

BRICS blasts 'resurgence of protectionism' in Trump era

Calls for a 'complete withdrawal' of Israeli forces from Gaza

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

China, Brazil and other members of the BRICS grouping have slammed the "resurgence of trade protectionism" at a meeting in Rio de Janeiro dominated by US President Donald Trump's tariffs blitz.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov were among the top diplomats of the 11-country grouping attending two days of talks on issues ranging from Trump's trade war to the push for peace in Ukraine.

Mauro Vieira, the foreign minister of Brazil, which holds the rotating BRICS presidency, said the bloc underscored its "firm rejection" of protectionism, without explicitly referring to Trump.

Since returning to the White House in January, Trump has hit dozens of countries with a blanket 10 percent tariff, but China faces levies of up to 145 percent on many products.

Beijing has responded with duties of 125 percent on US goods.

BRICS, which was founded by Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009 and now also includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, has become a major counterweight to Western-led groups such as the G7.

It now makes up nearly half of the world's population, and 39 percent of global GDP.

The meeting in Rio came at a critical moment for the world economy after the International Monetary Fund slashed growth forecasts over the impact of Trump's sweeping levies on imports.

The ministers did not issue a joint statement.

Brazil instead settled for a declaration summarising the discussions.

Vieira said there was "absolute consensus" on the subject of "trade



Foreign ministers and senior diplomats from BRICS countries pose for a family photo during the second day of the BRICS foreign ministers' meeting in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

conflicts and tariffs."

Some BRICS members have avoided Trump's trade fury.

Brazilian exports to the United States are subject to 10 percent tariffs, a fraction of those imposed on China.

And while Latin America's biggest economy has been hit by Trump's tariffs on steel imports -- Brazil is the second-biggest supplier of steel to the US -- President Luiz Inacio Lula's government has declined to retaliate and sought to negotiate with Washington instead.

Brazil has however made no secret of its frustration with European Union regulations on some of its agricultural exports, imposed over Amazon deforestation.

Vieira hit out Tuesday at the use of "non-tariff" trade barriers, deployed

under "environmental pretexts."

The group trod more carefully on the issue of non-dollar transactions among BRICS members.

At a summit last year in Russia, BRICS leaders discussed boosting such transactions, eliciting a swift rebuke from Trump who threatened them with 100 percent tariffs if they undercut the US currency.

Brazil said the ministers this week had "underlined the importance of greater use of local currencies."

"Multilateralism" and "cooperation" were the watchwords of the meeting, which also discussed the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

The BRICS ministers called for a "complete withdrawal" of Israeli forces from Gaza, terming Israel's more than

50-day aid blockade of the territory "unacceptable."

They had less to say about the war in Ukraine, which is at a critical juncture, with Washington threatening to end its efforts to broker peace in the absence of a breakthrough.

As in the past, Russia's BRICS partners stopped short of condemning Moscow's invasion of its neighbour, while calling for a "lasting peace deal."

The growing global polarisation is of particular concern to Brazil as it prepares to host the annual, often fractious UN climate conference in November in the Amazon.

On Tuesday, Brazil warned that the international "fragmentation" was jeopardising global "climate action ambitions."

22 sectors still pay wages below poverty line

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materials like metal or printing type.)

On the other hand, the industries that are paying above the poverty line include pharmaceuticals (Tk 8,050), private jute mills and the plastic industry (Tk 8,000), printing press (Tk 8,150), glass and silicate (Tk 8,500), aluminium and enamel (Tk 8,700), security services (Tk 9,140), fishing industry (Tk 10,520), privately-owned road transport (Tk 10,100), re-rolling mills (Tk 10,650), homeopathic factories (Tk 11,500), garments (Tk 12,500), tanneries (Tk 12,800), and saw mills (Tk 17,900).

Meanwhile, according to the law, these minimum wages are to be revised every five years. But labour leaders say the board has failed to update the wages in at least 18 sectors, with some left untouched for as long as 42 years.

The last revision for type foundry workers was in 1983, while petrol pump workers haven't had an update since 1987. Ayurvedic factory wages were last set in 2009. Iron foundry, oil mill, and vegetable product workers' wages were last fixed in 2010, salt crushing workers in 2011, unskilled adult and adolescent labourers in 2012, match industry workers in 2013, jute press workers in 2014, and hotel and restaurant workers in 2016.

Anwar Hossain, general secretary of the Bangladesh Hotel, Restaurant, Sweetmeal Federation, highlighted the struggles faced by workers, saying that they work 12 to 13 hours a day but receive only a meager wage.

"The money we earn barely allows us to survive and return to work

the next day. How can we possibly support a family on just Tk 3,000 or 4,000? Covering our children's education and healthcare expenses is extremely difficult."

