

## 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

## 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 nirkabi 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 nirkabi 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.

- ↳ Polls likely in Feb or April
- ↳ Army to serve as strike force
- ↳ 16,000 'high-risk' polling centres
- ↳ CCTV camera at every centre

At the meeting, Yunus stressed the need to verify workforce availability.

"If additional appointments are necessary, recruitment should begin immediately and adequate training should be arranged."

He also instructed the production of video content explaining election procedures for voters, which would be broadcast on television and social media for quick dissemination.

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,

"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.

At the same time, another group blocked the Chankharpul 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.

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