

Indian army chief here on a 5-day visit

To meet the prime minister today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Indian army chief General Manoj Pande yesterday lauded Bangladesh Army's leadership and overall high standards.

The visiting general attended an event at the Army Headquarters in Dhaka Cantonment. He received a briefing on Bangladesh Army's war preparedness, training, role in maintaining global peace and overall administrative structure, according to a statement of the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR).

A three-member Indian delegation, led by its chief of army staff, arrived in Dhaka on Sunday at the invitation of the Bangladesh Army chief.

This is General Manoj's first foreign trip after he took charge as the Indian army chief early May. He is accompanied by his spouse, Archana Pande.

Yesterday, the Indian army chief also paid a courtesy call on his Bangladeshi counterpart, General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, at the Army Headquarters in Dhaka Cantonment.

At the meet, they discussed various issues related to the good relations between the armed forces of the two countries and future cooperation.

In the afternoon, General Manoj paid homage to the memory of the martyrs of Bangladesh's Liberation War by laying a wreath at Shikha Anirban in Dhaka Cantonment.

He also called on Prime Minister's Security Adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, the chiefs of Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force.

The Indian delegation visited Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi and paid tributes to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The Indian army chief is scheduled to call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today.

The delegation will leave Bangladesh on July 21.

The visit of the Indian army chief is expected to further strengthen the close ties between the armed forces of the two countries, the ISPR statement said.



This handout picture released by Ukraine Emergency Service yesterday, shows firefighter putting out the fire on a wheat field burned as a result of shelling in Kherson region, amid Russian military invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia targets Ukraine's long-range missiles

Shelling kills six in Donbas town Toretsk; Zelensky sidelines close allies in war's biggest purge

AGENCIES

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu ordered generals to prioritise destroying Ukraine's long-range missile and artillery weapons after Western-supplied weapons were used to strike Russian supply lines.

Nearly five months since President Vladimir Putin ordered the February 24 invasion of Ukraine, Russian forces are grinding through the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine and now occupy around a fifth of the country.

Shoigu, one of Putin's closest allies, inspected the Vostok group which is fighting in Ukraine, the defence ministry said.

Shoigu "instructed the commander to give priority to the enemy's long range missile and artillery weapons," the defence ministry said.

The ministry also said the weapons were being used to shell residential areas of Russian-controlled Donbas and to deliberately set fire to wheat fields and

grain storage silos.

The United States and its allies have supplied billions of dollars' worth of weaponry to Ukraine, including long-range arms which Kyiv says are beginning to help on the battlefield.

Ukraine has carried out a string of successful strikes on 30 Russian logistics and ammunition hubs, using several multiple launch rocket systems recently supplied by the West.

Ukrainian emergency services said yesterday that Russian shelling had destroyed a building, killing six people in the town of Toretsk in the eastern region of Donetsk.

"Early in the morning, the town of Toretsk was shelled. A two-story building with people inside was destroyed," the emergency services said in a statement on social media.

Meanwhile, President Volodymyr Zelensky sidelined his childhood friend as head of Ukraine's security service, and another close ally as top prosecutor, in the biggest internal purge of the war, citing

their failure to root out Russian spies.

Ivan Bakanov, head of the powerful SBU security agency, and Iryna Venediktova, the prosecutor general, had been emblematic of Zelensky's policy of putting young loyalists in charge of combatting corruption since sweeping to power in 2019.

But nearly five months after Russia's invasion, the president acknowledged that his two allies had failed to root out traitors and collaborators in their organisations, reports Reuters.

Zelensky said on Sunday the two had been removed from their posts. The deputy head of Zelensky's administration clarified yesterday that they had been suspended pending further investigation, rather than fired.

More than 60 officials from the SBU and prosecutor's office were working against Ukraine in Russian-occupied territories, and 651 treason and collaboration cases had been opened against law enforcement officials, Zelensky said in a video address.

UPDF man killed as '2 factions trade gunfire'

A CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A UPDF member was killed and another injured in a "gunfight between two factions" of the organisation in a remote area of Khagrachhari's Matiranga upazila early yesterday.

The dead, Uttam Kumar Tripura, 25, was a member of United People's Democratic Front (Prasit Khisa). Injured Chigi Chakma, 24, also belongs to the same faction.

Locals said about 5-7 armed men of UPDF (Democratic) faction entered Sukumar Para in Matiranga around 5:00am, surrounded the house of Uttam's father and opened fire at it.

Retaliatory shots were fired from the home, prompting the gunfight. The gun battle continued for about half an hour, local union parishad member Sulumar Chakma told The Daily Star.

Uttam died on the spot from bullet wounds and Chigi suffered bullet injuries.

