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Development Diplomacy in Changing Political Transition: Envisioning a Developed and Prosperous Bangladesh

Razia Sultana[1]
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Abstract

The study aims to explore the intersection of development diplomacy and strategies to advance development goals in Bangladesh. The study delves into the significance of diplomatic, economic, cultural, and other engagements in shaping a nation's development trajectory, with a specific focus on how diplomacy can influence the realization of a 'technologically advanced' Bangladesh amid changing political dynamics in Bangladesh. The objective of the study is to determine the significant parameters of development diplomacy that can contribute to the country's growth path by drawing on domestic and international constraints in its capacity to engage diplomatically. To accomplish this, the research employs a qualitative method that combines a comprehensive secondary literature review with semi-structured interviews with policymakers, diplomats, academics, and practitioners active in the development field. From a conceptual perspective, the study outlines a framework that connects development diplomacy tools with intermediate outcomes comprising economic assistance, trade relations, and regional cooperation as well as soft power, all working in concert to achieve an advanced and prosperous Bangladesh. The findings reveal that development diplomacy is an important means to mobilize international resources, strengthen regional partnerships, and improve the global image of Bangladesh. However, domestic institutional fragmentation, regulatory bottlenecks, geopolitical tensions, and post-LDC economic dynamics still limit its effectiveness. The study argues that Bangladesh must adopt a more coordinated and multi-actor diplomatic approach to sustain the development momentum, overcome governance challenges, as well as to consolidate its global partnerships for sustainable socio-economic growth in the post-LDC period.

Keywords: Development diplomacy, Bangladesh foreign policy, LDC graduation, international cooperation, economic diplomacy

JEL Classification: F50, O19, Q16

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

In contemporary times, the world is going through an unprecedented situation due to several influential factors. Foremost among these is COVID-19, which has had significant ramifications of considerable magnitude, exacerbating disparities, reversing progress in reducing poverty, heightened global uncertainty, and elevated transaction costs (Ciravegna and Michailova, 2022). Following that, the Russia-Ukraine War occurred at a period when the global community was beginning to rebound from the repercussions of nearly two years of the COVID-19 pandemic (The Daily Star, 2024). This conflict has precipitated a worldwide economic predicament again, exerting a significant impact on both economic expansion and high inflation. The prolonged war in Ukraine has the potential to result in a decrease of 0.5% in global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022, and almost 1% by 2023, causing an impact of about $1 trillion on the world economy and overall living standard (Tank and Ospanova, 2022). Moreover, the Israel-Palestine conflict, along with ongoing escalating tensions in the Middle East through the Iran-US-Israel War and disruption around the Hormuz Strait, has affected global oil prices and resulted in significant inflation and higher global prices at about 20-25% (Roberto, 2026; Inman, 2026). Amidst this dwindling situation, Bangladesh is now being impacted by the consequences of the ongoing volatile situation, resulting in a decrease in exports and an increase in import expenditures. In particular, being a nation heavily dependent on imported oil, Bangladesh is going to experience a yearly surge of $4.8 billion owing to significant import payments and elevated oil prices (The Daily Star, 2026).

Apart from external instability, the political transition in Bangladesh has marked a significant milestone for governance, policy, and international credibility. The “July Movement” in 2024, led by students and civil society groups, was not only caused by worsening economic problems, dissatisfaction of the youth cohort, rising prices, and widespread calls for institutional reforms, but also created a scope for thinking about a new way of governance and diplomacy. The movement's main goals were to make it easier to see how foreign loans are used, to make sure that the benefits of aid-financed infrastructure are shared fairly, and to get more young people involved in making decisions, especially when it comes to climate change, technology, and international partnerships. The movement has a big impact on Bangladesh's development diplomacy by showing that there is a gap in domestic legitimacy and that participatory governance is needed. It led to calls for civil society, diaspora, and youth networks to be included in diplomatic talks, which was a step toward multi-actor diplomacy as theorized by Cooper et al. more than a decade ago (2013).

In addition to that, on 12 February of this year, the landslide victory of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the national election has brought the idea of development diplomacy to the core of foreign policy goals. The government started to rethink about diversified development partners, export expansion, foreign direct

investment (FDI), energy security, remittance flows, and other necessary plans, putting more emphasis on citizen involvement and social responsibility. Hence, the need for strategic diplomatic engagement continues to grow in order to utilize the ongoing momentum of its development.

1.2 Aim, Research Questions, and Objectives

Keeping this context in mind, the paper argues that Bangladesh has to embrace development diplomacy to reach its development goals. The paper has addressed the following research questions.

- Which core parameters of development diplomacy are essential for advancing Bangladesh's aspiration of becoming a prosperous nation?
- What are the present diplomatic, economic, and geopolitical obstacles that impede Bangladesh's growth trajectory amid political transition?
- How can Bangladesh strategically use its development diplomacy to broaden international cooperation and get sustained support for its developmental objectives?

The objectives of the paper are:

- To assess the function of development diplomacy in facilitating Bangladesh's evolution into a developed and technologically sophisticated nation;
- To identify and assess the principal challenges—both internal and international—that Bangladesh faces in executing its development strategy; and
- To provide implementable ways for augmenting development diplomacy as a mechanism for broadening global alliances and maintaining developmental advancement.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Studying development diplomacy is important for several reasons. Bangladesh is often seen as a model of "development." First and foremost, the role of development diplomacy in its economic progress is relevant at this critical political moment. Development diplomacy provides diplomatic tools that attract aid, investment, technology, trade, and partnerships necessary for a country's overall growth (Kostecki and Naray, 2007; Riddell, 2007). The country has already reached several milestones and is now preparing to achieve many more in the coming years. Bangladesh has shown remarkable success in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from 2000-2015 and has been diligently working on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At times, Bangladesh depended heavily on aid, but now it is striving to pursue trade-oriented policies. Therefore, understanding the shift from aid-driven to trade-driven policies is an essential aspect of Bangladesh’s development and economic growth.

