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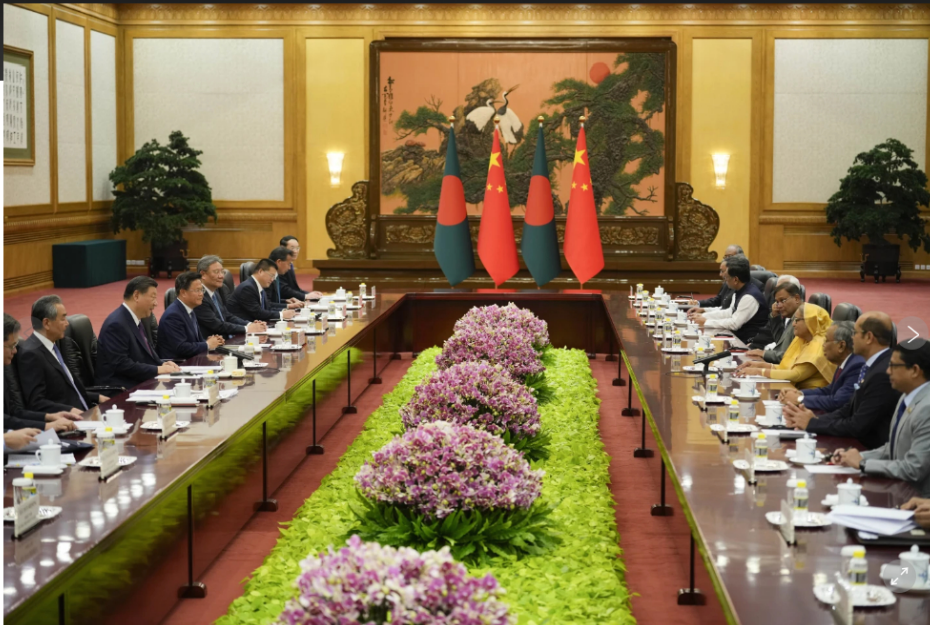
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WORLD NEWS

China and Bangladesh reaffirm their ties as territorial and economic issues rise in the region



1 of 3 | Chinese President Xi Jinping, second from left, and his delegation attend a meeting with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, fourth from right, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, Wednesday, July 10, 2024. (AP Photo/Vincent Thian, Pool)

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BEIJING (AP) — China and Bangladesh are reaffirming their ties during a visit by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Beijing on Wednesday as tensions rise in the region over territorial disputes and resources.

China's official Xinhua News Agency quoted Wang Huning, a member of China's Politburo Standing Committee who met with Hasina, as saying that "China and Bangladesh have respected and treated each other with equality, setting a good example of friendly coexistence and mutually beneficial cooperation between countries."

Xinhua reported Hasina later met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and "elevated their relations to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership." No details were given. but the designation of relations generally entails closer economic relations, largely funded by Chinese policy banks.

Bangladesh occupies a strategic position between Myanmar, a longtime Chinese ally now wracked by internal conflict, and India, the rising Asian giant with which China has a longstanding border conflict.

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Hasina met with her Chinese counterpart, Li Qiang, on Wednesday and oversaw the signing of 28 bilateral agreements covering mostly trade and investment.

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While Bangladesh maintains development partnerships with the United States and India, it is also drawing closer to China, which is heavily engaged in the country's major infrastructure projects.

Hasina is eager to strengthen relations to encourage Chinese investment in her country's economy, which faces challenges over a heavy debt burden. China also provides Bangladesh with tanks, missile launchers and other weapons and is building seaports, railway tracks, power plants and bridges. The U.S. remains Bangladesh's largest source of foreign direct investment.

Hasina's visit to China is taking place a few weeks after she visited India, demonstrating her plans for a partnership with both neighbors in the face of growing interest by the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region.

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While the U.S. and European countries pressured Hasina's administration to hold free and fair elections in January, China openly sided with Hasina. China has also shown a willingness to help Bangladesh's economy as it faces dwindling foreign currency reserves.

Media reports in Bangladesh say it will seek \$20 billion in new loans from China during Hasina's visit.

Concerns have risen over China's border tensions with India, the Chinese military's expansion into the South China Sea and Indian Ocean, fighting in neighboring Myanmar and Beijing's control of water resources in the Himalayas that affects agriculture in Bangladesh and neighboring countries.

Associated Press writer Julhas Alam in Dhaka, Bangladesh, contributed to this report.

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