

India wary of Sino-Pak-Bangla ‘convergence’

India’s chief of defence staff says it may impact internal stability

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India’s Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan yesterday cautioned against “a possible convergence of interests” among Bangladesh, China and Pakistan, saying it may have implications for India’s internal stability and security.

Speaking at an event hosted by the private think-tank Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, Gen Chauhan said, “There is a possible convergence of interest we can talk about among China, Pakistan and Bangladesh that may have implications for India’s stability and security dynamics.”

He said the economic distress in countries across the Indian Ocean region has allowed “outside powers” to leverage their influence, which could create vulnerabilities for India.

During his speech, Gen Chauhan also spoke about the May 7–10 military conflict between India and Pakistan, describing it as potentially the first time two nuclear-armed nations directly engaged in combat.



Covering themselves with polythene sheets to shield against the rain, women farmers plant Aman seedlings in Barshapara village of Rajshahi’s Godagari upazila yesterday. Across the Barind region, farmers are busy cultivating Aman paddy, which flourishes in the monsoon.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Beijing eyes ‘concrete co-op’ with Dhaka, Islamabad: China envoy

UNB, Dhaka

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen yesterday said Beijing is working with Dhaka and Islamabad to implement the consensus reached during an informal meeting held recently among the three countries.

He said the meeting was an attempt to foster “concrete cooperation” among the countries in specific areas.

“We have already identified 12 areas for concrete cooperation, including industry, trade, education, environmental protection, and water resources... We are following up on the consensus and working with Bangladesh and Pakistan to implement those,” he told reporters after attending a seminar in the capital.

Bangladesh, China and Pakistan held the meeting on the sidelines of the 9th China-South Asia Exposition and the 6th China-South Asia Cooperation meeting in Kunming on June 19.

Yao said the outcome of the meeting, if implemented, would improve economic development and livelihoods of all the countries involved. “We are in a very critical moment. There are lots of things we can work on together. I see this for the common interests of the three countries,” said the Chinese ambassador.

“Our cooperation is based on mutual trust. It is an open and transparent process. It does not target any third country. That is the message to convey,” said Ambassador Yao.

On June 26, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain said the meeting was an informal one and did not aim at alliance building.

Referring to India, he also said the meeting did not target any third country.

Wrap up polls preparations by December

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reforms implemented, the election could be held before Ramadan – possibly in February. This means that everything needed to build the institutional framework for the election must begin now,” Yunus was quoted as saying by his Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam at a briefing last night.

On June 13, after a meeting with Tarique Rahman in London, where the BNP acting chairperson suggested that polls could take place before Ramadan, Yunus said it was indeed possible to hold the election the week before the month of fasting if all preparations are completed.

Ramadan is expected to begin in the third week of February.

Yesterday’s meeting discussed the reshuffle of deputy commissioners, upazila nirbahi officers and superintendents of police at the district level along with officers in charge at local police stations.

Usually, during elections, deputy commissioners serve as returning officers and upazila nirbahi officers as assistant returning officers, while SPs and OCs maintain law and order.

About whether the army will remain on the ground with magistracy power until the polls, Shafiqul said, “It is uncertain ... but the army will serve as a strike force during the voting period.

“The chief adviser noted that previous elections were merely symbolic. Therefore, everyone involved must be trained to conduct a ‘real election’.”

He added, “Roles must be clearly defined. If necessary, a rehearsal election should be conducted.”

The chief adviser urged everyone to focus on safeguarding the women’s voting rights. Separate polling booths for new voters were also recommended.

He suggested evaluating whether “a separate voter list” could be created for those aged between 18 and 33.

“For the past 16 years, voters haven’t experienced a proper election. They recall violence and rigging at polling stations. In this election, we want voting to be a positive and memorable experience. First-time voters should feel proud – it should be a moment they cherish.”

The meeting also extensively discussed law enforcement deployment, identifying high-risk polling centres and the army’s role as a strike force.

Bangladesh will have 47,000 polling centres, around 16,000 of which are potentially “high-risk”. Special directives were issued to ensure peaceful voting at those locations.

Discussions also covered installing CCTV cameras at every centre to ensure proper monitoring and training of relevant personnel.

Previously, law enforcers were deployed for four days around election time. For this election, plans are underway for a seven-day deployment to maintain order before,

during and after voting.

Yunus instructed officials to look into the possibility of excluding presiding officers or polling officials of the last three elections from the upcoming election duties, said Deputy Press Secretary Azad Majumder.

The CA also said control rooms will be established at upazila, district and divisional levels. “Police personnel may wear body cameras and could be assigned duties outside their regular jurisdictions.”

The media’s role also came up at the meeting. Azad said, “We’ve seen cases where people posing as media workers were actually affiliated with political parties and then became involved in the electoral process. Even genuine media professionals could not do their duties properly.

“And therefore, a media code of conduct should be prepared in advance, so that media workers know their boundaries and election officials also understand to what extent the media should have access.”

There were also discussions about polls observers, especially since the upcoming election has already drawn global attention. “We’re hoping for around two lakh observers. We have given clear instructions to ensure that political party workers don’t show up as ‘observers,’” he said.

