

TAIWAN CONFLICT US, China hold first informal nuclear talks in five years

REUTERS, Hong Kong

The United States and China resumed semi-official nuclear arms talks in March for the first time in five years, with Beijing's representatives telling US counterparts that they would not resort to atomic threats over Taiwan, according to two American delegates who attended.

The Chinese representatives offered reassurances after their US interlocutors raised concerns that China might use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons if it faced defeat in a conflict over Taiwan. Beijing views the democratically governed island as its territory, a claim rejected by the government in Taipei.

"They told the US side that they were absolutely convinced that they are able to prevail in a conventional fight over Taiwan without using nuclear weapons," said scholar David Santoro, the US organiser of the Track Two talks, the details of which are being reported by Reuters for the first time.

Participants in Track Two talks are generally former officials and academics who can speak with authority on their government's position, even if they are not directly involved with setting it. Government-to-government negotiations are known as Track One.

Washington was represented by about half a dozen delegates, including former officials and scholars at the two-day discussions, which took place in a Shanghai hotel conference room.

Beijing sent a delegation of scholars and analysts, which included several former People's Liberation Army officers.

A State Department spokesperson said in response to Reuters' questions that Track Two talks could be "beneficial". The department did not participate in the March meeting though it was aware of it, the spokesperson said.

Such discussions cannot replace formal negotiations "that require participants to speak authoritatively on issues that are often highly compartmentalized within (Chinese) government circles," the spokesperson said.



Palestinian boys carry the shrapnel remains of ordnance following the Israeli military bombardment of the Gaza Municipality garage on al-Wahda Street in the al-Daraj neighborhood in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel 'pause' in Gaza had no impact on aid supplies

Says WHO, warns intense heat could worsen health crisis for displaced Palestinians

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A daily "pause" the Israeli military declared in Gaza to facilitate aid flows has had no impact on deliveries of badly needed aid, the UN's health agency said yesterday.

"So overall, we the UN can say that we did not see an impact on the humanitarian supplies coming in since that, I will say, unilateral announcement of this technical pause," said Richard Peeperkorn, the World Health Organization (WHO) representative in the Palestinian territories. "That is the overall assessment."

Over the weekend, the Israeli military announced a daily humanitarian "pause"

in fighting on a key road in southern Gaza. Days later however, a United Nations spokesman said "this has yet to translate into more aid reaching people in need".

According to the WHO, as of May 17, only 750 people remained in the city of Rafah.

There were between 60,000 and 75,000 in the Al-Mawasi area in the south of the Gaza Strip, where many Palestinians have taken refuge since the start of the Israeli offensive in Rafah, reports AFP.

Dr Thanos Gargavanis, a trauma surgeon and emergency officer at the WHO, said the UN in Gaza was trying to "operate in an unworkable environment". Returning from Gaza, the UN

Women's Special Representative for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Maryse Guimond, described the territory as a "world of devastation".

She added: "More than one million people in Gaza are in constant displacement" in the hope of finding somewhere safe. However, the WHO's Dr Gargavanis said that "no place is safe".

The world health body also warned that scorching heat in the Gaza Strip could exacerbate health problems for Palestinians displaced by Israeli bombardment, reports Reuters. The WHO is calling for the Rafah crossing to be reopened for humanitarian aid and medical evacuations.

US destroys 6 Houthi drones in Red Sea

AFP, Washington

The US military said later on Thursday that it had destroyed four Houthi nautical drones and two aerial ones over the Red Sea off Yemen.

Iran-backed Houthis have launched scores of drones and missiles at commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since November, describing the attacks as being in support of Palestinians during Israel's offensive in Gaza.

The US and its allies have responded with an increased naval presence to defend shipping in the vital waterway and with retaliatory strikes on Houthi targets.

Trump promises US green card for foreign graduates

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump said he wants to grant green cards to foreign graduates from US colleges, in an apparent softening of his typically hard-line view on immigration, a key election issue.

The Republican candidate made the remarks in a podcast published Thursday, days after President Joe Biden announced a citizenship pathway for immigrants married to US nationals, counterbalancing his recent crackdown on illegal border crossings.

"What I want to do and what I will do is, you graduate from a college, I think you should get automatically as part of your diploma a green card to be able to stay in this country," Trump told the All-In podcast. A green card is the commonly used name for a permanent resident card in the United States and a step toward citizenship.

Trump said this should include "anybody who graduates from a college," including those who complete two-year programs, known as junior colleges, and doctoral graduates.

Asked initially on the podcast if he would promise to help import the "best and the brightest around the world to America," Trump replied: "I do promise."

