

USE OF NUKES N Korea leader warns of ‘preemptive’ strike

AFP, Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has repeated his warning that Pyongyang could “preemptively” use its nuclear weaponry to counter hostile forces, state media reported yesterday.

Kim told top military officers that to “maintain the absolute superiority” of North Korea’s armed forces, the country should be able to “preemptively and thoroughly contain and frustrate all dangerous attempts and threatening moves... if necessary,” the official KCNA news agency reported.

Pyongyang should continue to build up its arsenal so that it can have the “overwhelming military muscle that no force in the world can provoke,” Kim said, calling it the “lifeline guaranteeing the security of our country”.

The leader’s comments followed similar remarks at a military parade on Monday, when he said he could use his atomic arsenal if North Korea’s “fundamental interests” were threatened.

Kim made his latest comments at a meeting with top brass to praise their work on Monday’s parade, which commemorated the 90th anniversary of the country’s armed forces and showcased its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Despite biting sanctions, North Korea has doubled down on Kim’s military modernisation drive, test-firing a slew of banned weapons this year while ignoring US offers of talks.

Last month Pyongyang test-fired an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017, and satellite imagery has shown signs of activity at a nuclear testing site.

The string of weapons tests comes as South Korea prepares for an incoming president, Yoon Suk-yeol, who takes a more hawkish approach to Pyongyang and has not ruled out a preemptive strike if necessary.



Light traffic in the capital’s Farmgate yesterday morning after thousands of city dwellers left the capital to celebrate Eid over the last few days.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Russia’s Donbas offensive ‘stalling’ Claims Kyiv; US Congress to pass Ukraine aid, weapons package soon

REUTERS

Russian forces pounded Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region yesterday but failed to capture three target areas, Ukraine’s military said, while Moscow said Western sanctions on Russia and arms shipments to Ukraine were impeding peace negotiations.

The Russians were trying to capture the areas of Lyman in Donetsk and Sievierodonetsk and Popasna in Luhansk, the General Staff of Ukraine’s Armed Forces said in a daily update. “Not succeeding - the fighting continues,” it said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in remarks published early yesterday, said lifting Western sanctions on Russia was part of the peace talks, which he said were difficult but continued daily by video link.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has insisted since the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24 that sanctions needed to be strengthened and could not be part of negotiations. He said on Friday there was a high risk the talks would end because of what he called Russia’s “playbook on murdering people”.

Ukraine accuses Russian troops of atrocities in areas near the capital, Kyiv, that they previously occupied. Moscow denies the claims.

Lavrov said that if the United States and other Nato countries were truly interested

in resolving the Ukrainian crisis, they should stop sending weapons to Kyiv.

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday told Zelenskyy during a call that his country would step up military and humanitarian support for Ukraine.

In Washington, US President Joe Biden’s proposed \$33 billion aid package for Ukraine, including \$20 billion for weapons, has received bipartisan support. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy

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Pelosi said on Friday she hoped Congress would pass the package as soon as possible.

Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a “special operation” to disarm Ukraine and protect it from fascists. Ukraine and the West say the fascist allegation is baseless and the war is an unprovoked act of aggression.

The war has turned cities to rubble, killed thousands and forced 5 million Ukrainians to flee abroad. After failing to capture the capital, Russia is now focusing on the east and south of Ukraine.

Moscow hopes to take full control of the eastern Donbas region made up of

Luhansk and Donetsk, parts of which were already controlled by Russian-backed separatists before the invasion.

Moscow yesterday said its artillery units had struck 389 Ukrainian targets overnight.

Alexander Bogomaz, the governor of Russia’s Bryansk region, said air defences had prevented a Ukrainian aircraft from entering the region, and as a result shelling had hit parts of an oil terminal, Russian news agencies reported.

The governor of another Russian region, Kursk, said several shells were fired from the direction of Ukraine yesterday at a checkpoint near its border. Roman Starovoit said in a video on his Telegram channel that there were no casualties or damage.

On the Ukrainian side, Luhansk Governor Serhiy Gaidai said the Russians were shelling all over the region “but they cannot get through our defence”. He said civilians would continue to be evacuated despite the difficult situation.

Gaidai said two schools and 20 houses were destroyed by Russian attacks on Friday in the Luhansk towns of Rubizhne and Popasna.

Mykola Khanatov, head of military administration in Popasna, said two buses sent to evacuate civilians from the town were fired on by Russian troops on Friday and there was no word from the drivers. He did not say how many people were on the buses.

Man dies, homes destroyed as storms hit 3 districts

UNB, Dhaka

A man died yesterday, while homes were destroyed as nor’westers, hailstorms and thunderstorms hit Joypurhat, Thakurgaon and Nilphamari on Friday night.

Sanjay Kumar Mandal, 28, died around 9:30pm when a tree fell on him during a storm in Joypurhat’s Sadar upazila.

Shafiqul Islam, deputy director of Joypurhat’s Department of Agricultural Extension, said Boro paddy, jute, corn, and banana farms on at least 12,700 hectares of land were destroyed in the two-hour long storm.

Meanwhile, a storm with hail and heavy rainfall swept over Thakurgaon around 12:10am and lasted around 40 minutes, uprooting hundreds of trees, including the century-old Pakur tree in Thakurgaon Government Boy’s School.

Fallen trees blocked roads, while many homes were destroyed.

Locals said the storm also disrupted electricity supply. It was restored in some parts of Thakurgaon city in the afternoon.

Abu Hossain, deputy director of Thakurgaon’s Department of Agricultural Extension, said corn, Boro paddy were damaged, while mango and litchi trees were also destroyed in the hailstorm.

