

Russia, regime airstrikes kill 43 in Syria

Says war monitor

AFP, Maaret Al-Numan

Regime and Russian air strikes killed 43 people in northwest Syria yesterday, most of them in a crowded market, a war monitor said, in the latest violence to plague the opposition bastion.

In the town of Maaret al-Numan in Idlib province, men drenched in blood were carried away by residents and rescue workers, who used mattresses as makeshift stretchers, an AFP photographer said.

He saw the corpse of one man sprawled on the ground near a motorcycle, rubble surrounding his lifeless body.

With his eyes closed and his face covered in dust, another man clutched the arms of two people helping him out of the bombed area, the photographer added.

Thirty-five civilians and two unidentified people were killed in raids that hit the vegetable market and surrounding areas in Maaret al-Numan, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which blamed the airstrikes on regime ally Russia. Moscow, however, denied it was

responsible, calling the reports "fake".

"The Russian air force was not carrying out any missions in this part of Syria," said a defence ministry statement.

More than 100 other people were wounded, according to the monitor, which said many of those injured were in a critical condition and people trapped under rubble.

The White Helmets rescue group said one of its volunteers was killed during the raids, raising the number of rescue workers killed since April to at least 6.

FRAGILE TRUCE

The jihadist-run Idlib region, home to some three million people, is supposed to be protected by a month-old international truce deal, but it has come under increased bombardment by the Syrian regime and its ally Russia since late April.

The spike in violence has killed more than 650 civilians and damaged or knocked out of service two dozen health facilities.

More than 330,000 people have fled violence in the area over the past three months, according to the United Nations.



Members of the Syrian civil defence, known as the White Helmets, pull out an injured child from under the rubble following a Russian air strike on Maaret al-Numan in Syria's northwestern Idlib province yesterday. Thirty-five civilians and two unidentified people were killed in the raid that hit the vegetable market and surrounding areas in the town.

PHOTO: AFP

Thai army vows probe after rebel suspect left unconscious

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's army is investigating how a detained suspected insurgent in the Muslim-majority south was left unconscious hours after being taken to a notorious military camp.

The Malay-Muslim south has been in the grip of a bloody insurgency that has killed nearly 7,000 people over the last 15 years, and allegations of abuse and impunity against the Buddhist-majority Thai state are rife.

The conflict garners little global attention although the majority of the dead are civilians -- both Muslims and Buddhists.

On Saturday afternoon, authorities arrested suspected rebel Abdulah Esormusor, 34, and took him to the infamous Inkayuth detention centre in Pattani province.

He was found unconscious less than 12 hours later after questioning and taken to hospital with severe brain swelling, southern army spokesman Pramote Prom-In said in a statement.

The army is investigating the incident and "if it is found it was a mistake by authorities, those responsible will face severe punishment", he said, before adding there was "no evidence" yet that interrogators caused the injuries.

Inkayuth camp is the Thai army's biggest detention centre in the south, where rebel suspects are taken for questioning and held under the emergency laws governing the conflict-scarred region.

Returning

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Bogura, Tangail, Sirajganj, Manikganj, Rajbari, Faridpur and Munshiganj may improve today.

The Teesta river at Nilphamari's Dalia and the Dharla river in Kurigram are likely to swell today while there would be heavy showers in the northern districts, the FFWC officials said, adding that the flooding would not worsen anywhere.

Many flood victims are still suffering from food and water shortages, officials said.

Ataur Rahman, a resident of Nowbosh area in Kurigram, said, "I stored some rice in my house. When the flash flood water entered my house, we had to evacuate immediately. We returned home today after nine days, only to find that our rice has been destroyed."

Besides, many families have become homeless and landless due of river erosion.

In Munshiganj's Lauhajang, houses of over 100 families in Kharia and Teutia areas have been gobbled up the Padma in the last one week.

Houses and properties of over 100 other families are at risk of being eroded in the areas. Many of them have been evacuating with valuables as fast as possible.