BGB Jamini Para Zone Commander Lt Colonel ABM Jahidul Karim said a BGB team went to the spot and recovered the body of Uttam, an AK-22 rifle and some bullets. Later, those were handed over to police.

2 men sent to jail for stabbing journalist

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A Narayanganj court yesterday sent two men to jail on charges of stabbing a journalist in Bandar area.

The accused Babu Mollah alias Razib, 26, and Shanto, 30, were arrested by police hours after a case was filed against them.

On Sunday, Nuruzzaman Mollah, 45, vice-president of Bandar Press Club and Bandar correspondent of Manab Zamin, was returning from a visit to the home of an abducted girl at Madanpur when the suspects stopped him near Haluapara Bridge, said his wife Irin Sultana.

The criminals stabbed him indiscriminately, leaving him critically injured, she added.

Nuruzzaman is being treated at a local hospital.

Irin filed a case against 19 named and 30-40 unnamed individuals hours after the incident, Bandar police said.

Mugger stabs CNG driver to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver, who was stabbed by a mugger in Khilgaon on Sunday afternoon, died at a city hospital early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Mamun Hawlader, 45, a resident of Kamrangirchar area.

A Dhaka court placed the attacker, one Mizanur Rahman who was handed over to police by locals after the stabbing, on a three-day remand yesterday.

Mamun died around 4:30am at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Inspector Bachchu Mia, in-charge of the police outpost at the hospital.

Before dying, Mamun told police and journalists that an attacker, trying to snatch Tk 1,500 from the him, stabbed him repeatedly at a roadside shop in Khilgaon's Taltola Market.

Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Rampura Police Station, said the victim's family filed a case against Mizanur yesterday.

Economic jitters EC in crisis

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challenges in the coming months," said a top official of a stock brokerage firm requesting anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Since the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission is not allowing any stock to drop more than 2 percent in a day, the index has been saved from registering massive drops.

"The global turmoil impacted the Bangladesh economy and that was reflected on the stock market," said Ershad Hossain, chief executive officer of City Bank Capital.

Both the DS30, the blue-chip index; DSES, the Shariah index; and DSMEX, the SME index, dropped 31.7 points, 16.6 points and 189.9 points respectively yesterday.

CASPI, the broad-based index of the port city's bourse, lost 242 points, or 1.3 percent, to close at 18,280.

Turnover at the CSE stood at Tk 13.61 crore yesterday, down from Tk 19.5 crore the previous day.

18 women killed in Pak wedding boat capsized

AFP, Sadiqabad

At least 18 women drowned and dozens more people are missing after an overcrowded boat carrying a Pakistan wedding party capsized yesterday, officials said.

The boat was ferrying about 100 members of one family across the Indus river in a marriage procession between the villages of Machka and Kharor in the Sadiqabad subdistrict of Punjab province, according to police and local authorities.

Eighteen women were "confirmed dead" and 25 to 30 people "were either rescued by locals who live along the river or managed to swim ashore", according to Sadiqabad swimsherman Rana Kashif Mehmood.

"Rescue teams are at the scene," he said.

EC in crisis

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Three political parties -- Revolutionary Workers Party, Khelafat Majlis and Bangladesh Islami Front -- while taking part in the talks at the EC office yesterday urged the commission not to use Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in the next general election.

Workers Party and Khelafat Majlis also called for formation of a neutral polls-time caretaker government.

CEC Awal said the polls may take place in late December 2023 or early January 2024.

"A major political party already decided that it would not take part in the election unless an election-time government is formed. From the commission's side, we consider it a crisis," he said at the meeting with the Revolutionary Workers Party in the afternoon.

"If one of the major political parties does not participate in the election, in our view it won't be acceptable."

He requested the political parties to reach a consensus so that the election becomes a participatory one, and said the commission wants the BNP and its like-minded parties to take part in the election.

Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Huq said over-enthusiasm regarding EVM has raised questions about the motive of the EC as the ruling party also wants the voting machine be used in the national election.

He also asked how the EC would deal with all MPs of an aggressive government during the parliamentary election if it could not rein in a lawmaker during the recent Cumilla City Corporation polls.

He castigated the CEC for his comment made at Sunday's talks that "if someone stands with a sword, you will have to stand with a rifle or sword".

In response, the CEC said he made the comment symbolically and jokingly.

About the allegation raised by Saiful that the electoral system has

been destroyed, Awal said, "Not only the electoral system but also politics and many other things have been ruined."

The CEC also said, "Make me the election commissioner of Australia or the United Kingdom, I will be able to conduct elections easily. It's very difficult to hold elections here. There is money power at play in politics here -- how can we control it?"

Earlier in the day, Awal at the meeting with Khelafat Majlis said there were "doubts" centring on the election as the BNP and some other like-minded parties have decided not to participate in it.