Demanding a fair minimum wage, Hossain insisted it be set between Tk 25,000 and 30,000. "With any amount lower than that, we simply won't be able to get by, especially as the cost of essential goods continues to rise."

The Labour Reform Commission submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Yunus on April 21. It recommended the introduction of a national minimum wage -- one that would apply to all workers, regardless of sector or job type.

The proposal aims to create a single wage floor for both formal and informal sectors, for government and private jobs, foreign organisations, and even self-employed individuals. The commission also proposed that both national and sectoral wages be revised every three years, taking into account inflation and living costs.

The report added that sector-specific and professional minimum wages must never be lower than the national minimum wage, and should instead be equal or higher.

Economist and former Jahangirnagar University Professor Anu Muhammad said wages below the poverty line is "simply irrational".

"When setting minimum wages, it's crucial to ensure that no worker's income falls below the poverty line."

He emphasised that wage decisions should be based on what is necessary for a worker to support a family of

at least four and meet their basic monthly needs.

"The minimum wage should be at least Tk 20,000," Prof Anu said.

He added that the effects of low pay on workers are significant. "It impacts them personally and their families. If their reproduction is affected, it creates health risks. The women who work so hard and do not get adequate nutrition may have weaker future generations. When workers' productivity decreases, national productivity also declines, leading to a national loss."

Sources in the minimum wage board and labour ministry said that work is currently underway to revise wages for workers in several sectors, including pharmaceuticals, ship breaking, paint and chemical, bakery and confectionery, battery, and automobile. The board has also issued a draft gazette for minimum wages in the poultry and tea packaging sectors.

Razekuzzaman Ratan, president of Samajtantrik Sramik Front, noted that stakeholders are typically invited to provide feedback on the draft gazettes. However, he added, "Some sectors still fail to implement the wages officially declared by the board."

Contacted, Labour and Employment Adviser Brig Gen (Retd) Sakhawat Hussain said a committee has been formed to review the commission's recommendations. "We will take the necessary steps after the committee reviews the [labour reform commission's] report."

and inspired the force members.

As a token of thankfulness, Yunus was presented a crest on behalf of Bangladesh Air Force.

Advisers, the chiefs of army and navy, civil and military high officials and other distinguished guests attended the event.

'Akash Bijoy-2025' serves as a significant demonstration of air force's operational readiness, high proficiency, and inter-service jointness.

Under the directives of Air Headquarters, all bases and units of air force are actively participating in the exercise deploying various types of fighter aircraft, transport aircraft, helicopters, UAVs, radars, and other air defence elements along with associated units.

Selected representatives from the army, navy, BGB, police, fire service, and BNCC also took part in the exercise.

Air force remains ever-ready, highly committed, and dedicated to safeguarding the nation's total airspace, and sovereignty, said the air force members.

Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan expressed his deep gratitude to the chief adviser for his presence, which significantly boosted morale.

Exercise "Akash Bijoy-2025" upholds this spirit and reflects the unwavering professionalism and dedication of all air force members, it said.

Dhaka in touch with Naypyidaw, Arakan Army

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is being discussed is only meant to provide support to the UN in delivering humanitarian aid to the state under UN supervision.

"The discussion is ongoing. We will definitely make it public to the nation at the right time."

Khalilur, also chief adviser's high representative on Rohingya and other priority issues, said the UN will be holding a high-level conference on Rohingyas in New York in September. "We are working for the solution to the Rohingya crisis..."

The comments came when several political parties expressed concerns over the issue of humanitarian channel being discussed with the UN, citing potential implications for national security and sovereignty after Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain's statement.

"We have information that they acquired foreign passports and invested significant amounts in multiple companies or business ventures in Slovakia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Switzerland, the British Virgin Islands, the United Kingdom, and Singapore, and deposited money in Habib Bank Ltd in the United Arab Emirates, conducted large financial transactions with Eurobank in Cyprus, and purchased house properties in Cyprus. These assets were acquired outside Bangladesh without the approval of the government of Bangladesh through investment."

The ACC filings also alleged that "despite being Bangladeshi citizens, they invested large amounts of money to obtain foreign passports and citizenship".

The application states, "According to the Bangladesh laws, prior approval from Bangladesh Bank is required to transfer capital from Bangladesh to foreign countries. In this case, it has been learned that the persons facing the allegations did not obtain prior approval from

Touhid told the media on Sunday that Bangladesh agrees in principle to the UN proposal of a humanitarian passage for the provision of humanitarian aid to the Rakhine state under the UN supervision, but with certain conditions.

Meanwhile, this correspondent yesterday reached out to the office of UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh.

A spokesperson of the UN office said any humanitarian support or supplies across the border from Bangladesh to Myanmar will first need to be agreed between the two governments.