ACC official

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for clearing him of a graft allegation, the ACC formed a three-member investigation committee headed by Fanafiya and suspended Basir.

In May last year, the ACC launched an enquiry into the wealth of Mizan of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The ACC had tasked Basir with the enquiry. Mizan was arrested earlier.

Iran breaks up CIA spy ring

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been in touch with the suspected spies. The Ministry of Intelligence said the 17 spies had been arrested in the 12 months to March 2019. Some had been sentenced to death, according to another report.

Such announcements are not unusual in Iran and are often made for domestic consumption. But the timing suggested a hardening of the Iranian position as the Gulf crisis escalates.

In London, Prime Minister Theresa May led a meeting of her government's COBR emergency committee to respond to Friday's capture of the Stena Impero tanker by Iranian commandoes who boarded onto its deck from helicopters in the Strait of Hormuz.

British ministers were expected to unveil their plans in a speech to

parliament later yesterday. Regional experts say London has few good options to exert leverage over Iran at a time when Washington has already imposed the maximum possible economic sanctions, banning Iran's global oil exports.

But the incident may prompt Britain and other countries to be more forthcoming as Washington has asked its reluctant allies to provide more ships to help secure the Gulf.

Asked on Fox News about any possible US role over the seized tanker, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said pointedly: "The responsibility ... falls to the United Kingdom to take care of their ships."

FACE-OFF

Confrontation between the United States and Iran has spiralled since

last year when President Donald Trump pulled out of an international agreement signed by his predecessor Barack Obama which guaranteed Iran access to world trade in return for curbs to its nuclear programme.

In May this year Washington closed loopholes in sanctions, effectively barring all countries from buying Iranian oil.

Since then, Iran has stepped up its nuclear activity beyond limits in the deal and Washington has accused Tehran of attacking ships in the Gulf. In June, after Iran shot down a US drone, Trump ordered retaliatory air strikes, only to abort them minutes before impact, the closest the United States has come to bombing Iran in their 40 year history of animosity.

Last week the United States said it had shot down an Iranian drone, which Tehran denied.

Washington's major European allies Britain, France and Germany opposed Trump's decision to quit the nuclear deal and have tried to remain neutral. But Britain was drawn more directly into the confrontation on July 4 when its Royal Marines seized an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar, accused of violating European sanctions on Syria.

Iran repeatedly threatened to retaliate for that incident and has made little secret that its capture of the Stena Impero two weeks later was intended as a retaliatory move. It says the ship is being held over safety concerns and the 23-member crew, including 18 Indians and no British citizens, are safe.

Oikya Parishad suspends Priya Saha over her comments

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"Seeking justice from another state over the country's [Bangladesh's] internal issue is not acceptable," Subrata Paul, a Hindu community leader, said while reading out a joint statement of the government-owned Hindu Religious Welfare Trust, Buddhist Religious Welfare Trust, and Christian Religious Welfare Trust.

He was addressing a press conference arranged by the three organisations at the capital's Jatiya Press Club.

Subrata urged the government to identify "instigators and vested groups" behind Priya's comments through a fair probe, and to take necessary steps in this regard.

Responding to a query, Subrata said the government and law enforcement agencies should investigate whether her comments were "seditious".

Christian Religious Welfare Trust Secretary Nirmal Rosario said he

and Priya were part of the same government delegation that attended a conference in the US.

Priya was included as a "victim survivor" and she also made a presentation at the conference, which was not made according to the comments she made to the US president, Nirmal said.

Also a member of Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, he said Priya's claims did not match the parishad's position because in the past "it never mentioned any figure" while talking about this issue.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the government would not take any hasty decision to this end.

She will be quizzed and will have to explain her statement once she returns to the country, Quader told journalists at his ministry office.