Second, for the newly elected government, the country’s impending graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in November of this year is a major

milestone in its development trajectory. It also comes with new challenges concerning the loss of preferential trade preference benefits, as well as concessional financing and development assistance (United Nations, 2021). Therefore, development diplomacy is a vital strategy to keep its development steam rolling. Finally, this piece of paper sheds light on how Bangladesh can strategically leverage its diplomatic tools to continue development cooperation, diversify economic partnerships, and build technological capacity during the post-LDC years. The paper makes a crucial contribution by providing insights into the opportunities and challenges of Bangladesh's diplomatic engagement, as well as policy recommendations for consolidating its foreign policy strategy amid a dynamic global environment.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Understanding

2.1 What is Development Diplomacy?

The concept of development diplomacy has been explained by scholars across various disciplines in distinct ways. The word 'development' has a unique connection with the term 'diplomacy'. Around four decades back, Adam Watson defined the term as the dialogue between the states (Adam Watson, 1982). The concept, in brief, is a means for a country to avoid conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and ensure peace and security between and among nations. Diplomacy is regarded as the art of a country to attract foreign audiences. In this aspect, Cooper et al. (2013) state that the primary objective of diplomacy is to advance and safeguard the national interests. However, the existing structure for the tasks of diplomacy seems obsolete in a globalized world with a wide range of players and interests. Diplomacy reconciles idealistic normative principles with pragmatic material interests, rendering competitive foreign policy inappropriate for a globalizing society that necessitates international collaboration to mitigate shared risks (Bermeo, 2018; Carter, 2016). Preserving national interest—one of the core objectives of diplomacy today—includes worldwide public advantages such as peace, healthy environments, and economic stability. Along with addressing global concerns.

Usually, the term 'development diplomacy' is viewed as a specialized kind of diplomacy that aims to advance the development and welfare of underdeveloped nations. It entails using tools to manipulate the views and behaviors of individuals from other countries to promote the interests of the nation that is initiating the action (Pamment, 2016; Zielińska, 2016). Countries across the global South, in particular, use their development resources, expertise, historical, political, cultural values, networks, legal and social policies, and common ties to generate soft power, which enables them to influence the choices and behaviors of foreign individuals in alignment with their own objectives (Custer et al., 2018). Papa and Gleason (2012) define development diplomacy as the practice of blending national and international interests, where the issues of 'sustainable development' involve skillfully managing

the relationships between a country's interests, international collaboration, internal development, and foreign policy goals.

Today, diplomats in foreign ministries possess the ability to explore the global landscape in search of pertinent knowledge, since worldwide foreign policy encompasses a wide range of areas such as health, science, education, and law (Cooper et al., 2013). According to Cooper et al. (2013), development diplomacy facilitates a shift in global and regional governance by prompting established institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and international financial institutions (IFIs) to adjust to the emergence of new regional multilateral organizations like the BRICS Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Thus, within the complex dynamics of international relations, the concept of 'development diplomacy' has emerged as a prevailing practice for fostering connections between states (Cooper et al, 2013; Zielinska, 2016).

2.2 Development Diplomacy in the Context of Bangladesh: An Overview

What is diplomacy for the development of Bangladesh? Diplomacy can act as a catalyst for development by leveraging various means such as exchange programs, MoU signing, organizing business and networking events. The current government's "Bangladesh First Policy" focuses on several interrelated issues related to economic recovery, trade cooperation with diverse regional and global partners, and diplomatic ties (Noor, 2026) So, diplomacy for Bangladesh now is seen as a mechanism to get the resources, expertise, and alliances essential for actualizing programs—aimed at attaining middle-income status and technological advancement by the next one and a half decades. Development diplomacy in Bangladesh is the tactical use of international relations to advance national development objectives. As one academic from Dhaka University (DU) explained, *"development diplomacy is basically using diplomatic efforts to attain development goals of a country... all of which will help Bangladesh become a developed country after LDC graduation"*.

This summarizes a crucial point that Bangladesh sees diplomacy not as conventional political maneuvering, but as a deliberate extension of its development programs. The critical approach for advancing the development visions involves establishing bilateral ties with significant economies, and the Bangladesh government is cultivating bilateral relations with nations such as the United States of America (USA), China, India, and Japan to enhance partnerships and investments. These linkages have permitted infrastructure development, knowledge transfer, and investment inflows, establishing a foundation for a more dynamic and interconnected economy.

In order to overcome the economic and human resource losses caused by the Liberation War in 1971, Bangladesh pursued economic diplomacy, usually referred to as now development diplomacy (Jahan, 1973), which aimed to attract international investment, enhance commerce, and establish new destinations for labor migration. Within one year after achieving independence, Bangladesh received recognition

from 97 nations and became a member of international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (Jahan, 1973). Bangladesh actively participates in promoting economic, commercial, and trade collaboration on both international and regional platforms. The main purpose is to ensure acknowledgement and foster positive relationships with other nations to accomplish key goals of development diplomacy, such as obtaining assistance, attracting investments, and creating opportunities for skilled labor migration from Bangladesh. Establishing strong connections with the Muslim World is essential to secure ongoing support from affluent Muslim nations, such as those in the Middle East, which have played a significant role in providing economic aid to Bangladeshi migrant workers (Oberst, 2016).

