

Taliban capture key Afghan dam as fighting escalates

Afghan journalist shot dead after Taliban warning

AFP, Kandahar

The Taliban have captured Afghanistan's second-biggest dam after months of fierce fighting in their former bastion of Kandahar, the insurgents and officials said yesterday.

Dahla Dam, which provides irrigation to farmers via a network of canals as well as drinking water for the provincial capital, was now under Taliban control, local officials told AFP.

"We have seized the Dahla Dam in Arghandab," Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi told AFP. Haji Gulbuddin, governor of an adjacent district, confirmed the dam "is now in the control of the Taliban."

The dam's capture comes after clashes erupted in neighbouring Helmand province this week, just days after the US military formally began withdrawing its remaining troops from Afghanistan.

Dahla was built by the United States nearly 70 years ago to provide water for irrigating land in about seven districts of Kandahar.

In neighbouring Helmand, thousands of people have fled their homes in the face of a massive Taliban offensive against government forces.

US warplanes have been providing air support for the Afghan forces despite the drawdown of foreign troops.

Meanwhile, a high-profile Afghan

television journalist was shot dead in southern Kandahar city yesterday, officials said, a day after the Taliban warned against "biased reporting" by the media.

Nemat Rawan was until last month a popular talk show host with the country's leading broadcaster Tolo News, before joining the ministry of finance as a communications specialist.

There was no claim of responsibility for the attack, but the Taliban have been blamed for a wave of assassinations targeting journalists in recent months.

On Wednesday, a Taliban spokesman warned that media workers who carry out "biased reporting" would be "held responsible".

Members of Afghanistan's educated class -- including journalists, activists and judges -- have for months been the target of bombings and shootings, forcing many to go into hiding or leave the country.

At least 11 Afghan journalists were killed in 2020, with four more reportedly murdered this year, according to a recent toll from Amnesty International.

The United States was supposed to have pulled all forces out by May 1 under a deal struck with the Taliban last year, but Washington pushed back the date to September 11 -- a move that angered the insurgents.



A demonstrator prepares to throw an object towards the police during a protest in Bogota, Colombia, wednesday. Riot police fired tear gas at protesters in Bogota on Wednesday during an eighth day of nationwide anti-government demonstrations, after crowds attacked police stations in the capital overnight. The protests were originally called in opposition to a now-canceled tax reform plan, but demonstrators have broadened their demands to include government action to tackle poverty, police violence and inequalities in the health and education systems. At least 24 people have died in the protests.

PHOTO: AFP



UKRAINE CRISIS

Blinken urges Russia to stop being 'reckless'

AFP, Kiev

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday called on Russia to cease "reckless and aggressive actions" against Ukraine, saying that Moscow has kept "significant forces" near the border.

"We stand strongly with you... and we look to Russia to cease reckless and aggressive actions," Blinken told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kiev.

Blinken's one-day visit comes after Russia last month amassed 100,000 troops on Ukraine's borders, the biggest mobilisation since Moscow seized the majority-Russian peninsula of Crimea in 2014 and war broke out in eastern Ukraine.

But Russia quickly announced a pullback after the latest buildup, leading some experts to believe President Vladimir Putin was testing the will of Biden while seeking to intensify pressure on Ukraine.

Despite Russia's troop drawdown, Zelensky during the press briefing with Blinken said his country remains under Russian military threat.

"We're aware that Russia has withdrawn some forces from the border with Ukraine, but we also see that significant forces remain there," Blinken said.

"We'll continue to strengthen our security partnership and in-flux collaboration with you to make sure Ukraine can defend itself against aggression," he added.

Impose UN arms embargo on Myanmar

Urge more than 200 rights groups

REUTERS, New York

More than 200 civil society groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, called on the UN Security Council on Wednesday to impose an arms embargo on Myanmar to help protect civilians peacefully protesting a military coup.

Since the military seized power on Feb. 1 and ousted an elected government led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar has seen daily protests and a surge of violence with security forces killing hundreds of civilians.

"Imposing a global arms embargo on Myanmar is the minimum necessary step the Security Council should take in response to the military's escalating violence," the civil society groups from around the world said in a joint statement.

