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Keywords: bangladesh-uk relations, track-ii diplomacy, economic diplomacy, climate change, strategic partnership, foreign policy, trade and investment, postcolonial diplomacy.

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a critical analysis of the developing bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and the United Kingdom (UK) since 1972, in terms of the evolving historical linkage that has ultimately led to a multidimensional strategic partnership. While the existing literature has overemphasized aid flows and historical diplomacy, this article presents a counterpoint by considering how trade, investment, defense cooperation, climate adaptation and humanitarian engagement combine to characterize these contemporary Bangladesh-UK relations. Through content analysis of policy papers, strategic documents, official speeches and documents, trade reports, and development cooperation frameworks, the study identifies mutual trust and shared strategic interests as the core analytical fulcrums that drive two-way priority alignment. The article demonstrates that the UK's role extends beyond historic aid; it encompasses investment facilitation, capacity-building, climate finance, and support for humanitarian crises, as seen in situations such as the Rohingya refugee crisis. At the same time, Bangladesh exercises agency by taking a leadership role on the climate front, preparing for its post-LDC economic transition through planning and retooling of its diplomatic strategy in the Indo-Pacific arena. The analysis argues that Bangladesh-UK relations constitute a postcolonial partnership, evolving from aid reliance to mutual strategic engagement, with implications for small-state diplomacy, regional security and global development governance. By synthesizing economic, security, humanitarian, and environmental dimensions, the paper provides insights into how bilateral partnerships can adapt to twenty-first-century geopolitical, economic and climate challenges, offering a model for other developing countries seeking

balanced, multidimensional international engagement.

Keywords: bangladesh-uk relations, track-ii diplomacy, economic diplomacy, climate change, strategic partnership, foreign policy, trade and investment, postcolonial diplomacy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom (UK) officially recognized Bangladesh as a sovereign country on 4 February 1972, making it one of the first Western countries to do so. It facilitated a further wide range of international recognition, particularly within the Commonwealth nations. Not long afterward, Bangladesh officially joined the Commonwealth on 18 April 1972. Through this landmark moment, numerous Commonwealth nations started recognizing Bangladesh as a sovereign nation (Karim, 2022). Additionally, during its formative years, the UK provided shelter and logistical support to Bangladeshi diplomats and refugees, underscoring a commitment to Bangladesh's independence that extended beyond mere legal recognition. However, the history of the Bangladesh-UK bilateral partnership is not only a forthright justification of goodwill; rather, the relationship has been influenced by power imbalances, conflicting interests, and evolving global standards from the beginning. This has led to expanded cooperation in trade, generating investment opportunities, strengthening security measures, and fostering educational exchanges, as well as people-to-people relationships and international collaboration (Karim, 2022). Although the UK's initial assistance had a substantial influence, Bangladesh has endeavored

to manage that legacy by expressing independence in development policy, migration governance and diplomatic orientation. Postcolonial and development diplomacy scholars advocate for farsightedness in representing donor-recipient dynamics, since assistance and collaboration can have implicit conditions that mirror the strategic aims of donors, including conditionalities and the projection of soft power.

In recent times, the UK has been a crucial development partner of Bangladesh. In the last two decades, the bilateral partnership has expanded across various sectors, including trade and investment, defense and security collaboration, educational and cultural exchange, interpersonal connections, poverty alleviation work, research activities, community growth initiatives, life expectancy expansion for women and children, women's empowerment programs, and international cooperation on global issues such as climate change adaptation, healthcare services, and disaster resilience initiatives (UK Government, 2023). These foundations have collectively driven the nation's development over the last half-century (Chowdhury and Kabir, 2023). Moreover, through effective political and governance solutions, Bangladesh has recently established itself as a successful model of positive national transformation. However, Bangladesh is approaching its exit from the Least Developed Country (LDC) classification by 2026, and therefore, the dynamics of this mutual relationship will be challenged (Raihan et al., 2022). Consequently, the LDC graduation will eliminate several preferential trade and development assistance advantages, forcing both nations to renew their relationship on a more equitable basis (Razzaque et al., 2025; Raihan et al., 2022). The substantial economic growth that turned Bangladesh from "one of the poorest countries" into "one of the fastest-growing economies" in the world represents a significant success story that the United Kingdom helped to create. However, the UK's domestic politics—particularly the shifting of its foreign policy after Brexit—and increasing international rivalry in South Asia have engendered new concerns within the bilateral relationship (Oppermann et al., 2019).