During the 1990s, Bangladesh saw a transformation in its trade and investment sectors as a result of political stability inside the country and the conclusion of the Cold War. This led to a change in emphasis towards development diplomacy and the expansion of commerce with global partners, such as the US. At present, the heart of Bangladesh's development diplomacy encompasses many key areas, including energy cooperation, regional connectivity, infrastructure development, and the promotion of commerce and investment (Yasmin and Rahman, 2019). The current government of Bangladesh has used energy security as a key component of its development diplomacy strategy, intending to ensure energy security and mitigate risks arising from wars, interstate competition, and financial crises. The primary goal of the nation is to provide an affordable and uninterrupted energy supply, while also ensuring the preservation of energy resources, efficiency, and stability in the global energy market (Uludag et al., 2023). For this study, development diplomacy in Bangladesh means bolstering regional alliances, ensuring development assistance (grants, loans, and technical support), opening up new markets for trade and investment, enhancing soft power, and building partnerships through development projects. Together, these tools enable states to build partnerships, negotiate development priorities, and position themselves effectively in the global system.

2.3 Research Gap

Development diplomacy ideas have largely been discussed in the realm of International Relations (IR) and development studies, but existing literature is still scarce in the context of Bangladesh. To begin with, while the existing literature offers useful conceptual insights into diplomacy and development, most works remain predominantly theoretical or focus on case studies in major powers and mature economies. Limited empirical attention has been paid to how emerging developing countries like Bangladesh strategically develop and employ development diplomacy as a tool for national transformation. Second, most of the existing studies tend to relate more towards traditional economic diplomacy rather than viewing development diplomacy as a consolidated strategic framework encompassing trade, aid, regional cooperation, and diaspora engagement. Third, there is a lack of

scholarly discussion on how Bangladesh, on the verge of LDC graduation, should strategically practice development diplomacy to maneuver new economic and diplomatic challenges. Thus, this study aims to fill those gaps by examining the tools of Bangladesh's development diplomacy, understanding its implementation challenges, and assessing the potential role of these diplomatic strategies in supporting the country's transition towards a technologically advanced and prosperous economy.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

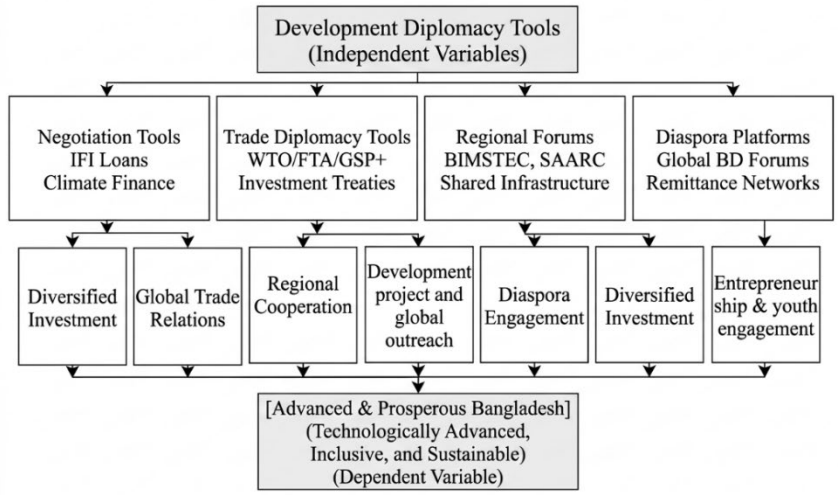
The conceptual framework for this paper illustrates the function of development diplomacy tools as independent variables that together influence the dependent variable, which is the objective of an advanced and prosperous Bangladesh. Figure 1 illustrates the impact of development diplomacy pillars on attaining a technologically advanced and prosperous Bangladesh. This graphic is structured in a top-down hierarchy and shows how the tools (means) facilitate the strategic results (ends). Here, the development diplomacy tools are identified as independent variables, which are categorized into four key clusters**,** each containing specific instruments that enable targeted policy action: First and foremost, n**e**gotiation tools (e.g., IMF loans, climate finance) that drive economic aid and assistance to support infrastructure and macroeconomic stability. Second, trade diplomacy tools (e.g., WTO negotiations, FTAs, GSP+, investment treaties) shape global trade relations by improving market access and investment flows. Third, regional forums (e.g., SAARC, BIMSTEC, shared infrastructure initiatives) strengthen regional cooperation through cross-border energy, logistics, and resilience projects. Finally, diaspora platforms (e.g., global Bangladeshi networks, remittance channels) enhance diaspora engagement, cultural diplomacy, and remittance-driven development. These intermediate pillars—aid, trade, cooperation, and diaspora—are direct outcomes of effective development diplomacy tools and are mutually reinforcing. For instance, trade diplomacy also shapes diaspora investment; regional forums facilitate climate finance; and negotiation tools influence both aid and trade terms.

In terms of intermediate variables, which are pillars of diplomatic outcomes, each set of tools directly feeds into four core pillars of development diplomacy in Bangladesh. The first pillar is a diversified economy that can be enabled by negotiation tools, tackle foreign exchange challenges, and maintain economic stability. The second pillar is global trade relations enabled by trade diplomacy tools and diversifies export markets, secures post-LDC trade concessions, and increases competitiveness. The third pillar is related to regional cooperation enabled by regional forums that strengthen energy and transport connectivity, build multilateral trust, and reduce dependency on bilateral ties. The fourth pillar is development projects and strategic outreach for retaining development, while the fifth pillar is diaspora engagement enabled by diaspora platforms, which amplifies cultural presence, builds soft-power leverage, and harnesses global Bangladeshi communities for development support. The last two parameters include soft power (good

governance, cultural heritage, global reputation, etc.) and youth-led entrepreneurship and innovation (startup, market access, skills and education, technology, etc.).All seven intermediate outcomes contribute to the central objective of achieving an **"**Advanced and Prosperous Bangladesh" (Dependent Variable), defined as a technologically advanced, inclusive**,** and sustainable economy. This outcome aligns with Bangladesh's strategic vision and represents the final goal of leveraging diplomacy for national transformation.