"The UN has a legal obligation to obtain permission from the governments concerned to deliver cross-border assistance. Without this, the UN's direct involvement is limited," the spokesperson said.

The Rakhine state is in a humanitarian crisis, with hundreds of thousands displaced amid ongoing clashes between Myanmar's military and the Arakan Army.

Since November 2023, about 1.13 lakh more Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh making the total number 1.3 million.

The spokesperson of the UN office in Bangladesh said it remains concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Rakhine and continues to support the refugees in Bangladesh and the Bangladesh government.

On Monday, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi told the UN Security Council in New York that Bangladesh's interim government has chosen to engage with the parties to the conflict in Rakhine in pursuit of a solution.

Freeze 70 bank accounts

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and his seven family members, along with their associates and related entities, have invested large sums of money in Slovakia and Cyprus without obtaining permission from Bangladesh Bank or complying with the laws of Bangladesh, in order to acquire foreign citizenship through investment.

"We have information that they acquired foreign passports and invested significant amounts in multiple companies or business ventures in Slovakia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Switzerland, the British Virgin Islands, the United Kingdom, and Singapore, and deposited money in Habib Bank Ltd in the United Arab Emirates, conducted large financial transactions with Eurobank in Cyprus, and purchased house properties in Cyprus. These assets were acquired outside Bangladesh without the approval of the government of Bangladesh through investment."

The ACC further submitted, "They laundered money from Bangladesh by illegally transferring, converting, and layering funds to acquire assets in Slovakia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Switzerland, the British Virgin Islands, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, and Cyprus."

"In addition, they opened accounts in various foreign banks under personal and business names and conducted illegal financial transactions through these accounts. Furthermore, investigations have revealed that they have also acquired huge properties within Bangladesh using illegally obtained funds."

According to the ACC, Shah Alam and his family members have been attempting to transfer money and shares elsewhere. "If they do it, inquiry into the allegations brought against them might be hampered. So, an order is needed to prevent them from doing so."

The Daily Star contacted MM Jasim Uddin, chief operating officer of Bashundhara Group's brand and

marketing, by phone last night for comments and he asked us to send the questions in writing. We sent the questions in WhatsApp, but he did not respond as of filing this report at 100am today.

On November 21 last year, the same court ordered a freeze on the alleged foreign assets of Shah Alam and his eight family members in six countries and two offshore jurisdictions.

These assets include bank accounts, real estate, and business holdings.

The order had come in relation to an ACC application that said Shah Alam and his family allegedly amassed huge wealth beyond their disclosed sources of income through illicit means and subsequently, laundered money to various locations, including the United Arab Emirates, Slovakia, St Kitts and Nevis, Switzerland, the British Virgin Islands, the United Kingdom, Singapore and Cyprus.

On October 6 last year, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) asked banks to freeze all personal accounts of the Bashundhara Group chairman and his family members.

About two weeks later on October 21, the same court issued a travel ban on Akbar Sobhan and eight members of his family in connection with corruption allegations.

'India may strike within 24 to 36 hrs'

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Muslim-majority Kashmir, a region of around 15 million people, is divided between Pakistan and India but claimed in full by both nations.

About 1.5 million people live near the ceasefire line on the Pakistani side of the border, where residents were preparing for violence by preparing simple, mud-walled underground bunkers reinforced with concrete if they can afford it.

India yesterday shut its airspace to Pakistani airlines, the government said, days after its nuclear armed neighbour banned Indian airlines from flying over its territory.

The ban on Pakistani aircraft will be from April 30 to May 23, according to a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) issued by the Indian government.

India's military yesterday said it had repeatedly traded gunfire with Pakistani troops for a sixth straight night across the Line of Control (LoC), a heavily fortified zone of high altitude Himalayan outposts that represents the de facto Kashmir border.

A Pakistan security source said troops responded to "unprovoked firing" overnight, while another security source told AFP that two drones were shot down on Tuesday near the LoC "after violating our airspace".

According to media reports, India yesterday warned Pakistan against the unprovoked firing along the LoC.

The message was given during a call between the Directors General of Military Operations of the countries.

Sources said the two sides are

mandated to speak once a week over the hotline that connects the two DGMOS in New Delhi and Rawalpindi. "It was a routine call," in which the matter of firing was raised, media reports in India and Pakistan said.

Since the Pahalgam attack, both countries have downgraded diplomatic ties, expelled citizens and ordered the border shut. India also suspended the Indus Waters Treaty.

The bellicose statements have prompted worries of a spiral into military action, with calls for restraint from several nations.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif received a telephone call from US Secretary of State Marco Rubio this evening, his office said in a statement yesterday.