However, diplomats say such a move by the 15-member Security Council is unlikely because China and Russia.

"We are not in favor of imposing sanctions and we do take it as the last resort in tackling conflicts," China's UN Ambassador Zhang Jun said on Monday when asked whether Beijing would support stronger UN Security Council action on Myanmar.

Since the coup the Council has held several closed briefings on the situation and issued statements expressing concern and condemning violence against protesters.

"The time for statements has passed. The Security Council should take its consensus on Myanmar to a new level and agree on immediate and substantive action," the civil society groups said. "Myanmar's people cannot afford to wait any longer for the Security Council to take action."

India's neighbours close borders over virus scare

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday became the latest of India's neighbours to seal its borders with the South Asian giant as it battles a record coronavirus surge.

Bangladesh and Nepal have also banned flights and sought to close their borders with India, where a huge rise in numbers in the past three weeks has taken deaths past 230,000 and cases over 21 million.

All three countries are fighting their own pandemic surges, which Red Cross leaders have described as a "human catastrophe".

The Sri Lankan government banned flight passengers from India entering, as the country reported its highest daily toll of 14 deaths and 1,939 infections in 24 hours. Sri Lanka's navy said it had stepped up patrols to keep away Indian trawlers, adding that on Tuesday it stopped 11 such vessels which had crossed the narrow strip of sea dividing the two neighbours.

Bangladesh halted all international flights on April 14 because of its own surge and shut its border with India on April 26.

It has reported 11,755 Covid-19 deaths and 767,338 cases, but experts say the real figures are higher in all South Asian countries.

Bangladesh has had 10 million vaccine doses from India, but the supply has been halted and the government is now



negotiating to get Chinese jabs.

Nepal suspended international flights a week ago, until May 14. Border crossings are only allowing starved Nepalis to return home.

Many hospitals, specially bordering India, in Nepal are overflowing with Covid-19 patients, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan are all experiencing record Covid-19 death rates, it added.

Even the luxury tourist destination of the Maldives has tightened restrictions for Indian visitors, insisting on negative test results on entry.

India is the largest tourist market for Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Sri Lanka has reported 117,529 infections with 734 deaths since the start of the pandemic. The Maldives has reported 32,665 cases with 74 deaths.



Israeli police detain a Palestinian protester amid ongoing tension ahead of an upcoming court hearing in an Israel-Palestinian land-ownership dispute in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. Twenty-two Palestinians were wounded in overnight clashes with Israeli police in annexed east Jerusalem, the Red Crescent said yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SpaceX finally lands Starship rocket

AFP, Washington

SpaceX managed to land its prototype Starship rocket at its Texas base without blowing it up on Wednesday, the first time it has succeeded in doing so in five attempts.

The test flight represents a major win for the hard-charging company, which eventually wants to carry crew inside Starship for missions to Mars.

"Starship landing nominal!" tweeted founder Elon Musk triumphantly, after the last four tries ended in big explosions.

"Nominal" means normal in the context of spaceflight.

The execution wasn't quite perfect, with a small fire engulfing the base of the 50 meter- (160 feet-) high rocket, dubbed SN15, shortly after landing.

SpaceX webcaster John Insprucker explained this was "not unusual with the methane fuel we're using," adding engineers were still working out design issues.

The flames were quickly put out with water cannons, footage showed.

Earlier, the rocket took off at around 5:25 pm local time (2225 GMT) from the Starbase in Boca Chica in southern Texas, reached an

altitude of 10 kilometers (6 miles) and performed a series of maneuvers, including a horizontal descent called a "belly flop."

SpaceX was facing added pressure to succeed with Wednesday's flight after NASA last month announced a version of Starship will be used as a lunar lander when the space agency returns humans to the Moon.

But the \$2.9 billion contract is currently suspended after two rival companies, Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin



and Dynetics, lodged a protest.

Nevertheless, if the award is eventually confirmed, it will transform Starship from Musk's pet project to a major tax payer-funded venture, with all the scrutiny that entails.

The first two flight tests of Starship, SN8 and SN9, both crash landed and exploded when they launched in December and February, respectively.