Figure 1 consolidates a strategic framework for the newly elected government for advancing Bangladesh's development diplomacy. Essential components comprise: (a) Institutional reform (to enhance coherence and specialization), (b) Proactive regional/multilateral leadership (to broaden cooperation channels), (c) Inclusion of multiple stakeholders (leveraging business, diaspora, civil society, and youth as diplomatic resources), (d) Enhancement of domestic capacity and credibility (to negotiate effectively and respect international obligations), and (e) Strategic articulation of Bangladesh's developmental narrative. The insights reflect the notion that the strategic application of development diplomacy instruments (negotiation, trade agreements, regional forums, diaspora networks) will enhance intermediate outcomes (aid, trade, cooperation, soft power), thereby propelling the ultimate objective of a self-sufficient, advanced Bangladesh. Through the implementation of these strategy changes, the current government may more effectively traverse the intricacies of its post-LDC period, expand its coalition of foreign allies, and guarantee that the pace of its growth is not only sustained but further accelerated via global collaborations.

Figure 1: The impact of development diplomacy pillars on attaining a technologically advanced and prosperous Bangladesh



Source: Authors' construction, 2025

3. Methodological Framework

This paper adopts a qualitative research design to investigate the role of development diplomacy in promoting Bangladesh's developmental goals. The study presents a mix of primary and secondary data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Bangladesh's diplomatic strategies and development priorities. Secondary data was collected from academic literature, government reports, policy documents, and books published by international organizations. Such data were useful for contextualizing Bangladesh's changing diplomatic dynamic, its development trajectory, and global economic challenges.

The primary data were derived from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in development policy and diplomatic engagement. Purposive sampling included five policymakers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), two representatives of a2i program, seven academic experts from International Relations (IR)across various universities, two development practitioners, six members from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and six from youth-led organizations. In total, 30 interviews were conducted for around 30–60 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview guide focusing on Bangladesh's development diplomacy tools, institutional challenges, and future policy directions. The set of interview transcripts was framed thematically as a form of stakeholder "voice" which provides evidence across multiple themes. Data is then triangulated into the research questions against the conceptual framework (development diplomacy tools → intermediate outcomes → "developed and prosperous Bangladesh"). All responses during the interview process were then coded, analyzed, and grouped into major thematic categories consistent with the study's conceptual framework of economic aid and assistance, global trade relations, regional cooperation, diaspora engagement, and development projects. Coding was done in two deliberate steps. First, a framework-led code phase used seven "key parameters" as the very first organizing buckets (economic aid and assistance; global trade relations; regional cooperation; development projects; soft power; effective diaspora; youth-led entrepreneurship and innovation). Second, an emergent coding phase revealed that cross-cutting constraints are repeatedly presented as "decision-relevant" to whether or not diplomacy turns into development by: institutional coordination failures; regulatory/bureaucratic friction; skills/ecosystem gaps; and governance/credibility pressures. This approach aligns with the guidance in thematic analysis literature about moving back and forth between data, codes, and themes until a structure of concern is coherent and analytically valuable (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This analytical approach allowed the study to identify recurring patterns and policy perspectives across stakeholder types, but also to triangulate interview data with documentary evidence.

4. Findings

There are no structured parameters of development diplomacy in the context of Bangladesh. However, going through the literature and expert interviews, it can be said that there are several areas that help to formulate this evolving concept of

development. Besides, certain parameters can be outlined as the key components of development diplomacy in line with the guiding motto of the current government.

4.1 Economic Solvency through Diversified Investment

Under the current government, diversified investment has been a cornerstone of development diplomacy. The country is relentlessly trying to reduce traditional aid flows and focuses more on economic solvency through multisector investment, attracting FDI, reducing dependence on a single partner, and signing more trading agreements. However, policymakers did not frame external assistance as 'dependency'; rather, they analyse it as a 'negotiated space' for policymaking during a high-stakes transitional period. In fact, Bangladesh's LDC graduation schedule is anchored as per United Nations (UN) documentation (UN, 2025), adding urgency for this effort. Early 2026 domestic debates about whether and when to pursue deferral have reportedly dominated the Bangladeshi press, making "transition timing" now politically contested and diplomatically salient for the current government (The Business Standard, 2026). This view is anchored by one of the officials from MoFA, who linked LDC graduation pressure directly to the need for proactive diplomacy and credible negotiation.

"Diplomacy is the key, and a skilled negotiator is crucial for better communication and coordination of the development agenda. After graduating from LDS, Bangladesh will face some challenges, including not being able to settle the loans or grants… In this regard, Bangladesh needs to consider using development diplomacy or any other tools diplomatically."

