Bangladesh open to joining Saudi-Pak-Turkiye defence pact: Ministers

DHAKA, AUG 23: Bangladesh is open to joining the recently formed defence alliance between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye, two junior ministers have said, while stressing that any decision would be guided by the country's national interests.

Signed in Makkah, the pact establishes a framework for collective deterrence and stipulates that an armed attack on any one of the three countries would be considered an attack on all three.

"Bangladesh maintains a positive approach towards the possibility of joining an economic or defence framework involving Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye, taking into account its own interests and the changing dynamics of the global economy and trade," newly appointed state minister for foreign affairs Humayun Kobir said.

In an interview with the Bangla service of state-run BSS on Friday, Kobir said the government was pursuing a "Bangladesh First" policy and a balanced foreign policy with national interests at its core, which might lead Dhaka to join the defence pact. He said Bangladesh would also strengthen bilateral ties with Pakistan through normal diplomatic engagement, focusing on trade and people-to-people connectivity. Kobir, appointed as the second state minister for foreign affairs on Friday, said Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is expected to visit Riyadh at Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's invitation and the tour schedule is likely to be finalised after the summer.

Another state minister for foreign affairs, Shama Obaed Islam, in a separate media interaction on Friday, supplemented Kobir's comments, saying Bangladesh's national interest and the interests of its people would determine Dhaka's stance on joining the pact. "Whether we join any pact or any multilateral body will be decided primarily on whether Bangladesh's interests and the interests of the Bangladeshi people are protected," she said when asked whether Bangladesh would be part of the trilateral framework.

The two junior ministers' comments came two days after Rahman's finance and planning adviser Professor Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir said a "Bangladesh First" policy marked a "paradigm shift" in the country's foreign policy.

He said the policy placed national interest, sovereignty, mutual respect and regional harmony at the centre of Bangladesh's engagement with the international community by maintaining constructive and mutually beneficial relations with all countries.

"The Bangladesh First policy means putting Bangladesh's interests first, but Bangladesh for all," Titumir said. (PTI)

The sunhat is everywhere in Athens as crowds grow larger at ancient sites

ATHENS, AUG 23: Outside the Acropolis, a sea of hats bobs up and down the hill to the ancient site: straw boaters, Panama hats, baseball caps and bucket hats in the relentless heat.

Hat racks are hard to miss in central Athens this summer. Kiosks and stores keep outdoor stands piled high as more tourists seek relief from the midday heat.

The Acropolis drew about 4.6 million visitors in 2025, a record year for Greek tourism. Many spend hours in mid-30s Celsius (mid-90s Fahrenheit) temperatures with little shade. Even a carriage horse at the foot of the ancient monument has joined in, sporting a brown bucket hat with holes cut for its ears.

"You need a hat. I'm already red as it is," said Jack Yosif, an Australian tourist wearing a black baseball cap. "It's a bit more of a common thing nowadays, and people are a bit more aware."

Scorching temperatures didn't deter a record 38 million visitors last year, the most recent for which there is data. The combination of extreme heat and high demand for sites â€" which means not everyone can visit in the morning â€" is adding urgency to sun protection.

Greek health campaigners have welcomed a growing awareness of the dangers of ultraviolet exposure and risk of heat stroke. Red Cross volunteers at the Acropolis hand out kits with sunscreen, water, information leaflets and red caps.

On nearby Syntagma Square, kiosk owner Konstantinos Mallios says hat sales have risen in recent years. His stylish and souvenir models run up to 20 euros ($24) while the cheapest costs 6 euros. Available elsewhere is semi-disposable headgear: mass-produced hats made using compressed paper pulp.

And there are more ostentatious options. At her basement workshop, hatmaker Lisa Sarigiannidou turns straw braids into boaters using century-old presses and molds in a matter of minutes.

Her hats start at around 50 euros, with elaborate designs costing more than 100 euros.

"People's attitudes toward hats have changed," said Sarigiannidou, who was trained by her hatmaker father.

"In the past, when a young woman tried on a hat and looked at herself in the mirror, she usually laughed. Now they try them on seriously ... and they wear them straight out the door." (AP)

Pak Deputy PM Ishaq Dar to visit UK from August 24-28: FO

ISLAMABAD, AUG 23: Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar will undertake a five-day official visit to the United Kingdom on Monday where he will hold meetings with British officials, the Foreign Office said on Sunday.

He would also meet the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to discuss Pakistani crew members held by Somali pirates aboard the MT Honour 25 oil tanker, the FO said in a statement.

It added that the trip by the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister is scheduled from August 24-28.

Dar will meet UK Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office minister of state for Pakistan, Stephen Doughty, as well as other senior UK government officials.