Despite facing multiple challenges, numerous collaborative frameworks currently operate between Bangladesh and the UK, specifically in areas such as trade and investment, healthcare services, education, political development, defence engagement, cultural partnerships, and sports like cricket, with British Bangladeshis contributing to all aspects (Islam, 2022; Ahmed, 2021a). An especially underexamined element of this connection is the influence of the British-Bangladeshi diaspora (Ahmed, 2021b). The 2021 census indicated that the Bangladeshi descent group in England and Wales comprised 644,881 individuals, accounting for 1.1 percent of the population (Alexander and Lidher, 2024). This number has functioned as a channel for remittances and economic networks, while also providing social capital, political influence, and soft power in both nations (IOM, n.d.; Mannan, 2004). However, the diaspora's experience is not uniform; instead, it encompasses numerous challenges related to socio-economic marginalization, regulatory limitations such as UK family migration regulations, and disputes over identity and representation (Dickson et al., 2023). More particularly, diaspora involvement in homeland development is often influenced by disparities in access, state capability, and institutional motivations (Tripathi and Parth, 2025). Despite facing challenges, strong historical connections, combined with mutual trust and respect, establish a shared vision for Bangladesh and the United Kingdom's twenty-first-century partnership. The geostrategic placement of Bangladesh within the Bay of Bengal and its recent economic development establish it as a vital British partner for maintaining South Asian stability in the twenty-first century.

In light of this context, specific questions necessitate further examination, including in what ways the Bangladesh-UK partnership has evolved in response to new paradigms of development cooperation and fluctuating geopolitical circumstances, to what degree the diaspora influences or contests this bilateral framework, and what political, structural, and strategic restrictions hinder the establishment of a genuinely fair partnership. Addressing these

questions helps in bridging a gap in the current literature, which primarily offers descriptive narratives and often neglects the interplay between collaboration and contestation. Focusing on these critical issues, this study aims to provide a theoretically well-versed and empirically validated investigation of Bangladesh-UK diplomatic relations. Additionally, the analysis assesses the evolution of the bilateral collaboration through three perspectives, i.e., (1) development diplomacy and assistance frameworks, (2) strategic partnership to address the competitive South Asia and (3) Public Diplomacy, diaspora-state relations, and transnational cooperations. The study argues that the Bangladesh-UK relationship is optimally comprehended as a dynamic negotiation between leverage and agency, influenced by structural restrictions as well as domestic political decisions and transnational entities.

II. DEVELOPMENT DIPLOMACY AND ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP

Bangladesh receives its second-largest foreign investment from the United Kingdom, benefiting from the country's dependable partnership for economic growth. Trade and investment relations between the two countries have notably intensified in recent years. However, they are accompanied by inherent structural constraints and emerging threats.

2.1 The UK's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Bangladesh

As a developing country, Bangladesh receives a significant amount of Foreign Direct Investment from various nations. Most notably, the UK's investment remains a crucial source of foreign capital for Bangladesh. The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), a British universal bank and financial services group headquartered in London, and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) (2023) report that more than 240 UK firms are active in Bangladesh, with investments primarily focused on textiles and weaving, electricity, banking and food supply sectors. The United Kingdom has been one of the top three most prominent investors in Bangladesh, with significant foreign direct investment in the banking, textile, apparel, and food industry sectors (Gov.UK, 2023). The March 2020 figures show that British corporations invested more than \$2.245 billion in Bangladesh, where they run over 200 separate businesses. Additionally, the United Kingdom is Bangladesh's third-largest export destination, after the United States and Germany. Bangladesh delivered exports worth £2.4 billion during 2021, while making purchases worth £585 million (Chowdhury and Kabir, 2023). The Bangladesh High Commission in London reports that prominent British corporations are actively engaged in the energy, oil and gas, tea and service industries and are highly willing to invest more in various sectors in Bangladesh (Financial Express, 2023).

Table 1: FDI Inflow to Bangladesh from the UK (Million US\$)

Year	Total FDI Flow to Bangladesh	FDI from the UK	FDI from the UK as % of Total
2003	350	116	33.14
2004	460	106.2	23.09
2005	845	111.9	13.24
2006	792	127.6	16.11
2007	666	140.2	21.05
2008	1,086	138.5	12.75

2009	700	207.3	29.61
2010	913	105.68	11.58
2011	1,136	116.32	10.24
2012	990.04	136.94	13.83
2013	1,599	191.35	11.97
2014	1,526.70	180.98	11.85
2015	2,235.39	300.8	13.46
2016	2,332.72	330.32	14.16
2017	2150.00	312.98	14.56

Source: *Bangladesh High Commission in London, 2025*

The Bangladesh High Commission in London presents 15 years (2003-2017) of FDI reports, focusing on the total FDI flow to Bangladesh, FDI from the UK, and FDI from the UK as a percentage of the total. The table shows that the UK provides a considerable amount of FDI in Bangladesh, ranging from 11% to 33% of the total amount. Nonetheless, obstacles persist in this partnership, as in the post-Brexit exchange rate changes, particularly between GBP and BDT. The UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS) provides duty-free access for several items, contingent upon compliance with requirements related to human rights, environmental standards, provenance and political freedom, which poses a massive obstacle in the partnership. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) suggests that Bangladesh's impending graduation from the LDC classification in 2026 may impact investor confidence due to changes in tariff preferences and regulatory conditions.