Protesters refuse to back

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Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan described the protests as misguided, saying, “What they’ve done can’t be appreciated, but I think they’ve done it out of a misunderstanding. They’re our children. A judgment can’t be made based on slogans.”

He stated that only the Appellate Division had the authority to assess the correctness of the High Court ruling and criticised those who, in his view, had failed to explain this to the students.

However, the court’s decision did little to pacify the protesters, who insisted they would not relent until the government formed a commission to reform the quota system and the parliament enacted a law to that effect.

Earlier in the day, protesters resumed the “Bangla Blockade,” bringing key intersections, major highways, and rail lines across Dhaka and other cities to a standstill.

Several hundred Dhaka University students and job seekers blocked the Shahbagh intersection around 11:50am, arriving in a procession from the DU Central Library.

At the same time, another group blocked the Chankharful intersection, while students of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University blocked the Agargaon intersection near the metro station. Major routes such as Farmgate to Mirpur and Agargaon to Mohakhali remained closed for hours.

The Science Lab area was under blockade for at least seven hours as students from Dhaka College and nearby institutions took to the streets around 10:30am. They barred all forms of transport except ambulances. Most of the blockades in Dhaka were lifted

between 7:00pm and 7:30pm.

Protests erupted outside the capital as well. Jahangirnagar University students blocked the Dhaka-Aricha Highway for nearly six hours, while Comilla University students blocked the Dhaka-Chatogram Highway for four hours in Cumilla’s Kotbari area. Patuakhali Science and Technology University students staged a three-hour blockade on the Dhaka-Kuakata Highway at Payra Bridge.

Railway communication also faced disruption across the country. In Dhaka, student protesters blocked the Karwan Bazar level crossing from noon until 5:00pm, cutting off rail connectivity to the east, west, and south of the country. In Chattogram, Chittagong University students blocked the Dhaka-Chatogram rail link in Dewanhat from 11:30am, stranding at least five trains. The CU shuttle train service remained suspended, while the port city’s main Tigerpass road was blocked around 1:00pm.

Elsewhere, students from Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology (DUET) blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh rail tracks at Joydebpur, starting with a sit-in at their campus before moving to the railway junction.

Meanwhile, pro-quota demonstrators under the banner of the Muktiyoddha Sangsad Santan Command staged a brief sit-in around 9:30am in front of the National Museum at Shahbagh, calling for the reinstatement of the quota system.

By the evening, most blockades had been withdrawn, but the message from the protesters remained clear: without concrete steps toward legal and structural reforms, they would not stand down.

Wherever they find

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the Awami League, have denied all allegations.

An Awami League spokesperson told the BBC the recording does not indicate any “unlawful intention” or “disproportionate response.”

However, the BBC reports that the leaked conversation between Hasina and an unidentified senior government official is the most substantial evidence to date linking her to the deadly crackdown.

The BBC World Service, in collaboration with BBC Bangla, had previously uncovered unreported details of a massacre in Dhaka, suggesting a much higher death toll than initially acknowledged.

A source familiar with the leaked recording said the phone call took place on July 18, with Hasina speaking from her Gono Bhaban residence. Police documents reviewed by the BBC show that military-grade rifles were deployed across Dhaka in the days following the call.

According to the BBC, the recording is one of several involving Hasina that were made by the National Telecommunications Monitoring Centre. The source of the leak remains unknown.

Since the protests, multiple recordings of her phone calls have circulated online, though many remain unverified.

The Criminal Investigation Department of Bangladesh Police confirmed the July 18 recording matched known audio samples of Hasina’s voice. The BBC also conducted its own forensic analysis, working with UK-based audio forensics firm Earshot, which found no signs of tampering or synthetic generation.

Earshot concluded the recording was likely captured with the call played on speakerphone, citing distinctive telephonic frequencies and consistent background noise. The presence of Electric Network Frequency – a byproduct of interference with mains-powered devices – further indicated the audio was genuine.

Analysis of Hasina’s speech patterns, including intonation, rhythm, and breath sounds, revealed no synthetic artefacts, according to the BBC.

“These recordings are critical for establishing her role. They are clear, properly authenticated, and supported

by other evidence,” said Toby Cadman, British international human rights barrister and special adviser to the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal.

An Awami League spokesperson told the BBC, “We cannot confirm whether the tape recording referenced by the BBC is authentic.”

Former government and police officials have also been implicated in the July killings.

BBC Eye analysed hundreds of videos, images, and documents detailing police attacks on demonstrators for over 36 days.

In one case in Dhaka’s Jatrabari area on 5 August, at least 52 people were killed by police fire, the BBC found. Initial reports at the time had reported 30 deaths.

The BBC’s investigation combined eyewitness videos, CCTV footage, and drone imagery to reconstruct the incident.

According to its report, police opened fire indiscriminately after army personnel, who had been separating protesters from police, withdrew from the scene.

For over 30 minutes, police fired at demonstrators attempting to flee through alleyways and nearby roads. Officers later retreated to an army camp. Protesters retaliated hours later, reportedly killing at least six officers and setting fire to the Jatrabari Police Station.