He said the commission is ready to hold the election but considers that if the BNP does not participate in this election, its goal to hold an inclusive election will not be achieved.

The BNP's issues on how the election should be conducted could be addressed by sitting with other parties, especially the ruling Awami League, and reaching a consensus, he added.

At the meeting with Islamic Front in the morning, Awal said the BNP should establish through movements and discussions what it wants. "The EC doesn't want to see any play staged in the name of an election."

Islamic Front proposed cancelling a mandatory provision of keeping 33 percent positions in all committees of a party reserved for women as all parties cannot ensure it.

Bangladesh Sanskritik Muktiyote, another political party, proposed that the ministries of public administration and home should be brought under the EC during the polls.

Khelafat Majlis recommended keeping local government, public administration, defence, home and finance ministries under the EC during the election.

Muktiyote also proposed forming a Jatiya Parishad comprising all registered political parties and that Parishad would be in charge of the government during the election.

Energy reality bites hard

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"All the countries, including the UK and USA, are also experiencing load shedding," he said.

Principal Secretary to the PM, Ahmad Kaikaus, presided over the meeting attended by the high-ups of power and energy division, BPC, Petrobangla, BPDB and the power distribution companies.

On July 7, another high-level meeting recommended setting thermostats at 25 degrees Celsius at every government office, reducing the use of air conditioners at religious

establishments, and wrapping up social events like weddings by 7:00pm.

Yesterday's meeting recommended that these measures be implemented as soon as possible.

"Devotees in all religious establishments can use air conditioners during prayers but are requested to maintain austerity by keeping those off the rest of the time," said the state minister at the press conference.

According to the BPDB, the country has a capacity to produce

22,348MW. Of it, around 52 percent comes from gas-based power plants, 27 percent from furnace oil-based plants, 5.86 percent from diesel-based, 8.03 percent from coal-based plants and the rest from hydro, solar and import.

Since the government decided to stop the import of liquified natural gas from the international spot market at a high price, there were shortfalls in power generation. Since June 30, the country started load shedding to meet the shortfalls.

Sri Lanka crisis a warning sign for many

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to be on a similar trajectory," BBC said in its report titled "Sri Lanka crisis is a warning to other Asian nations".

The countries are Bangladesh, Pakistan, Laos and the Maldives, it said.

"For economies running current account deficits -- such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- governments face serious headwinds in increasing subsidies. Pakistan and Sri Lanka have turned to the IMF and other governments for financial assistance," Kim Eng Tan, a sovereign analyst at S&P Global Ratings, told the BBC.

Bangladesh has also requested the IMF for \$4.5 billion to prop up its fast-draining foreign currency reserves, and an IMF mission is in Dhaka to discuss the matter.

As of July 13, foreign currency reserves stood at \$39.79 billion, enough to cover just about five months' import bill.

In the first 11 months of fiscal 2021-22, Bangladesh's current account deficit stood at \$17.2 billion, up from \$2.78 billion a year earlier, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

In May, inflation hit an eight-year high of 7.42 percent.

"Bangladesh has had to re-

prioritise government spending and impose restrictions on consumer activities," Tan said.

Over in Pakistan, the government is trying to rein in spending as it negotiates with the IMF to resume a bailout programme, BBC said.

Since August last year, Pakistan's foreign currency reserves halved. As of July 7, it stood at \$15.61 billion.

Inflation hit a 13-year-high of 21.3 percent in June.

Fuel prices in Pakistan are up by around 90 percent since the end of May, after the government ended fuel subsidies.

The Maldives has seen its public debt swell in recent years and it is now well above 100 percent of its GDP.

Like Sri Lanka, the pandemic hammered an economy that was heavily reliant on tourism, BBC said.

Countries that depend so much on tourism tend to have higher public debt ratios, but the World Bank says the island nation is particularly vulnerable to higher fuel costs because its economy is not diversified.

US investment bank JPMorgan has said the holiday destination is at risk of defaulting on its debt by the end of 2023.

Laos' public debt amounted to

88% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021, according to the World Bank, with almost half of that figure owed to China.

Laos, which is already heavily in debt, is struggling to repay those loans or pay for imports like fuel. The World Bank says the country had \$1.3bn of reserves as of December last year.

But its total annual external debt obligations are around the same amount until 2025 - equivalent to about half of the country's total domestic revenue.

As a result, Moody's Investor Services last month downgraded the communist-ruled nation to "junk", a category in which debt is considered high risk.

China has been a dominant lender to several of these developing nations and therefore could control their destinies in crucial ways, BBC said.

But it is largely unclear what Beijing's lending conditions have been, or how it may restructure the debt, the report said.

Where China is at fault, according to Alan Keenan from International Crisis Group, is in encouraging and supporting expensive infrastructure projects that have not produced major economic returns.