2.2 Export Dynamics of Bangladesh to the United Kingdom

The UK's focus on exporting high-value and high-value-added products has grown exponentially, leading to successful global shipments of pharmaceutical products, shipbuilding services, and electrical and electronic products, as well as computer services. The recent trade figures indicate that the UK remains one of Bangladesh's primary export destinations. In the 2024-25 fiscal

year, exports to the UK totalled \$3.36 billion, representing a 4.14% growth. The average annual growth rate of Bangladesh's apparel exports to the UK over the last decade was 8%. In FY22, Bangladesh exported \$4.8 billion worth of garments to the UK market (TBS, 2023).

Bangladesh's third-largest export destination is the United Kingdom, with which it has maintained a favorable trade balance for a long time. In 2023-2024, items valued at US\$4,477.98 million were shipped to the UK, constituting 10.06% of total exports. The principal exportable commodities are ready-made clothes, frozen food, IT engineering, leather and jute products, and bicycles, among others. Knitwear and woven garments account for 90% of the total (Bangladesh High Commission in London, 2025). The country has been expanding its export portfolio with premium and high-value-added items, achieving notable success in the global exportation of pharmaceuticals, computer services, shipbuilding and electrical and electronic goods. However, exports are predominantly concentrated in traditional industries, with ready-made garments—specifically knitwear and woven garments—comprising around 80% of exports to the UK. Alongside frozen foods and information technology engineering, leather and jute products, and bicycles are also major export products, although to a lesser extent. Non-traditional exports are small but increasing; for

instance, footwear exports to the UK have shown a substantial average annual growth rate of around 27.5% in recent years. Overall, Bangladesh exports around 10% of its total exports yearly. The growth projection for exports to the UK is

approximately 15% starting in 2026, and Bangladesh's total annual apparel exports to the UK could increase to \$11 billion by 2030 (TBS, 2023).

Table 2: Bangladesh Export to the UK (in million US\$)

Year	Actual Export	Growth (%)	Total Export of Bangladesh	UK Export as % of Total Export
2007-08	1,374.03	-	14,110.80	9.73
2008-09	1,501.20	8.47	15,565.19	9.64
2009-10	1,508.54	0.49	16,204.65	9.30
2010-11	2,065.38	26.96	22,928.22	9.00
2011-12	2,444.57	15.51	24,301.90	10.05
2012-13	2,764.90	11.59	27,027.36	10.23
2013-14	2,917.73	5.24	30,176.80	9.66
2014-15	3,205.45	8.98	31,208.94	10.27
2015-16	3,809.70	15.86	34,257.18	11.12
2016-2017	3,569.26	-6.74	34,846.84	10.24
2017-2018	3,989.12	10.53	40,950.00	9.74
2018-2019	4,169.31	4.51	40,535.04	10.28
2019-2020	3,453.88	-17.16	33,674.09	10.25
2020-2021	3,751.27	8.61	38,758.31	9.67
2021-2022	4,828.08	28.70	52,082.66	9.27
2022-2023	4,428.17	-8.28	46,430.71	9.53
2023-2024	4,477.98	1.12	44,469.74	10.06
2024-2025	4,622.70	3.23	48,283.93	9.57

Source: (Bangladesh High Commission in London, 2025)

During the fifth UK-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue held on 12 September 2023, the United Kingdom declared that it would sustain unrestricted market access through the 2029 framework. The possibility exists for two specific agreements, named Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

and Preferential Trading Agreement (PTA), to replace the current conditions (PTA). The future success depends on the bilateral trade and investment maintenance processes. A wide range of investment opportunities now exists to support development transition initiatives across

infrastructure development and technology assistance, as well as in hundreds of economic zones (Gov.UK, 2023). Bangladesh needs to actively preserve an appropriate investment environment that will optimize every opportunity British investment prospects bring.

However, there remain both structural challenges and risks, as well as forward-looking perspectives and opportunities (Uddin, 2025). Excessive reliance on RMG renders Bangladesh susceptible to external shocks—fluctuations in global demand, trade regulations, competition, or disruptions from Brexit or supply chain challenges may severely impact exports. Additionally, the post-Brexit trade frameworks raise concerns about the loss of preferences. Bangladesh has obtained duty-free access through the UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme (DCTS), which covers around 98% of its exports; however, stipulations on rules of origin and compliance may introduce additional charges. Additionally, fluctuations in the value of the British Pound influence the competitiveness of Bangladeshi exporters. Moreover, the environmental, labor, human rights and political factors within UK trade policy may intensify, impacting export eligibility for Bangladesh.

On the contrary, under the UK's DCTS, Bangladesh is anticipated to sustain reduced or zero tariffs on a significant proportion of exports post-LDC graduation until at least 23 November 2029, subject to continued eligibility (Razzaque et al., 2023). This offers an opportunity to diversify export portfolios. However, the current duty-free market access in the UK could be replaced by an average tariff of about a considerable percentage for Bangladesh.

III. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND THE UK

3.1 Political and Diplomatic Partnership

Bangladesh and the United Kingdom have systematically advanced their bilateral relations from conventional diplomacy to an extensive strategic conversation. During the Fourth UK-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue, held in London in 2021, both sides explored their entire

bilateral partnership, encompassing political and diplomatic bonds, as well as global and regional matters, economic development, collaboration, and security and defence aspects (FCDO, 2021). Moreover, the fifth Dialogue in 2023 reaffirmed the cooperation in the Bangladesh-UK relationship, including political and diplomatic ties, economic, commercial and development collaborations, as well as global, regional and security concerns. These dialogues illustrate the UK's adjustment of its foreign policy post-Brexit, with South Asia increasingly regarded as a vital element of its Global Britain and Indo-Pacific strategies. For Bangladesh, these discussions offer opportunities to enhance its global prominence, leveraging the UK's permanent position on the UN Security Council to garner support on issues such as the Rohingya refugee crisis (ICG, 2022). Both countries express hopes to work together to evaluate the necessary improvements and develop an action plan through mutual cooperation and support, thereby further strengthening their political and diplomatic ties.

3.2 Cooperation in Defence and Security

The defence and security collaboration between Bangladesh and the UK has been robust and intense, with the UK's ongoing support for defence development and training of the Bangladesh Armed Forces being notably significant. In March 2022, Bangladesh joined forces with the United Kingdom to conduct its first Defence Dialogue in Dhaka, aiming to strengthen bilateral relations into a strategic partnership (TBS, 2022). This marked a significant milestone in this developing collaboration by formalizing military-to-military interaction. This Dialogue marks the first meeting between the two nations and sets the course for expanded bilateral military cooperation on global and regional security matters, as well as improved capabilities across defence technologies, equipment development, disaster response, and peacekeeping activities. Defence collaboration advances through cooperative engagements in training sessions, inspections, joint exercise programs and station installation operation workshops. The UK pledged to enhance cooperation in defense technologies, maritime

security, counterterrorism, and peacekeeping, in accordance with Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030 modernization initiative (The Daily Star, 2021). The UK's strategic interest in enhancing maritime security in the Bay of Bengal, an increasingly disputed area in the Indo-Pacific, is underscored by the British navy's acquisition, training exchanges and plans for upgraded fighter aircraft.

The government of Bangladesh has selected five United Kingdom ships to strengthen its defence along its vast Bay of Bengal maritime border. This policy choice supports Bangladesh's long-term mission to secure defence shopping from Asian manufacturers by buying from Western companies (Hossain and Rahman, 2020). At the 2019 Third Bangladesh-UK Strategic Dialogue, the United Kingdom announced its "readiness" to help the Bangladesh Air Force acquire European multi-role fighter jets and strengthen airport aviation security measures at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The solution utilizes "Best practices sharing, training, and capacity building." However, collaboration with the UK serves as a strategic equilibrium for Bangladesh. Although China is the predominant defense supplier and India an essential security ally, acquiring resources from Western sources mitigates reliance and enhances negotiating leverage. Nonetheless, dependence on UK defense technologies presents dangers of strategic reliance, constraints on technology transfer and potential conditionalities associated with Western security frameworks.

Indeed, the UK has historically engaged in capacity-building through military education and training. Institutions like Sandhurst, the Royal College of Defence Studies, and the Joint Defence Command Staff Course have influenced several generations of Bangladeshi officers, instilled professional standards and promoted interoperability (UK MoD, 2022). With significant military and advisory support from the United Kingdom, Bangladesh has received prestigious educational institutions, such as the National Defence College and the Defence Services Command and Staff College, thereby enhancing the nation's indigenous defense capabilities (Bangladesh High Commission London, 2025). For multiple decades, the British Military

Assistance Team has provided critical assistance to strengthen both the Bangladesh Navy and the Royal Navy (Bangladesh-UK Defence Partnership, 2025). Moreover, cybersecurity, climate-related security threats, and counterterrorism are increasingly recognized as collective issues between the two countries. Since Bangladesh ranks among the leading contributors to UN peacekeeping missions, UK training and logistical assistance might uplift Bangladesh's international peacekeeping stature.

The UK underscores its commitment to the Indo-Pacific region, as demonstrated by its participation in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and its status as an ASEAN Dialogue Partner. At the same time, Bangladesh has emphasized its Indo-Pacific Outlook. Currently, the Bangladesh-UK relationship is transitioning from a defense-focused collaboration to a multifaceted strategic partnership, where the balance of security, diplomacy, and sustainability will shape its future direction. The United Kingdom and Bangladesh agreed to maintain collaboration on global and regional security matters and both countries expected their robust defense collaboration (GOV.UK, 2023).