Priya, one of the organising secretaries of Bangladesh Hindu-

Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad, drew huge criticism after she told US President Donald Trump that 37 million people from religious minorities had been "disappeared" from Bangladesh.

Attending a programme at the White House last Thursday, she also told the president that her land had been grabbed by Muslim fundamentalists and sought his help so that religious minorities could live in Bangladesh.

After the video of her making the comments went viral, the foreign ministry on Saturday protested and said what Priya told the president were "all blatant lies".

PROF BARKAT DISMISSES PRIYA'S CLAIM

Bangladesh Economic Association President Prof Abul Barkat yesterday said Priya Saha distorted his research findings.

Issuing a statement, he said after her

meeting with the US President, Priya in a video interview cited his name and claimed that her statistics were according to his research findings.

"There is no similarity between Priya Saha's aforementioned statistics and my research findings," Prof Barkat said in the statement.

"In my count, in about five decades, from 1964 to 2013, an estimated 1.13 crore Hindus have gone missing... Nowhere have I said '3 crore and 70 lakh Hindus-Buddhists-Christians were missing'. Moreover, she never mentioned that the duration of my research data was of 50 years -- from 1964 to 2013."

She further claimed she "directly worked with him" in 2011 which was why she was aware of the matter.

"Priya Saha was never my co-researcher, research associate or research assistant," he further said, demanding that she immediately withdraw her comments.

400kms of roads wrecked by flood

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yesterday said flood affected roads were being repaired on an emergency basis.

He, however, claimed that "every highway is in a good shape now" and it would be the same in the coming days.

"Condition of highways is better than any other time and we hope there will be no congestion due to road condition," he told reporters at his ministry office.

According to the RHD's control room, of the 396.14km affected roads, 122.48km, which is the highest, was damaged in Gaibandha division, while 102.40km was affected in Kurigram division, 69.50km in Rangpur division, and 61.50km in Netra-kona division.

Seven other divisions where roads were also damaged are Kishoreganj, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Moulvibazar, Lalmonirhat, Sylhet, and Habiganj.

The length of damaged roads may increase when reports are updated, said Munir Hossain.

Amir Hossain, executive engineer of Kurigram, said 83km, of the 102.40km affected roads, under his division was damaged by floods and the rest by insistent rain.

Four and a half kilometres of Kurigram-Nageshwari-Sonahat Land Port National Highway were damaged by floods, while 24kms of a regional highway were also affected, he said, adding that the portion of the national highway had already been made "usable".

"We will require Tk 21 crore to

repair all the roads. We hope to make the roads 'usable' before Eid, but it will take around two months to make them as they were before," he said.

AKM Shafiquzzaman, executive engineer of Rangpur division, said as per the up-date he got, 79.50kms of roads, including some portions of Rangpur-Kurigram National Highway, were damaged.

"We have already repaired the national highway and it will take one or two days to repair the regional highways. It will take two to three months to repair all the roads," he said.

EID PREPARATIONS

Quader said like previous years, heavy vehicles, including trucks and lorries, would not operate on highways across the country three days ahead of Eid.

However, vehicles carrying daily essentials and emergency medicine will be out-side the purview of the ban, he said.

Besides, steps will be taken to ensure that the CNG filling stations across the country remain open round the clock seven days before and three days after Eid, he added.

The minister said Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation would allocate buses for transporting garment workers during the Eid rush.

The ministry will also write to garment factory owners to give their workers leave on different dates, he said.

Quader added that they instructed the authorities concerned not to allow any cat-tle markets beside highways to avoid traffic jams.

Zelensky party heads for absolute majority in Ukraine

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's comedian-turned-president Volodymyr Zelensky is set to control an absolute majority in parliament, ushering in a generational shift in the ex-Soviet country's political arena.

The 41-year-old became Ukraine's youngest ever post-Soviet leader when he took office two months ago and has promised to stamp out corruption and end a separatist war.

His newly created Servant of the People party -- named after a sitcom in which he played a president -- took around 42 percent of the weekend vote, with 50 percent of votes counted.