CORRUPTION CASE Delhi HC blocks Kejriwal's release from prison

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian court yesterday stopped the release from jail of one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's chief opponents, a day after he was granted bail in a long-running corruption case, reports said.

Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of Delhi and the leader of the opposition Aam Aadmi party, denies the charges as a "political conspiracy" by Modi and his Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

He was released from detention to campaign partway through India's weeks-long general election but returned to jail after voting ended this month.

A trial court ordered his release late Thursday, but before he could walk out of jail yesterday the country's top economic crimes investigative agency, the Enforcement Directorate (ED), appealed to the Delhi High Court.

It suspended his release until it could decide on the appeal, local media reported.

Tigers face India

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the competition, and the scorecards of the other matches in the Super Eight are indicating that runs are flowing more freely now, unlike the first round.

In the first four matches of the Super Eight, the average run-rate has been 8.60, which is significantly higher than the first round's average scoring rate of 6.71.

This upsurge in runs will make Bangladesh's task even more arduous against India, who are fresh off a convincing 47-run win over Afghanistan in their Super Eight opener on Thursday, where they posted 181-8.

Much like the Australia match, Bangladesh will be tested against a side that look stronger on paper in all departments.

India boast one of the strongest batting line-ups in the competition, and although their star batter Virat Kohli is yet to hit his stride, making just 29 runs in four innings, it hasn't stopped their undefeated march so far in the tournament.

India's ace in the hole so far in this World Cup has been pacer Jasprit Bumrah. His economy rate of 3.46 is the best amongst bowlers who have played at least four matches, and on top of that, he has also claimed eight wickets, conceding just 6.50 runs per wicket.

Bangladesh's fragile top order will have to try and preserve their wickets against Bumrah and Co early on and again deal with the pacer's searing yorkers at the death.

History is also not on Bangladesh's side, as the Tigers have ended up on the losing side in all four previous encounters against India in T20 World Cups.

The last two of those defeats were agonising for Bangladesh, as they lost by just one run in Bengaluru in 2016 and by five runs in DLS method in Adelaide in 2022.

A defeat today will douse Bangladesh's faint hopes of making it to the knockout phase of the T20 World Cup for the first time. A washout would keep them in the hunt while a win would put the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side with a golden opportunity of making it to the top four.

But to topple India, a lot has to go right for the Tigers and even more things have to go horribly wrong for India, which at the moment seems unlikely.

JU lost 40pc waterbodies

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The university is situated on over 697 acres.

According to the study, Jahangirnagar University's original master plan, designed by renowned architect Mazharul Islam in 1968, was neglected during subsequent structural development phases, disguising the changes as further development.

"As a consequence, significant structural alterations have occurred in the university's landscape, land use, and land cover. Unfortunately, these changes have led to a reduction in blue-green spaces, resulting in a de-greening impact on the campus," it added.

The research found that the university's new registrar building, new arts building, and several dormitories of male and female students were constructed after removing a significant portion of vegetation cover.

The study further said much of the architecture of the buildings, constructed on the campus in the last two decades, does not harmonise with the surrounding environment by utilising maximum airflow and natural lighting.

Furthermore, many abandoned structures remained unused on the campus occupying the spaces, it mentioned.

Farhadur Reza, one of the four researchers who conducted the study, said an area with more trees absorbs more carbon, and if the vegetation cover is reduced, it affects the microclimate and ecological services.

If any area faces deforestation, temperature will rise subsequently

and that has a negative impact on the biodiversity, said Farhadur, also an associate professor of urban and regional planning at JU.

Another member of the team, Mashura Shammi, said the construction of academic and administrative buildings without proper environmental and social assessments, and also in violation of the master plan is to blame for the decrease in waterbodies and vegetation area.

Mashura, also a professor of environmental sciences at JU, said the drainage system, footpath, sewage plan, air flow, and abandoned buildings should have been taken into consideration before taking up such construction projects.

The study said solid waste management practices, faecal sludge and sewage management, grey water management and energy management were ignored in the Further Development Projects of JU.

"These problems require practical solutions," it said.

Students and teachers have long been criticising the authorities for taking up development projects without proper environmental and social assessments. They demanded a master plan for the university saying that the authorities violated the existing one.

Students staged demonstrations over the felling of trees to make room for different structures to be built under different projects. The ongoing project, involving around Tk 1,445 crore, is one of them.

Under the project launched in 2018, a total of 22 new buildings and an extension building are

being constructed. Construction of some of these buildings have been completed. The project was supposed to be completed by this year but the deadline will be extended.

Amartya Ray, president of a faction of JU Chhatra Union, said, "Since the beginning of the Further Development Projects, we have been urging the authorities to knock down old and abandoned buildings, except the special ones designed by Mazharul Islam.