3.3 UK Assistance to Rohingya Crisis Management

Bangladesh is hosting over one million Rohingya after the Myanmar army perpetrated atrocities in Rakhine State in August 2017. It has been a serious threat to Bangladesh. The UK and Bangladesh have recently reached an agreement to form a Joint Working Group focused on migration, returns, and other matters related to justice and home affairs. The UK acknowledged that the large refugee population imposed a considerable strain on Bangladesh, especially on populations residing near the camps in Cox's Bazar. The UK recognized the need for enhanced livelihood support for the Rohingya to facilitate a more sustainable repatriation to Rakhine State, and therefore declared a further £3 million commitment to the Rohingya response, raising its total contribution since 2017 to £368 million (Gov.UK, 2023). Additionally, the UK announced

an additional £5.2 million (approximately 73.2 crore taka) in humanitarian aid for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh in March 2024 (Reliefweb, 2024). Moreover, the country committed \$36 million in additional humanitarian assistance to support over half a million Rohingya in Bangladesh, reiterating its enduring commitment to one of the world's most pressing displacement crises (The Daily Star, 2025). The United Kingdom has allocated a cumulative sum of \$596 million since 2017 and has allocated more than \$154 million to assist communities in Rakhine State (GOV.UK, 2025).

The United Kingdom stands ready to facilitate a safe, dignified, voluntary and information-based return to Myanmar at the first opportunity. The British government raises matters to the United Nations Security Council as it continues to apply diplomatic pressure on Myanmar. The two countries require international collaboration to resolve this protracted conflict, including partnerships with ASEAN and the United Nations.

3.4 Bangladesh and the UK in Disaster Management and Climate Change Adaptation

As one of the world's most climate-prone nations, Bangladesh serves as a leading model for climate adaptation and resilience, receiving active support from the United Kingdom. In this situation, collaboration with the United Kingdom serves as both a pragmatic solution to immediate adaptation requirements and a strategic alliance with broader global ramifications. Between 2008 and 2020, the United Kingdom assisted in the installation of 249 solar irrigation pumps across 6,062 farms, thereby protecting 40,000 hectares from flood damage (Hossain and Rahman, 2020). UK funding enabled Bangladesh to establish flood and cyclone warning systems, benefiting 27 million people nationwide. The United Kingdom plays a fundamental role in achieving both the SDG targets and the planned objectives of the Delta Plan 2100. In a regional context, these actions enhance Bangladesh's capacity to exemplify adaptation for other South Asian deltaic nations, while also promoting global climate objectives under the SDGs and the Delta Plan 2100. The fourth Strategic Dialogue reinforced the

two countries' dedication to climate action (Karim, 2022).

Through strategic Dialogue, both the United Kingdom and Bangladesh honour the position of Britain as Bangladesh's first international supporter of independence while anticipating intensified diplomatic connections. Following its comprehensive review of security, defence development and foreign policy, the United Kingdom unveiled a committed strategy to combat terrorism and climate change and prevent conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region. Both Bangladesh and the United Kingdom agreed to collaborate on addressing the universal problem. Bangladesh and the United Kingdom have declared that all nations must immediately implement robust strategies to combat climate change. Furthermore, discrepancies persist between the UK's ambitious international commitments-such as mobilizing \$100 billion annually for global climate financing and achieving net-zero objectives by 2050 - and the actual financial allocations to Bangladesh, which have often been inadequate in both magnitude and timeliness (ADB, 2023). The President-Elect of COP26, the United Kingdom, and the Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, Bangladesh, have pledged their leadership positions to elevate climate action ambition throughout the global community (UNHCR, 2023).

The Bangladesh-UK climate collaboration has become intricately linked to Britain's post-Brexit foreign policy and its orientation towards the Indo-Pacific region. The UK demonstrated climate leadership globally by hosting COP26, while Bangladesh utilized its presidency of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) to champion enhanced climate justice for disadvantaged states. Moreover, the United Kingdom commended Bangladesh's greenhouse gas reduction strategies while urging stronger leadership toward low-carbon development in the years to come. The United Kingdom supports all nations in achieving zero-emission targets by 2050. International climate funding secured by the United Kingdom earned praise from Bangladesh because this money represents a vital resource for climate-vulnerable nations like Bangladesh (CPD, 2022).

This interaction illustrates that climate diplomacy now encompasses not just environmental issues but also influence, legitimacy, and alignment with larger geopolitical goals in Asia. For Bangladesh, dealing with the UK is a strategic balancing act—diversifying alliances across Western and Asian entities while ensuring its adaptation program is adequately funded and internationally prominent.

Considering future developments, it is anticipated that novel collaborative methods might enhance the alliance between the two nations. The significant contribution of the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK, including generating national revenue and supporting climate funding initiatives, is enhancing intergovernmental collaboration. Conversely, while the UK has made significant contributions to improving Bangladesh's disaster management and adaptation capabilities, a more comprehensive assessment reveals both successes and deficiencies. Future collaboration must extend beyond project-centric initiatives to address sustainability, financial deficiencies, and the inclusion of unconventional stakeholders, ensuring that bilateral climate diplomacy yields enduring resilience for one of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries.