FO said the meeting with the IMO secretary-general would focus on "the issue of Pakistani crew members held by Somali pirates aboard the MT Honour 25 oil tanker".

Ten Pakistani sailors, who have been held hostage since April, are among the crew of the MT Honour 25, a Palau-flagged oil tanker that was hijacked by armed pirates off the coast of Puntland, Somalia.

Dar will also meet Commonwealth Secretary-General Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey. The foreign ministry said the deputy prime minister would also "engage with British parliamentarians and representatives of the British-Pakistani community".

The visit assumes significance against the backdrop of Pakistan's increasingly visible diplomatic role in regional and international affairs, especially Islamabad's role to stop the US and Iran war.

The trilateral Makkah defence deal has also increased Pakistan's significance as Turkiye is also part of the NATO, which stretches the implication of the deal behind the West Asia.

Since the agreement declares attack on any three countries as attack on all, Pakistan will be bound to support Turkiye in case of any attack along with NATO nations.

Maldives' largest infra project advances with India's support after final segment of Thilamale Bridge is installed

MALE, AUG 23: The final bridge segment connecting the Maldivian capital Male with Villingili island has been officially set in place, marking a major milestone in the India-funded connectivity project.

Under the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP), a 6.74-km-long bridge and causeway link will be built to connect capital city Male with adjoining islands of Villingli, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi.

In 2021, a contract was sealed between the Maldives and India for the implementation of an India-funded connectivity project.

"A big milestone for the Greater Male Connectivity Project! The final bridge segment connecting Male with Villingili is officially set in place - bringing seamless connectivity between the islands one step closer," India in Maldives posted on X on Saturday.

Former Maldives foreign minister Abdullah Shahid has also hailed the milestone in the India-funded connectivity project.

"A major milestone for the Greater Male Connectivity Project today! Honoured to have launched this project during my tenure as Foreign Minister. The Maldivesâ€"India friendship is built on trust and shared progress. This link is a symbol of that commitment and of India's support for Maldives' development," Shahid posted on X.

Shahid also expressed "deep appreciation" to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for their role in the project.

"Deep appreciation to PM @narendramodi, and EAM @DrSJaishankar, for their leadership in realising this vision for the Maldivian people," the post read.

The GMCP, also known as the Thilamale Bridge, funded under a grant of USD 100 million and a Line of Credit of USD 400 million from India, is the largest infrastructure project in the Maldives.

The contract for the Thilamale Bridge project was awarded to India's Afcons Infrastructure on August 26, 2021. More than 75 per cent of the project's work has now been completed.

The project comprises three primary bridge links: the connection between Male' and Villingili, the link between Villingili and Gulhifalhu, and the bridge connecting Gulhifalhu to Thilafushi.

The Indian High Commission in the Maldives earlier stated that this bridge, initiated during former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's administration, features the tallest precast segments of any bridge in the world.

According to the Commission, the precast segments of the Thilamale Bridge superstructure will reach a height of 8.177 meters.

Enhancing regional connectivity has been a key priority for India and the Maldives.

A direct cargo ferry service connecting Tuticorin in Kochi with Male and Kulhuffushi was started in September 2020.

India has maintained that the Maldives is its key maritime neighbour and an important partner in the 'Neighbourhood First' policy and Vision 'MAHASAGAR' i.e. Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions.

Canada will impose retaliatory tariffs on US goods beginning Sept 8 as trade negotiations collapse

WASHINGTON, AUG 23: The United States imposed 50 per cent tariffs on USD 20 billion worth of Canadian products early Saturday, and Canada said it would retaliate beginning September 8 after last-ditch negotiations failed to resolve the latest strain in relations between the historic allies.

President Donald Trump's import taxes will hit about 5 per cent of what Canada ships to the United States every year, including products ranging from hockey sticks to tongue depressors.

Carney said that "in the coming days, we will release the details of these new tariff measures, which will come into force the Tuesday after Labor Day." The dollar-for-dollar retaliation would target steel, dairy, appliances, agricultural equipment, pulp and paper and electronics, he said from Ottawa.

He disclosed that Canada had been willing to drop remaining retaliatory tariffs on steel, aluminum and autos if the United States substantially lowered its own, and to encourage provinces to restore US alcohol sales. But he said Washington's final demands went too far, saying, "They asked too much and offered too little," Carney said.

Trump's top trade negotiator, Jamieson Greer, said the Republican administration was offering to cut tariffs on steel, autos and lumber, "things that are sensitive for them. And they've always had the best deal, and they still would have an even better deal, but they didn't want that," he told "Fox & Friends Weekend.

He added: "We're moving forward with measures that respond to Canadian retaliation."

The moves also call into question the future of a North American trade agreement covering the United States, Canada and Mexico that is crucial to industry in all three countries.