This shifts Bangladesh toward a "capability-based bargaining" dynamic, where credibility, preparedness, and the capacity to present convincing policy narratives are as important as economic need. For the current government, diversified investment is not just a financial tool; it is a diplomatic instrument and an important path for a resilient economy. An IR scholar from DU reinforces this capability-based logic, defining development diplomacy as purposeful leverage of international engagement: "*Development diplomacy means utilizing diplomatic efforts to achieve concrete development goals… creating more partnerships and attracting investments into the country—all of which will help Bangladesh's trajectory post-LDC graduation."*

4.2 Global Trade Relations

Global trade relations emerge as a key parameter of development diplomacy, not only an issue of market access, but also a function of regulatory efficiency and institutional credibility. Interviewees consistently emphasized that Bangladesh's trade diplomacy should operate within a "two-level" dynamic: external negotiations need to be coupled with internal reforms for effectiveness. A senior MoFA official emphasizes the role rapidity and efficiency of regulation play in determining trade outcomes: *"Bangladesh is a large consumer market with good infrastructure… But sluggish business can cause bottlenecks and increase the cost for all stakeholders."*

Likewise, a private sector expert highlights the operational challenges with regulations. He recommended that: *Bangladesh must understand the time value of business… there should be a customized export section (authorization), government bureaucracy, and relevant departments for that purpose.* An IR academician from Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) reinforced this argument by taking this further to investment rules and institutional design: *"A fixed office should be established under MoFA solely for the purpose of pursuing development diplomacy objectives… [and to] formulate investment laws in a more simplified manner to bring foreign partners."*

This concern is consolidated by further comments of other interviewees, highlighting slow-moving regulation and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Bangladesh finds it hard to attract investment, let alone go on and secure trade partnerships. These insights are also informed by documentary evidence. According to World Trade Organization (WTO) frameworks, as a result of its graduation from LDC status by 2026, Bangladesh will experience progressive termination of preferential treatment, leading to greater reliance on compliance, negotiation, and competitiveness for continued market access (IDLC, 2018; European Commission, 2022; Hussain, 2021; Munni 2022). Likewise, EU GSP+ conditionality illustrates that trade advantages rely on compliance with governance, work, and environmental criteria. In brief, the empirical finding shows that trade diplomacy is increasingly conditional: credibility, regulatory reform, and compliance are not peripheral but at the heart of diplomatic success. In this aspect, development diplomacy in trade is a mechanism of coordinating the capacity of local institutions with global regimes.

4.3 Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation is viewed both as a development multiplier and as a strategic necessity. Interviewees emphasize that the regional platforms offer pragmatic channels to enhance connectivity, strengthen energy security, and deepen economic integration. An academician of DU highlights the instrumental role of regional organizations: *"Bangladesh can leverage regional groups like BIMSTEC to build additional energy corridors in the Bay."* While on the strategic front, the same respondent notes that engagement with ASEAN and a revival of SAARC may facilitate cooperation in spheres like education, health, and technology.

The policy developments, nonetheless, support this viewpoint. The BIMSTEC Charter (2022) has institutionalized sectoral cooperation in areas of connectivity, trade and energy, while continuous diplomatic efforts for ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partner status reflect Bangladesh's strategic objective of diversifying regional engagement. At the same time, interview evidence from a development practitioner introduces a vital nuance: *"The project is going to contribute, of course, but the full potential of the project will depend on regional cooperation … without that, we are not able to capture due credit for it. So, the full potential is not possible."* This indicates that regional integration can no longer be simply symbolic, even as it would argue in favor of the success, or rather completion of domestic development

agendas, especially on infrastructure. For this reason, regional development diplomacy can be interpreted in terms of conditional interdependence were realized domestic benefits hinge on the enactment of broader regional integration.

4.4 Development Projects and Strategic Outreach

Development projects serve as economic tools and diplomatic poker chips of strategic outreach, incorporating local initiatives with broader economic and diplomatic goals. Stakeholders interpret mega-projects linking renewable energy initiatives, skill-based development programs, and knowledge exchange and partnership. While Bangladesh has carried out other mega infrastructure projects — such as the metro rail, nuclear power, and port development — interviewees argue their success hinges on wider political-economic conditions than implementation alone. The MoFA practitioner voice links the project-development chain into trade logistics and regulatory processing—an under-discussed yet determining mechanism for whether projects give rise to export competitiveness: *"Greening raw materials, production and exporting them quickly can save money and costs… [the goal is to achieve] more efficient and cost-effective [business processes]*.

The findings also imply that projects have more than one purpose: i. domestic development tools (infrastructure, growth, connectivity); ii. External signaling mechanisms (being able to signal credibility to investors and partners). These interpretations resonate with general policy narratives, where the purpose of infrastructure development is to attract FDI and enhance bilateral relationships.

4.5 Soft Power

Soft power is significant because credibility affects negotiation outcomes, investment confidence, and the sustainability of preferences or partnerships. In this set of data, soft power was less "cultural branding" and more credibility power: the perceived trustworthiness of institutions, professionalism in delivery, combined with the ability of the state to project competence and integrity. Two strands emerge. First, transparency pressures: the MoFA practitioner insists negotiation takes place in a public setting where credibility cannot be conjured up without preparation and knowledge: In his remarks… *[the need for] thorough research and knowledge… doing a lot of homework…"*. Second, governance and integrity keep being mentioned as actual constraints on ecosystem-building and policy implementation. One academic expert from DU directly associates governance issues with the sustainability of development agendas:

The ideas of soft power, cultural and public diplomacy, are not aspirational but institutionalized in Bangladesh's foreign missions. For example, the mission documentation describes the group responsible for public diplomacy activities (communication, media engagement, cultural programming) as the "Press Wing" — functions that directly correlate to shaping external perception and building credibility (Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Tokyo, 2017). Therefore, Bangladesh's engagement in the UN peacekeeping operations has been

formally documented by government sources like the Armed Forces Division (AFD) that track long-term participation, deployment levels, and mission locations — an internationally visible channel of soft power and reputation on global governance (AFD, 2022).