IV. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, DIASPORA-STATE RELATIONS, AND TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS

4.1 Accelerating Public Diplomacy

The countries share the vital need for robust social bonds, cultural links, intellectual exchanges, and people-to-people relations that strengthen their joint Diaspora community and Commonwealth partnership (Islam, 2019). The governments agreed to hold free elections, alongside the development of civil society and the promotion of religious freedom, to create accountable democratic systems and institutions. The nations have intensified their bilateral relationship by developing mutual legal support procedures and establishing an extradition treaty (Islam, 2019).

Thousands of Bangladeshi students enroll in UK higher education yearly because they seek

top-notch education, affordable tuition costs, and enhanced job prospects. Bangladeshi students gain a globally significant educational experience through British higher education, which combines both academic rigor and importance (Islam, 2019). British universities work with industry professionals to design most courses, while these same experts serve as full-time academic instructors through visiting positions and career mentoring programs.

British universities offer students from abroad economic, cultural, and social benefits for studying abroad. By taking courses that follow a condensed and demanding format, students can accelerate their career progression and reduce their educational costs simultaneously (Chatham House, 2021). Multiple student programs exist that help students find affordable public transportation options and reasonable study materials.

Through its points-based system, the United Kingdom now grants permanent residency rights to students who have obtained a bachelor's degree or a master's degree, enabling them to participate in the workforce. In the British Isles, the United Kingdom established a new immigration policy dedicated to attracting Bangladesh's and the world's brightest talent for academic pursuits as well as employment opportunities inside its borders (CPD, 2022).

Studies demonstrate that thousands of students from Bangladesh choose to study in the UK annually because their institutions offer excellent academic programs at affordable tuition rates, which in turn lead to better job prospects. Educational opportunities in the United Kingdom provide high-quality, globally applicable education to Bangladeshi students. Major university courses from the UK adopt dual input from professional partners in business and commerce, while instructors, visiting lecturers and professional mentors support real-world employment readiness through workshops. Students from Bangladesh who study in the United Kingdom gain the ability to compete effectively for job opportunities (UNHCR, 2023).

4.2 Labour Party's Envisage its Foreign Policy Outlook towards South Asia, particularly for Bangladesh

The Labour Party pledged to collaborate with frontline climate countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, alongside Brazil, as COP30 hosts for climate action (UNHCR, 2023). The party plans to establish a new "Clean Power Alliance," which would expedite climate transition processes, promote more efficient clean energy supply routes and lower utility costs for British consumers. Labor demonstrated its commitment to expanding the UK's global leadership while protecting national identity and promoting liberal values, all while safeguarding its citizens. Under the soft power section of its manifesto, Labour promised to unite creative and cultural institutions with diaspora communities to build international cultural relations (FCDO, 2021).

The party announced plans to establish a right for citizens who experience human rights violations to receive support from their international diplomats. As stated in the manifesto Labour committed to establishing a renewed British identity in international development through authentic partnerships and respect between the UK and nations in the global south.⁶ The manifesto declared that regaining UK development leadership was vital to re-establish relations with all partners (FCDO, 2021). Under Labour rule, the FCDO would become Keir Starmer's international mission execution hub (Karim, 2022).

Embassy representatives needed to show through performance how they achieved economic growth and maintained security while supporting the transition to low-carbon systems. Mr Lammy stressed the importance of diplomatic institutions rediscovering successful methods of grand strategy execution and the need for better technological implementation and greater transparency across FCDO operations. Mr Lammy explained that the Diplomatic Academy of the FCDO would evolve into a new, expense-neutral "College of British Diplomacy" to provide educational programming for international diplomatic envoys alongside FCDO personnel.

Climate-change-driven population movement functions as a core connection between geopolitical systems and security issues related to climate. People must abandon their homes when several regions reach an environmental state where continued occupation becomes impossible. People migrate from their homes because of climate change at both domestic and global levels. An increasing number of climate change refugees generate social conflicts and create risk zones of potential disputes. Population flows from Africa's drought-plagued areas, together with Southeast Asian drought zones, have created overwhelming societal stress that worsened national political and ethnic conflicts in close proximity areas (Boas et al., 2019; Rigaud et al., 2018).

Governments across the world encounter geopolitical problems when handling the migration crisis (Karim, 2022). European nations, alongside other developed countries, encounter mounting political resistance from environmental refugees and those displaced by conflict due to demands regarding their migrant policies. Future decisions about national and international policies towards migration because of climate change must wait until time reveals their development.

Dr. Yunus's Nobel-winning initiatives have prompted worldwide pressure on Myanmar to resolve its Rohingya conflict, which has persisted for six years. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) maintains fundamental responsibilities to address this situation. During the fifth Joint Working Group (JWG) session between Bangladesh and Myanmar officials conducted on June 14, 2022, the parties focused on Rohingya repatriation strategies. During the session, Bangladesh officials emphasized the immediate need for Rohingya repatriation procedures to begin (GoB, 2022).