A Bangladesh Police spokesperson told the BBC that 60 officers had been arrested in connection with the July–August violence.

“There were regrettable incidents in which certain members of the then police force engaged in excessive use of force... Bangladesh Police has launched thorough and impartial investigations.”

Another Awami League spokesperson told the BBC, “The Awami League categorically denies and rejects claims that some of its senior leaders, including the prime minister herself, were personally responsible for or directed the use of lethal force against crowds.

“The decisions made by senior government officials were proportionate in nature, made in good faith, and intended to minimise the loss of life.”

The BBC said it approached the Bangladesh Army for comment but received no response.

US-China tariff war punishes Bangladesh

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as it requires a high threshold for local value-addition.

The pressure is most acute on the woven garment sector, which is the larger portion of Bangladesh’s apparel exports to the US. Industry insiders said that nearly 70 percent of the woven fabric needed for items like trousers and shirts, destined mainly for American consumers, is imported from China.

This contrasts sharply with the knitwear sector, where local spinners can supply nearly 90 percent of the required fabric, thus having a much lower dependency on Chinese imports.

This data underscores the woven sector’s vulnerability. In the first 11 months of fiscal 2024-25, the US imported \$4.62 billion worth of woven garments from Bangladesh, compared with \$2.4 billion in knitwear, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

“The terms and conditions of the US value addition are stringent and almost impossible for Bangladesh to comply with,” said Masrur Reaz, chairman of the Policy Exchange, a Dhaka-based think-tank.

Mostafa Abid Khan, a former member of the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission, echoed his view, saying higher US value addition requirements will put pressure on Bangladesh’s woven sector.

Washington’s demands extend beyond value addition. US negotiators have pushed Bangladesh to align its tariff system with American geopolitical interests, proposing lower tariffs on countries favoured by the US and higher tariffs on those subject to higher American levies.

This directly challenges Bangladesh’s adherence to the World Trade Organisation’s Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle, which ensures non-discriminatory trade by applying the same tariff rates to all member countries.

Faced with difficult proposals, Dhaka has attempted a conciliatory approach. Unable to agree on the tough RoO and tariff alignment, Bangladeshi negotiators have instead offered to increase imports of American goods to narrow the trade gap, which is currently about \$6 billion in Bangladesh’s favour. To entice US negotiators, Dhaka offered a package of concessions that included

purchasing more American LNG and agricultural products, such as cotton and soybeans, and increasing orders for Boeing aircraft.

The negotiations also reflect broader US security and investment concerns. Bangladeshi officials said US negotiators sought assurances regarding the security of American investments and cited the recent increase in Chinese capital flowing into Bangladesh. They also raised reservations about growing Chinese ownership in local industrial units and pointed to perceived weaknesses in Bangladesh’s policy regulations, intellectual property laws, and labour rights.

Industry leaders are sounding the alarm over the potential fallout. Anwar-ul-Alam Chowdhury, chairman of the Evince Group, a major garment exporter, said meeting a 40 percent value-addition requirement on products made from Chinese fabric is “almost impossible”.

Furthermore, there is a growing fear of an additional “transshipment” tariff. Chowdhury worries that the Trump administration could apply a broad definition of transshipment, similar to the 40 percent duty

BNP sends draft back to govt with its inputs

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recommendations but said the party had sent its formal response to the government yesterday.

On February 12, BNP submitted its opinion about the July Declaration after the government sought its recommendations.

“After that, they did not provide any feedback,” he said after last night’s standing committee meeting.

He said Wahiduddin Mahmud is coordinating with BNP over the matter.

Earlier, Mahmud told The Daily Star that progress was being made on the issue.

“The government is taking more opinions so that it becomes widely acceptable and reflects the aspirations of the people,” he added.

On June 28 last year, the Students Against Discrimination and the National Citizens’ Committee declared that they would unveil the

“Proclamation of the July Uprising” at the Central Shaheed Minar on December 31, sparking widespread political debate.

Initially, the interim government denied involvement. But on December 30, the chief adviser’s press secretary said the government itself would draft the proclamation based on national consensus. That same day, student and citizen groups launched the “March for Unity” programme, demanding the declaration be made public by January 15.

Later, the government circulated the draft among political parties for feedback. Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus also began consultations with political parties to finalise it.

However, progress stalled.

On June 30, injured protesters held a sit-in near the CA’s residence, demanding action. The National Citizen Party, which was formed by

that time, threatened to unveil the declaration itself if the government failed to do so by August 5.

Sources said the draft declaration outlines the transition to democracy and traces Bangladesh’s long struggle for freedom, starting from the 1947 independence from British rule, 23 years of exploitation under Pakistani rulers, and the 1971 Liberation War.

It also recounts the 2024 mass protests that escalated into an uprising, leading to the ouster of the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her escape to India.

The draft further calls for justice for genocide and crimes against humanity and the looting of state assets under the Awami League regime.

Sources said several other topics were discussed at BNP’s Standing Committee meetings. They include US tariffs on Bangladeshi products, reserved women’s seats in parliament, and election reforms.