4.6 Effective Diaspora and Skilled Migration

Diaspora is both an economic resilience channel and a capability-transfer channel (e.g., skills, expertise, innovation networks). The diaspora theme in this dataset is thus less about identity politics, symbolic or otherwise, and more about how to turn external Bangladeshi talent into domestic innovation capacity. A young entrepreneur working in the Ed-tech platform highlights the logic of knowledge transfer: *"We know a lot of the Bangladeshis who graduated from good national and international universities are working in different labs. It will be a great help for the country if we can attract and access their expertise."* The entrepreneur-focused discussion from the impact pioneer group also treats "brain drain" as economically consequential, if not too problematic, part of the concern that a demographic dividend is lost without ecosystem-building: *"Brain drain is a well-known phenomenon…"*

Bangladesh's diplomatic training infrastructure explicitly includes expatriate welfare and consular know-how, suggesting that diaspora engagement is seen as a vector of core diplomacy, not an afterthought. The results also identify diaspora as a link between domestic development and global structures. But it is conditional on opening up institutional avenues for participation and coupling diaspora programs with national development perspectives.

4.7 Youth-Led Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Youth and innovation are the most futuristic parameters of development diplomacy in light of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Interviewees consistently identify youth as both a demographic opportunity and a political challenge. A youth-led organization founder reflects on the transformational potential of emerging technologies: *"AI, IoT and digital systems… will have a major impact… on almost everything we do."* Meanwhile, a range of actors highlight structural gaps such as a mismatch in skills and training, a weak ecosystem for innovation, and limited coordination between the public and private sectors.

Linking to this point, a respondent from the NGO points out a critical gap in the current policy approaches: *"We did not have an ecosystem… the infrastructure and the ecosystem… are two major policy challenges."* Likewise, an entrepreneur working at the grassroots level echoes and stresses that: *"The connection and relationship with the private sector are very bad. We call it dual education, apprenticeship, internship, etc. These systems are not getting built properly."* These findings align with policy debates around digital transformation and skills that emphasize the importance of investing in information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, education reform, and cross-border collaboration.

As such, youth-led entrepreneurship is not a given; it demands intentional policy support, global partnerships, and ecosystem development. In this regard, development diplomacy can serve as a mediator by linking youth initiatives to foreign funds, knowledge transfer, and technological synergy.

5. Predicaments

Bangladesh wants to be a frontrunner in innovation, technology, and social development (Sarker and Pal, 2023). Earlier, the Bangladesh government established a robust alliance with neighboring nations to advance national interests, particularly in development diplomacy and economic collaboration for infrastructure development (Naomi, 2023). Currently, the BNP government is prioritizing market-oriented economic growth, economic liberalization, and strong ties with labor-receiving countries, taking into account the core issues of the country's sovereignty and strategic balancing. However, despite optimism about the possibilities of diplomacy, substantial barriers are hindering Bangladesh's development path after it graduates from LDC status. These problems are both internal (e.g., domestic policy and institutionally related) and external (related to changes in world economic circumstances and geopolitics).

5.1 Institutional and Policy Deficiencies

Domestically, a significant issue is the absence of policy coordination and institutional readiness for engaging in development diplomacy. One interviewee lamented that, *"the different ministries of Bangladesh are not working together to attract foreign partners; they work in isolation and thus the causes and goals are not being furthered"*. The fragmented approach indicates that Bangladesh is not fully using diplomatic chances; for instance, commerce authorities, education ministries, and energy agencies may interact with international partners independently rather than articulating a cohesive strategic objective. This fragmentation diminishes the efficacy of development projects and may convey ambiguous messages to foreign stakeholders. The lack of a specific governmental framework to promote development diplomacy was identified as an impediment. Now, duties are dispersed, resulting in overlaps or deficiencies in engaging donors and investors. This may postpone project discussions, generate bureaucratic obstacles, and result in Bangladesh forgoing urgent assistance. The results indicate that, in the presence of bureaucratic inefficiencies and regulatory hurdles and the absence of improved intra-governmental cooperation and explicit policy direction, Bangladesh's diplomatic endeavors may be less successful than optimal.

5.2 Economic Difficulties

The cessation of foreign funding tailored for LDCs presents a significant problem. As briefly mentioned earlier, upon graduating from LDC classification, scheduled for November this year, Bangladesh would forfeit certain trade privileges, aid funding, and technical assistance now available to it. This change is anticipated

to impose immediate economic difficulties (UN, 2021; Daily Star, 2021 and 2022). Research suggests that Bangladesh faces the potential loss of a significant share of export revenues and up to $700 million in grants following its departure from the LDC classification. Analysts project that Bangladesh may relinquish around 14% of its annual export revenues (exceeding $5 billion) after the termination of duty-free market access associated with LDC trade privileges (LightCastle Analytics Wing, 2022; WTO, 2022). The apparel industry, which depends heavily on tariff-exempt access to Western markets, is especially susceptible. Participant interviews reflected these concerns in general ways, and policymakers recognize that graduation would constrain Bangladesh's budgetary and trade circumstances, thereby hindering development. A foreign ministry source expressed concern that development partners may exhibit a "lack of interest" if Bangladesh ceases to be classified as an LDC, unless the nation can convincingly demonstrate its ongoing requirements and qualifications. The forfeiture of certain geopolitical advantages, such as preferential access to climate adaptation money designated for LDCs, also contributes to these challenges. The graduation milestone, while indicative of advancement, presents concrete risks such as elevated borrowing prices, less help, and intensified rivalry in export markets.

In the interviews, policymakers and practitioners expect that unless Bangladesh can demonstrate ongoing development needs with adequate reform commitments, development partners may be less inclined to make special considerations. This reinforces a central thesis: Bangladesh's post-graduation negotiating position will increasingly be conditioned by its governance record, policy coherence and standards compliance. That is, development diplomacy becomes increasingly difficult not because Bangladesh has fewer friends, but because the regional and global set of rules around expectations moves in an upward direction.