The urgency to verify genuine Rohingya people had two goals: verifying their identities and improving their safety conditions and livelihood prospects. The Rohingyas living in Bangladesh camps coordinated the 'Bari Chalo' event on June 19, 2022, to gain worldwide awareness. The Rohingya movement presented this campaign

with 17 demands to the world, which include: Rohingya should receive official recognition as well as immediate repatriation while the 1982 Citizenship Act needs repeal and the RTP must establish secure conditions in Arakan State and transit camp durations need reduction and major international actors including US and UK along with UN should actively contribute to the return process (Chowdhury and Kabir, 2023).

Climate security and geopolitics partnership requires active international collaboration to achieve meaningful results. Global climate change demands international cooperation, which the United Nations and similar global organizations have produced through their dialogue initiatives (Lewis, 2021). Through international agreements and initiatives like the Paris Agreement, countries unite to fight climate change. The partnership between countries faces numerous hindrances because of current geopolitical disputes. Agreements dealing with international climate change move at a reduced pace because countries prioritize their economies and domestic interests over environmental concerns.

The international support for the crisis started when conflicts began in Myanmar in 2017. The Rohingya and their host communities in Cox's Bazar have received more than \$240 million from Australia, while Japan provided \$140 million and the United States delivered \$1.2 billion in assistance (U.S. Embassy Dhaka, 2024; Anadolu Agency, 2024).

Official task forces and organizations operating within refugee camps have developed new methods to distribute food and vital public health resources that help minimize the virus transmission over the past year. UN Women and UNICEF expanded their operational scale and added new activities throughout the pandemic. The production of personal protective equipment in UN Women's multi-purpose centers serves dual purposes: creating women-led income streams while providing essential PPE to beneficiaries (Haque, 2020).

In addition to running its regular health education activities, UN Women performed educational

sessions about COVID-19. Distance learning education initiatives continue at schools under UNICEF's leadership since most educational centers across the region have closed. Burmese language trainers who volunteer as teachers travel to Rohingya homes multiple times monthly to provide home-based learning using current educational resources (GoB, 2022).

The UK maintains consistent support for Bangladesh's role as host to the Rohingya community. The past year has brought multiple fresh challenges due to COVID worldwide, with Cox's Bazar among them. The stabilization of infection rates and vaccination campaigns do not reduce our urgent mission to support Bangladesh authorities and help humanitarian agencies deliver needed aid to Rohingya refugees and their host communities.

The UK participates in this joint mission to speed up support for Bangladesh's government while enhancing our ties with international and non-governmental organizations. The Japanese commitment extends beyond humanitarian aid in Cox's Bazar to include efforts for the swift displaced persons repatriation from Rakhine State (GoB, 2022). The solution to this crisis is essential for creating a lasting, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The government expects educational services to restart when the coronavirus crisis passes.

International supporters remain vigilant towards populations who protect refugees, as well as Rohingya refugees, according to UK government reports. The UK government will support international organizations to push Myanmar toward developing an environment that allows voluntary, safe, and dignified permanent refugee repatriation. We fully endorse the call for Myanmar's military to hand authority to a democratic government that will free detained people unfairly imprisoned without harming journalists and activists, along with others (Haque, 2020).

V. STRENGTHENING BANGLADESH-UK RELATIONS: NECESSITY FOR COLLABORATIVE ENDEAVORS

The Bangladesh-UK alliance has developed into a multifaceted collaboration, including security, humanitarian and climate initiatives, each mutually reinforcing and demonstrating the strategic self-sufficiency of both countries. Moreover, both governments need to advance their strategic partnership through joint training, sharing of experiences, technical assistance, and a fundamental analysis of the causes of terrorism (Islam, 2019). Defence cooperation between the UK and Bangladesh will further progress toward the Forces Goal 2030 objectives. Nonetheless, obstacles persist, including resource limitations, procurement requirements, and the equilibrium between Western and Asian defense providers. The UK offers technical and advisory assistance, which Bangladesh strategically utilizes to enhance its regional security, especially in the Bay of Bengal, while preserving autonomy in its defense choices.

Bangladesh received formal praise from the United Kingdom for its continued protection of more than one million Rohingya refugees after the August 2017 attacks by Myanmar's army in Rakhine State. In addition to commendation, the UK assists diplomatic lobbying and modest financial commitments; yet, deficiencies persist in resettlement and sustained humanitarian funding. Bangladesh is proactively trying to control the refugee flows, which illustrates Dhaka's ability to influence international discourse, establishing the country as a responsible regional player and augmenting its diplomatic power with London and other global allies. However, worsening political conditions in Myanmar create an unlikely scenario for safe, dignified returns of the Rohingya refugees. Although there is a slight inflow happening, it is not alarmingly so. The Bangladesh Government is trying its best to ensure the safe and dignified repatriation of the refugees. In this case, the United Kingdom confirms that it will facilitate and assist, by all means, a dignified, voluntary, and informed return to Myanmar whenever appropriate (UNHCR, 2023).