"If the new infrastructures are built after knocking down the old ones, land will not be wasted and the environmental damage will be much less," he said.

Renowned economist Prof Anu Muhammad, also a former faculty member of JU, said, "I used to call the university a 'living laboratory'. But the present environment is not like that."

He said the biggest damage happened to JU over the last decade. "The authorities keep saying that they are preparing a new master plan, but we have not seen one yet. They are cutting trees in the absence of a new master plan.

"This is an administration governed by contractors," said Anu Muhammad.

Nasir Uddin, director at the planning and development office of JU, said they were drawing up master plan which would have details about sewage management.

Asked about filling waterbodies, he said only an extension building of the Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences is being built on low land.

Putin threatens to arm North Korea

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"It would destabilise the Korean Peninsula, of course, and potentially ... depending on the type of weapons they provide, might violate UN Security Council resolutions that Russia itself has supported," Miller said.

Russia and North Korea's signing of a mutual defence pact this week sent ripples out across the region, with South Korea summoning Moscow's envoy yesterday, and Japan and the United States voicing serious concern.

The defence pact, which comes against the backdrop of Putin's grinding

war against Ukraine, is the most significant agreement signed by Russia and North Korea in decades and is seen as something of a revival of their 1961 Cold War-era mutual defense pledge.

The deal was inked on Wednesday during Putin's trip to Pyongyang, where he received a lavish welcome from fellow autocrat Kim Jong Un, North Korea's leader.

It consolidates the Kim regime's powerful link with a world power that wields a veto on the UN Security Council and means Russia now has a defence pact with South Korea's

biggest enemy.

South Korea, a US treaty ally, condemned the treaty and summoned Russia's ambassador yesterday, a rare diplomatic step that illustrates the soured tensions between Seoul and Moscow.

First Vice Minister Kim Hong-kyun relayed the South Korean government's "stern position" on Kim and Putin's defense pact, urging Moscow to "immediately halt military cooperation" with Pyongyang and abide by UN Security Council resolutions, the foreign ministry said.

Dhaka, Delhi should look for 'creative solution'

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Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi.

Dhaka and Delhi failed to seal the Teesta deal in 2011 due to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's last-minute opposition.

People in Bangladesh's northern region currently suffer from a shortage of irrigation water in the dry season. There is no respite for them during the monsoon either as they experience flooding.

In 2020, Bangladesh asked China to support the implementation of nearly \$1 billion Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project. China has shown interest in the project.

During a visit to Dhaka on May 9 this year, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra told Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud that his country was interested in financing the Teesta project.

On June 13, Hasina told parliament that her government was considering a proposal for a detailed feasibility study for the Teesta project as per recommendations from China.

The premier is likely to visit China on July 9-12. During that tour, Dhaka and Beijing may discuss the Teesta project, said diplomatic sources.

Sreeradha, a professor of Jindal School of International Affairs at OP Jindal Global University in Haryana, yesterday said India would not want to see any "unfriendly country" implementing any project close to its border.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has a very good understanding of Indian security concerns. So, it is expected that Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina will go for a mutually acceptable agreement," said Sreeradha, who researches into India's neighbouring countries and South Asian security.

She expressed optimism that India will realise the importance of Bangladesh's priority project.

About the killing of Bangladeshis by Indian Border Security Force, she said identifying and addressing

the root causes of cross-border smuggling and trespassing are crucial.

Though India approved line of credits of about \$8 billion for Bangladesh, only about \$1.7 billion has been disbursed so far because of the difficult terms and conditions, Sreeradha said.

As Bangladesh seeking fresh loans, India should offer credits under new terms and conditions, she added.

She said India's northeast region is much more secure today and is developing because of Bangladesh's support in addressing the security concerns.

According to Sreeradha, the road, rail and water connectivity between Bangladesh and India has seen a significant progress, thanks to Bangladesh's support.

"All these are advancing the regional and sub-regional cooperation."

However, the visions of India and Bangladesh to have access to ASEAN nations via Myanmar have been affected due to the conflict in Myanmar, she observed.

"In South Asia, India attaches highest priority to its relations with Bangladesh. Addressing each other's concerns can greatly help promote the regional value chain, stability and peace," she said.

She hoped the two top leaders will advance this agenda.

About reducing the Bangladesh-India trade gap, Sreeradha said Bangladesh should produce new products that are in demand in India.

Bangladesh also needs to improve its investment environment to attract more investment from India, she added.

"Though there is a Special Economic Zone in Chattogram for India, red tape, corruption and other governance issues keep Indian investors away from investing in Bangladesh," she said.

India's exports to Bangladesh are worth \$12 billion a year against Bangladesh's exports of about \$2 billion to India.