5.3 Compliance and Competitiveness Issues

Quality and regulatory requirements represent a significant impediment to bridging the local and international differences. To secure new trade agreements or enhanced privileges, such as the EU GSP+ program, Bangladesh must fulfil rigorous criteria, including labor rights, environmental safeguards, and governance. One participant delineated the spectrum of policy modifications required, including improvements in environmental, labor, and bureaucratic processes to meet international standards. This includes the enhancement of worker safety and labor conditions (a significant concern after events such as Rana Plaza), the promotion of environmental sustainability within companies, and the optimization of bureaucratic processes. Bangladesh's present performance in several domains shows potential for improvement; without modifications, the nation faces the threat of penalties or diminished market access. The interviews underscore the difficulty of ease of doing business, indicating that Bangladesh remains "behind in terms of ease of doing business" despite recent improvements. Burdensome laws, protracted project approvals, and erratic policy enforcement dissuade foreign investors and impede

multinational collaborations. For example, a diplomat pointed out that excessive customs delays can *raise costs and cause critical materials to be "lost"* or expire before use. Such inefficiencies might undermine Bangladesh's credibility and appeal as an economic partner. Bureaucratic delay and regulatory deficiencies are identified as significant obstacles that development diplomacy must overcome to achieve outcomes.

5.4 Lack of Proper Regional Diplomacy

Regional diplomacy is essential for the next phase of Bangladesh's growth. By advocating for regional integration initiatives—such as cross-border transportation networks, regional disaster management systems, or academic and research collaborations—Bangladesh may garner support from neighboring countries while fostering collective self-sufficiency. Moreover, Bangladesh needs to enhance its presence in international venues (UN, WTO, climate summits) to garner support for its development program. Unfortunately, due to a lack of trust and mutual understanding, various regional platforms cannot be utilized properly, as seen in the case of SAARC. Whereas, if the regional platforms are active, Bangladesh has credibility (such as climate adaptation or UN peacekeeping), to garner goodwill and technical support. The results identify that due to a lack of collaboration, Bangladesh cannot adopt a more prominent, proactive, and leadership-driven stance on both regional and global platforms, transitioning from a passive receiver to a convenor and agenda-setter.

5.5 Geopolitical Tension

Geopolitically, Bangladesh's external environment is laden with complications that may impede its development trajectory. The results addressed the strategic tensions in the Indo-Pacific and the economic repercussions of global crises. An examination of these issues indicates a consensus that Bangladesh's diplomacy must be exceptionally agile. For example, sustaining equitable ties with both China and India is essential: China is a major investor and assistance provider, whilst India is a proximate neighbor and a crucial commercial partner; any decline in ties with either might impede development efforts, as seen in other nations entangled in great-power conflicts. Bangladesh prioritizes its relationships with Western nations that provide market access and economic aid, while also relying on Russia for critical imports such as wheat and on Middle Eastern countries for oil and labor possibilities. The ramifications of the Iran-US-Israel conflict on oil costs and the apprehensions about a worldwide recession illustrate how geopolitical occurrences manifest as economic challenges for Bangladesh.

6. Enhancing Development Diplomacy for Broader Cooperation: A Roadmap for Future

This roadmap converts these findings into a development diplomacy strategy that can be put into action for Bangladesh's next phase of political-transition and post-LDC period. Guided by the knowledge that resources and political attention are

finite, the roadmap also recommends sequencing: reforms that safeguard market access and fortify negotiating capacity should be the immediate order of business, while deeper ecosystem-building (innovation, education overhaul, industrial upgrading) must play out in time frames of almost intermediate or longer term (UN, 2025).

6.1 Institutional Strengthening and Strategic Coordination

The findings indicate that the central constraint for Bangladesh is not a lack of partners, but rather a lack of whole-of-government conversion capacity to convert opportunities into outcomes. This politically expedient misconception that what is good for development in the global context, automatically transferable domestically; hence the top priority should establish a dedicated Development Diplomacy and Partnerships Unit inside of the MoFA with a mandate to coordinate across economic ministries and track one single "diplomatic delivery" portfolio (trade preferences, investment facilitation, climate finance, technology partnerships and regional initiatives). Its validation output/output metrics for the key performance test of this unit must be functional: Minimizing inter-ministerial conflicts and school project/negotiation timelines through a single-cycle clearance process. The unit should also operate a standing inter-ministerial "post-LDC task force" to prepare preference alternatives, negotiate FTAs where feasible, and oversee compliance reforms needed for future market-access regimes.

6.2 Focusing on Diplomatic Tools and Soft Power

The quality and credibility of negotiation is now a development variable, as evidenced in findings. This is not generic "capacity-building"; the policy response should be a sector-specific training architecture. At least five peerage pressing skillsets should be part of a revamped curriculum at the Foreign Service Academy (or its equivalent training institutions):

- *Mastering international trade negotiation and rules:* WTO disciplines; rules of origin; services schedules, trade remedies – and preference-scheme strategy (including EU GSP +/rules conditionalities) (WTO, 2020).
- *International investment law and investment facilitation:* Investment treaty fundamentals, investor-state dispute risk for the deep-pockets bank, structured projects to build capabilities and negotiate performance-linked incentives (so FDI deals are not just tax-holidays) – international investment law and investment facilitation.
- *Climate finance and negotiations linking sustainability:* access funds for climate, basic carbon markets, expectations for sustainability reporting, negotiation of partnership on green industrial upgrading.
- *Digital economy and technology partnership:* data governance basics; digital trade facilitation; cross-border services design, technology transfer/skills partnership design aligned to ICT Master Plan priorities (ICT, 2021).