Media projections yesterday showed this puts the party on track to pick up more than half of the parliament's 450 seats, the best showing by any party in Ukraine's post-1991 history.

The result is the culmination of a stunning turnaround in Ukrainian politics and will bring a host of newcomers into parliament and government.

One of the many young and politically inexperienced future lawmakers that will enter parliament is Zhan Beleniuk, a 28-year-old Olympic wrestler with Rwandan roots.

Four other parties -- including one openly supported by the Kremlin -- passed the five percent threshold to enter the assembly, the results showed.

At 49.8 percent, the turnout was the lowest of any election in Ukraine's post-independence history.

It was initially thought Zelensky would have to form a coalition.

The president had indicated a preference for another new political force, the Golos (Voice) party of rock star Svyatoslav Vakarchuk.

The singer's party, also packed with young professionals like Zelensky's, made it to parliament with six percent

of the vote, according to the latest results.

Servant of the People party chief Dmitry Razumkov said yesterday that the party was "open for dialogue" with forces that share a similar "basic vision for our country."

Speaking shortly after exit polls were released Sunday, Zelensky said his primary goals were to bring peace and tackle corruption.

"Our main priorities -- and I repeat this for every Ukrainian -- are to end the war, return our prisoners and defeat the corruption that persists in Ukraine," he said at his party's election headquarters.

Man kills

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additional superintendent of police (sadar circle) in Magura.

Accused Bittu Majumdar, 30, was a resident of Parnanduali village, the additional SP said, adding that he was first sent to Magura Sadar Hospital and then to Dhaka Medical College Hospital due to his critical condition.

The couple often used to quarrel over family issues and police are suspecting that Bittu might have killed the two by slitting their throat at a point of scuffle sometime early yesterday, Ibrahim also said.

Quoting locals, Ibrahim said finding no sign of anyone's presence, Bittu's younger brother Anit Majumdar, along with the other neighbours, broke the door and found the bodies lying on the floor.

At the time, Bittu was groaning with pain, he added.

The bodies were sent to Magura Sadar Hospital for autopsies, the police official said.

A case was filed with Magura Sadar Police Station in this connection, said Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Former DSCC

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of income, which is an offence," reads the case statement.

His wife Reshma stated that her moveable and immoveable properties add up to Tk 3.45 crore, but she could not mention the legal source of Tk 1.34 crore.

Based on its analysis, ACC says in the case statement that Salam gathered the money from beyond the legal source and cited it as his wife's income to cover up the offence. The couple invested the money in the stock market and other sectors, it adds.

The wealth statement covers the period from June 1984 to January 2016.

Abdus Salam has been suspended since 2014 after being accused in a money laundering case in 2012. ACC filed the charge sheet in the case in April this year.

Tokyo adds

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and arms which can be remotely controlled.

And while the pint-sized pair can't move or talk, a camera inside their heads helps them interact with spectators and athletes, said Tomohisa Moiradaira, an official responsible for Tokyo 2020 robot development at Toyota.

"Thanks to the camera, the robots can recognise people's expressions and respond back," he told reporters.

"If a person moves away it will look sad."

The mascot's "feelings" are reflected in its eyes: they can display hearts or stars depending on emotions.

Toyota has suggested the mascot robots could welcome athletes and spectators, and possibly help engage children with the Games.

Significantly less cute -- but slightly more practical -- is the company's Field Support Robot, a suitcase-sized automaton on wheels that will help Olympic staff.

It is capable of following staff, while avoiding obstacles, and can be loaded with items like javelins or discuses, helping "reduce the amount of time needed to retrieve items as well as reduce the amount of staff labour for events", Toyota said.

Other offerings include robots designed to support people in wheelchairs or deliver food to spectators.

For those who can't attend the Games, there's the T-TRI, effectively a human-sized narrow screen on wheels equipped with a camera.