Carney said the US added last-minute terms that would have reduced tariff relief for Canadian-made vehicles, restricted Canada's ability to strike trade deals with other countries and weakened protections for language, culture and sovereignty. He said such demands were "unacceptable."

But Greer, the US trade representative, said that after a year of retaliation by its longtime ally, "We've said enough, and so we've taken countermeasures. Our interest is in protecting American workers and protecting American supply chains."

No further talks are planned.

The breakdown in negotiations marked a sharp reversal from two days earlier, when officials from the two countries sounded as if they were headed toward a compromise.

Carney said Ottawa would "hit back" with targeted tariff protection for industries exposed to the new US duties, including some steel products.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who leads Canada's most populous province, backed Carney's response, saying the prime minister had his "full support" for retaliation "tariff for tariff, dollar for dollar" and that "everything needs to be on the table."

A typically cooperative alliance goes sour

The political impact will likely be even bigger than the economic fallout. The countries sold each other USD 880 billion worth of goods and services last year.

The tariffs were initially supposed to kick in at 12:01 am Wednesday. Trump extended the deadline for three days to allow talks to continue, but the countries could not reach an agreement in time.

The US and Canada have wrangled for decades over trade, poking each other over sore spots such as Canadian softwood lumber imports and US access to Canada's protected dairy market.

Somehow, they still managed to remain friends, allies and trading partners. Canadian soldiers fought alongside Americans in Afghanistan after 9/11. The 5,525-mile US-Canada border is undefended, and nearly 330,000 people and USD 2 billion worth of goods cross it every day; 800,000 Canadians live in the United States.

Trump's approach to dealing with Canada marks an extraordinary departure from the traditionally cooperative relationship between the two countries. Trump has imposed tariffs on Canadian goods in a push to bring manufacturing back to the United States and made inflammatory comments about turning Canada into America's 51st state. Carney said Canada had recognised that "America has changed" and that the two countries would "not return to our old relationship."

Canadians and Americans are frustrated

The Canadian public is fed up. A petition to expel US Ambassador Pete Hoekstra, a Trump ally, has collected nearly 248,000 signatures since July 21. It accuses the former Republican congressman from Michigan of having "normalised" Trump's talk of annexing Canada, among other things.

The two countries had good reasons to find a compromise. Nearly 72 per cent of Canada's goods exports last year went to the United States. The Trump administration might be wary of imposing new tariffs - paid by US importers who try to pass along the cost to consumers via higher prices - before the November's midterm elections. American voters are already frustrated with the high cost of living.

"Canada likely wanted further sector-specific relief than the US was willing to offer, or Canada's concessions did not go far enough," said Ryan Majerus, a partner at King & Spalding and a former US trade official. "Either way, I think both sides will be under immense pressure in the coming days to still find an off-ramp. But if Canada has agreed to also impose tariffs, the off-ramp may be even harder to find."

Candace Laing, president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, called the tariffs "a body blow to North American competitiveness" and warned they would raise costs for Americans while threatening Canadian customers, investment and small businesses.

Trump has turned to Depression-era trade penalties

Trump has made tariffs the centrepiece of his second-term economic agenda. Last year, he imposed double-digit import taxes on almost every country, justifying them by declaring the long-standing US trade deficit a national emergency. The Supreme Court in February ruled that he had overstepped his authority. The justices struck down the trade penalties and set the stage for the federal government to pay refunds to importers.

So Trump has looked for other legal authority to justify tariffs.

To punish Canada, he reached back to the Great Depression, invoking Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930 to threaten 50 per cent tariffs on products that account for about 5 per cent of Canadian exports to the United States.

Nearly a century ago, with the US and world economies in collapse, Congress passed the 1930 tariff law, imposing taxes on imports from around the world. Known as the Smoot-Hawley tariffs after their congressional sponsors, they are notorious among economists and historians for limiting world commerce and making the Great Depression worse.

Section 338, which has never been used before to impose tariffs, authorises the president to slap import taxes of up to 50 per cent on imports from countries that have discriminated against US businesses. No investigation is required to justify the levies. Nor is there any limit on how long they can stay in place.

The rift comes as the United States, Mexico and Canada are trying to renew a trade agreement that Trump negotiated in his first term and once praised as a triumph. The United States has begun formal talks with Mexico over revamping the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, known as USMCA. But talks with Canada have not begun and escalating trade conflicts casts doubt on whether they will. "Canada told the Americans in advance that if these tariffs landed, it would stop negotiating and retaliate," said Barry Appleton, senior fellow at the Centre for International Law at New York Law School. "The American trade representative said publicly he would not tolerate retaliation. Both sides have now committed themselves in public."