As a leader in climate adaptation strategies, Bangladesh stands as a global pioneer among climate-vulnerable nations while receiving active support from the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom supported 6,062 farmers by helping install 249 solar irrigation pumps for their fields while protecting 40,000 hectares of arable land from flooding between 2008 and 2020. Through financial support from the UK, about 27 million Bangladeshis now receive advanced cyclone and flood alert systems (GOV.UK, 2020). The United Kingdom has been a key partner in achieving the SDG goals and the Delta Plan 2100 targets. Climate action received fresh commitments from both nations at their fourth and fifth Strategic Dialogue (Karim, 2022). Through its comprehensive security and defence review, the United Kingdom established a long-term plan to combat conflict, terrorism, and climate change across the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, the United Kingdom and Bangladesh are committed to collaborating against this global issue. Simultaneously, limitations arise from unfulfilled climate financing commitments and sustainability challenges, necessitating meticulous planning to ensure a lasting impact (GOV.UK, 2020). By proactively influencing climate and environmental initiatives, Bangladesh demonstrates its agency, converting vulnerability into opportunities for leadership. In this regard, the United Kingdom and Bangladesh emphasize the critical need for nations to take immediate action against climate change. The United Kingdom, holding the COP26 presidency, and Bangladesh, serving as chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, both demonstrated their commitment to extending international climate action goals with their current leadership positions. The United Kingdom praised Bangladesh's progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions while supporting the country in taking a leading role in transitioning to low-carbon development in the years to come, facilitating a considerable chance for greater collaboration.

Although the UK's assistance is essential, Bangladesh's assertive diplomacy, strategic leadership, and practical implementation determine the parameters and influence of collaboration. To further cooperation, it is

necessary to address institutional constraints in defense procurement, enhance humanitarian assistance, ensure consistent climate finance, and leverage diaspora contributions. By connecting these elements, Dhaka and London may establish a robust, mutually advantageous partnership that addresses current global and regional concerns while elevating the international stature of both countries. The United Kingdom maintains its commitment to supporting nations in reaching zero emissions by 2050. Bangladesh supported the United Kingdom's overall initiative to attract global climate funding, given its vital importance for countries like Bangladesh that face climate vulnerabilities. Maintaining a balanced relationship might help both Bangladesh and the UK address their adverse issues and benefit from each other mutually.

VI. CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of global economic shifts, political transitions, and climate challenges, the two nations continued to engage in multifaceted cooperation spanning trade, governance, climate change, migration, and education. As Bangladesh nears its graduation from LDC status in 2026, its relationship with the UK has undergone recalibrations, with a greater focus on trade facilitation, investment and technical collaboration, rather than traditional aid mechanisms. At the same time, the UK's engagement in Bangladesh's political transition and continued support for humanitarian causes, such as the Rohingya crisis, reinforced its long-standing commitment to fostering stability and development in the region. Although preferential trade agreements may require adjustments, the transition promotes an increased emphasis on investment facilitation, high-value exports, and technical collaboration, signifying a move toward a more fair and mutually advantageous economic partnership.

In the domains of security and humanitarian involvement, Bangladesh continues to navigate complex regional dynamics. The UK emphasises its commitment to the Indo-Pacific region, as evidenced by its membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for

Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and its status as an ASEAN Dialogue Partner. At the same time, Bangladesh highlights its recently published Indo-Pacific Outlook, where the UK and Bangladesh agree to continue cooperation on global and regional security. Collaboration in defense with the UK enhances capabilities and regional stability; nonetheless, it requires meticulous balancing in light of the UK's Indo-Pacific orientation and the conflicting regional interests of China and India. Moreover, the humanitarian assistance in accommodating over one million Rohingya refugees is essential; yet, the durability and sufficiency of UK help underscore the persistent issues of prolonged crises and the need for ongoing international involvement. The UK agrees that this vast population significantly burdens Bangladesh, particularly for communities living adjacent to camps, further necessitating improved livelihood provisions for the Rohingya to ensure a more sustainable return to Rakhine State.

Climate and sustainability are key cornerstones of bilateral collaboration in the present global politics. Bangladesh's role as Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum and the UK's presidency at COP26 have strengthened mutual objectives to promote climate action, enhance catastrophe resilience, and facilitate low-carbon development. Both countries express appreciation for the UK-Bangladesh Climate Partnership, launched in January 2020, which facilitated the exchange of expertise and whole-of-society engagement, as well as the UK-Bangladesh Climate Accord, signed in March 2023. Both sides reiterated the urgent need for all countries to take ambitious action to combat climate change. Moreover, future cooperation may enhance the integration of innovation, digital technologies, renewable energy, and diaspora participation, aligning national goals with global concerns such as climate migration, energy transition, and food security. The Bangladesh-UK relationship exemplifies a postcolonial alliance, showcasing Bangladesh's autonomy in shaping its security, economic and climate policies, while demonstrating the UK's commitment to maintaining influence through its global and

regional engagement. Establishing a progressive agenda that integrates trade, defense, humanitarian and environmental concerns, creating a paradigm for fair and adaptable bilateral relationships in the twenty-first century, will be the ultimate apex of bilateral relations.

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