- *Strategic communication and reputation management:* transparently constructing narratives around reforms, accountability, participative engagement—actually crucial after the prominence of the 2024 political crisis.

Moreover, training should involve assignment to simulation-based negotiation labs, short secondments into economic agencies (commerce, investment promotion, central bank), and co-modules with private-sector experts who know deal-making. This refines soft power into professional credibility and delivery capability, not mere culture projection.

6.3 Proactive Engagement in Regional and Multilateral Forums

Bangladesh should also prioritize cooperation venues that offer near-term development payoffs and reduce dependence on a single bilateral patron. In practice, that means leveraging BIMSTEC for connectivity and energy cooperation — as appropriate within its Charter-based institutional maturation and pursuing cohesive technology and education cooperation with ASEAN member states through pragmatic action across sectors (BIMSTEC, 2022). However, because of the long impasse at the summit level in SAARC, initiatives of that regional forum should be regarded as opportunistic rather than foundational.

6.4 Inclusion of Multi-stakeholders

Findings suggest that innovation and upgrades to skills must be coordinated between public and private partners with credible training-to-jobs pathways. A multistakeholder diplomacy paradigm must thus do three specific things:

- entrench private-sector involvement in large-scale investment and tech discussions (ensure advisory, not capture);
- facilitates structured engagement pathways for NGOs and youth organizations on skills and inclusion initiatives (particularly to address digital divides, gender gaps); and
- set up diaspora “knowledge return” programs that focus on priority sectors (ICT, green energy, applied R&D), transforming global Bangladeshi human capital into domestic capability.

6.5 Building Image through Ensuring Good Governance

Governance credibility is a crucial component of the market-access and investment calculus, rather than just a normative preference. When future preference regimes are contingent on the effective implementation of international conventions and investors heavily discount political risk, governance reforms enhance Bangladesh’s development-diplomacy bargaining power (European Commission, 2024). Consequently, development projects must be subject to transparent reporting regarding their utilization and outcomes. Such programmatic accountability serves as a robust diplomatic asset that actively fosters partner confidence, while simultaneously safeguarding the country against reputational vulnerabilities during periods of domestic political transition. By institutionalizing these open reporting

standards, Bangladesh can demonstrate long-term stability and reliability to its international development partners regardless of shifting domestic landscapes.

6.6 Knowledge Exchange and Capacity Building

Knowledge exchange should focus on measurable capability transfer; however, including joint research with applied industry partners, faculty-industry secondments, and targeted scholarships tied to return pathways in priority sectors. This aligns with the interviews, which address cautions regarding building infrastructure without the human capital necessary to effectively run it. The roadmap should be ordered by urgency and leverage to avoid simply being a "wish list." In the near term (next 12–18 months), Bangladesh should focus on: i) institutional coordination at home (MoFA unit and post-LDC task force); ii) trade-preference strategy and compliance readiness; and iii) investment facilitation reforms that move towards reducing friction whilst signaling credibility. Next, at the 2–5-year horizon, the country can focus most on the long-term innovation ecosystem (public-private training pipelines, venture funding, targeted technology partnerships). The long-term vision (5 years to 2041 and beyond) indicates that the strategic success is to consolidate an overall diplomatic identity for Bangladesh as a green, rules-compliant, technology-upgrading economy with agenda-setting capacity in regional forums.

7. Concluding Remarks

This paper aims to investigate how development diplomacy may aid Bangladesh in achieving its goal of being a technologically advanced country, the challenges faced after graduating from LDC status, and the methods to enhance such diplomacy for continued international support. The paper further demonstrates that diplomacy and development are intricately connected. Good diplomacy may secure developmental resources, while successful development enhances diplomatic leverage. The study's conceptual framework, which correlates methods such as negotiation, trade agreements, regional forums, and diaspora networks with outcomes like assistance, commerce, collaboration, and soft power, is substantiated by the empirical data. The trajectory of Bangladesh illustrates a fundamental inference: by strategic development diplomacy, a nation may markedly expedite its advancement towards wealth, notwithstanding external adversities and transformations. In this context, diplomacy serves as a conduit for optimism and progress, transforming a nation's ambitions into tangible outcomes in the international arena.

The research further elucidates that Bangladesh's transition from LDC classification, albeit a momentous accomplishment, poses considerable diplomatic, economic, and geopolitical hurdles that may impede its development trajectory. The nation faces challenges, including the forfeiture of privileged trade access, diminished concessional assistance, and a convoluted international environment marked by geopolitical tensions and economic volatility. Diplomatic analyses

indicate apprehensions about reduced backing and emerging market entrance obstacles. As Bangladesh evolves, it must adjust to a framework of equitable competition, demonstrating its creditworthiness while managing global economic instability, which poses risks to its developmental progress. The current political transition, coupled with the post-LDC period, is crucial, necessitating smart diplomatic initiatives to solidify advancements in human development and economic progress.

The research suggests that Bangladesh may improve its development diplomacy by implementing strategic reforms focused on international collaboration and sustainable assistance. There is a need to enhance institutional administration of development cooperation by mitigating inter-ministerial fragmentation via the establishment of a specialized development diplomacy division. Diversifying relationships externally is crucial, especially by including regional blocs, developing economies, diaspora groups, and global forums to reduce dependence on a single source. The research emphasises the diaspora and the business sector as essential collaborators in this endeavor. The post-LDC period presents geopolitical concerns due to global economic instability, necessitating shrewd diplomacy to sustain development progress and safeguard advancements in human development and economic growth. In order to get continuous foreign support, Bangladesh's development diplomacy needs to grow to be more organized, inclusive, and assertive in the global platform.

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