The next, SN10, successfully landed then blew up a few minutes later on March 3.



<div><div></div><div><div>Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh</div><div>Office of the Project Director</div><div>Railway Connectivity Improvement Preparatory Facility Project</div><div>Bangladesh Railway, Railbhaban</div><div>16, Abdul Gani Road, Dhaka, Bangladesh</div></div></div>		<div></div>
Memo No. 54.01.0000.689.07.004.21-06		Date: 06.05.2021
Request for Expression of Interest (FIRM) (International) for Consultancy Services for Railway Connectivity Improvement Preparatory Facility Project [ADB Loan 6030 BAN]		
1.	Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has received a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for implementing Railway Connectivity Improvement Preparatory Facility Project. A portion of the loan is intended to be used for payments under the Contract for Consultancy Services for which this Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) is being issued.	
2.	Bangladesh Railway (BR), Ministry of Railways of the Government of Bangladesh will implement the project as the Executing Agency. The Project Director of Railway Connectivity Improvement Preparatory Facility Project shall be the Client for the Consulting Service Contract.	
3.	Brief Description of the Services: The assignment will advance project readiness of ensuing projects (i.e., subprojects) in the railway sector of Bangladesh, by preparing feasibility study, detailed design, safeguard documents, bidding documents and other project documents for 11 subprojects to be studies under the Consultancy Services. Detailed terms of Reference (ToR) have been uploaded at ADB's website.	
4.	The Consultant will be selected under Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS; 80:20) Method in accordance with the procedures set out in the ADB Procurement Policy 2017 ("Policy") and the Procurement Regulations for ADB Borrowers 2017 ("Procurement Regulations"): https://www.adb.org/documents/adb-procurement-policy https://www.adb.org/documents/procurement-regulations-adb-borrowers	
5.	BR will conduct 'short-listing' of the interested Consulting Firms who will have submitted Expression of Interest (EOI) for the abovementioned Consultancy Service. For this purpose, qualifications and experience of the Consulting Firms required are as follows: a) Technical Competence: general experience, specific experience in similar assignments (Detailed Design, Feasibility Study of similar railway projects with comparable scale and technical complexity); b) Geographic Experience: experience in similar geographic area; c) Contractual Management Experience: Substantial experience in managing FIDC contracts as a Firm and by the key members of the team; d) Management Capabilities: Financial (Annual Turnover); capability to retain the required number of Key Experts who are preferably permanent employees of the consulting firms with adequate qualifications. e) Experience to work with Multilateral Development Banks-MDBs (i.e. ADB, WB etc.) The interested applicants should submit necessary documentary evidence in favor of their submission i.e. in case of turnover audited financial report in USD/BDT. Applicants may obtain further information by applying to undersigned during normal office hours preferably by email.	
6.	The applicants may associate with other firm(s) to enhance their qualifications and association with foreign firms is encouraged.	
7.	According to ADB's Procurement Regulations, an REOI for this Consulting Service has been published electronically in the ADB's Consultant Management System (CMS) which can be accessed through the following link: https://selfservice.adb.org/OA_HTML/adb/xxcrs/isp/ADBCsmFwd.jsp?sel=168517 The applicants shall have to submit their EOI electronically through ADB's CMS by 17 June 2021 on 11:59pm Manila Local Time (Bangladesh Local Time 09.59pm).	
8.	If any contradiction is found between CMS notice and Newspaper notice, the information on CMS notice shall prevail. For technical inquiries/assistance, the Consultants may seek advice by emailing to the following email address: cmshelp@adb.org	
9.	Offline submission of EOI is NOT allowed .	
10.	The Client will not be responsible for any costs or expenses incurred by the firm(s) in connection with the preparation or delivery of the EOI. The Executing Agency reserves the right to accept any EOI or reject all EOIs without assigning any reason.	
<div><div>Md. Mahubur Rahman</div><div>Project Director</div><div>Railway Connectivity Improvement</div><div>Preparatory Facility Project</div><div>Bangladesh Railway, Railbhaban, Dhaka</div><div>Phone: +8801711692999</div><div>E-mail: pdrcipf@gmail.com</div></div>		
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