India on the basis of mutual

respect, non-interference, equitable water sharing, and balanced trade relations. Stable and respectful relations between the two neighbours remain essential for regional peace.

Despite these positive developments, I would humbly offer a few words of caution to the prime minister.

First, his relatively accessible style of governance has earned public admiration, but it also increases vulnerability. Bangladesh’s political history is full of tragic lessons. Public leaders are often surrounded by not only admirers but also hidden enemies waiting for an opportunity to exploit. National stability may depend heavily on his personal security and political survival. Second, growing public criticism regarding the performance of certain cabinet members and key appointments should not be ignored. A government elected with overwhelming public expectation cannot afford complacency, inefficiency, or poor governance.

Bangladesh today stands at a delicate crossroads. The country has emerged from a traumatic political chapter with renewed hope. But hope alone is not enough. The people expect discipline, competence, justice, and meaningful reform. Tarique Rahman has begun his tenure with a reassuring tone, ambitious promises, and a composed demeanor. But whether he succeeds will depend on his ability to confront corruption within his own party ranks, strengthen state institutions, and maintain national unity during a turbulent period.

As someone who survived having lost a leg in an exchange of fire with an indigenous leftist extremist group within months of the nation’s independence, I have learned never to lose faith in the resilience of our people. If the present leadership can resist the temptations of power and remain committed to national interest above partisan gain, Bangladesh may indeed be able to move towards a stable and hopeful future.

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E-Tender Notice

e-Tenders have been invited in the national e-GP System portal for procurement of the Works as stated below:

SI No	Tender/proposal ID, Reference No; Tender/proposal status	Description of Goods & related service	Type, Method	Last selling Date & Time	Publishing & Closing Date & Time
1.	1287983 DOA/BM/G-01	Goods. Supply and Installation of Lawn Mower 2025-26 AD.	NCT, OTM	17-Jun-2026, 12:59 PM	07-Jun-2026 12:00 PM & 17-Jun-2026, 12:59 PM

These are online Tenders, where only e-Tenders will be accepted through national e-GP Portal https://www.eprocure.gov.bd and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP system portal is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP system portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank’s branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)

04.06.2026
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