Meanwhile, a storm began in Nilphamari around 1:00am and lasted for over 10 minutes, during which it destroyed hundreds of houses and Boro farms.

Deputy Commissioner Khandakar Yasir Arefin said he was informed about the damages and will take necessary steps after visiting the affected areas.

17 new Covid cases in a day

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh reported 17 fresh Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday morning, taking the total number of cases to 19,52,691.

As per the latest government data, the total number of fatalities remained unchanged yesterday at 29,127.

Meanwhile, the daily positivity rate decreased to 0.58 percent from Friday’s 0.63 after testing 2,938 samples during this period, according to the Directorate General of Health Services. The mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.49 per cent.

The recovery rate rose to 97.07 per cent as 258 patients recovered yesterday.

UP chair, son held for assault on former AL president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested BM Jasim, union parishad chairman of Hayndgaon, and his son for beating up a former president of the union’s AL unit on Friday afternoon.

Jiten Guha, the victim, was tied to a tree and beaten by Jasim and some others due to intra-party rivalry, police said, adding that he was a former president of Hayndgaon AL and of Chattogram South District Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad. Jiten is also the vice president of Patiya upazila’s Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad.

After the attack, Jiten’s brother Tapas Kumar Guha filed a case with Patiya Police Station accusing seven people, including Jatin and his son Mushlique Uddin Wasi, 21.

Jiten has been undergoing treatment at Chattogram Medical College Hospital after sustaining head injuries from the attack.

Epitome of optimism

FROM PAGE 1

get bored. He never disappointed. I have rarely seen senior, often uptight, World Bank officials enjoy the word “rubbish”, hurled at something they proposed, so delightfully without any feeling of offense even when it was a characterisation they disagreed with. The man knew nothing else but to speak from his heart, something that many times put him in troubled waters. He knew how to swim out of it with bravery and sagacity.

Like all humans, Muhith was not perfect. One of his character flaws was temper. He never shrank from expressing anger when he felt angry. But he was acutely aware and found ways to get his mind back to a state of calm almost immediately with grace. He felt no shame, no ego in apologising for the rage in such a way that it made those on the other side feel remorseful for the offense they might have felt. They often ended up appreciating his candour and humility.

Every interaction with him was a learning experience. Every meeting made me proud as a Bangladeshi because in the post meeting discussions back at the office, the one thing no one disputed was the wisdom of the man. I remember one of the World Bank vice presidents remarking, “If

I am as alert and sharp at his age, I will consider myself extraordinarily lucky”. Muhith’s mind, face, or demeanour never reflected his age.

He loved his job and believed in his country. “Optimism is the secret to living in a low-income country”, he told me this long ago in the eighties in Boston University where I was a student. He came to give an informal talk on the state of the Bangladesh economy. I happened to be studying Robert Solow’s Nobel Prize winning model of economic growth at the time. A key proposition of the Solow model is that the low-income countries would eventually catch up with high-income countries. I don’t think Muhith had Solow’s proposition in mind, but the intuition came naturally to the man who was a student of English literature in his Dhaka University life. Solow’s optimism came with a variety of conditions. Muhith’s optimism about Bangladesh was unconditional, one based on his faith in the will of this nation. The rest of course is history in which his name will certainly figure as a legend that should inspire finance ministers now and in future.

Zahid Hussain is a former lead economist at the World Bank’s Dhaka office.

Hassle-free, so far

FROM PAGE 1

The Dhaka met office forecast that rain or thunder showers, accompanied by gusty or squally wind, was likely at a few places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, and Sylhet divisions.

If that happens, people will suffer on their Eid journey today.

A huge number of passengers and small vehicles were noticed on the Paturia-Daulatdia and the Aricha-Kazirhat ferry routes. But no major congestion was reported.

Around 2:00pm, more than 200 cars were seen waiting in lines to cross the Padma near the Paturia ferry terminal in Manikganj.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) added three more ferries to its fleet for the Paturia-Daulatdia route, which

took the total to 20.

With the inclusion of one more ferry on the Aricha-Kazirhat route, it now has four ferries.

A similar situation was found on the Shimulia-Banglabazar and Shimulia-Majhikandi ferry routes. Ferries carried a huge number of motorcycles all day long.

Many travelling on speedboats said they were forced to pay extra.

The three railway stations in Dhaka, including the Kamalapur Railway Station, saw a huge pressure of passengers, especially in the evening.

Almost all the compartments were found filled with passengers in Kamalapur. As the trains reached the airport and Joydebpur stations, many climbed to the roofs, risking their lives.

Most trains were on schedule. At least four

intercity trains – Nil Sagar, Sundarbans, Dhumketu and Ekata Express – heading for the north and western districts were late by up to one and a half hours.

Meanwhile, 110 launches left the capital’s Sadarghat terminal until 7:50pm as the pressure of passengers intensified in the afternoon.

The authorities fined owners of four launches Tk 36,000 each for carrying people on the roof, said joint director of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA).

SITUATION ON ROADS

A 13.5km stretch on the Dhaka-Tangail-Rangpur highway, from Elenga to Bangabandhu bridge, and a 19km section of the road, from the bridge to Hatikamrul, were causes of concern for many because of ongoing road expansion

work.

Although there was a huge number of vehicles on those sections, traffic was almost normal until the evening.

Talking to The Daily Star in the afternoon, Ataur Rahman, in-charge of Elenga Highway Police Outpost, said except for small tailbacks near the bridge, traffic had been smooth on the highway.

M e a n w h i l e , the authorities of Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge set a new record in collecting tolls from vehicles in 24 hours till 6:00am yesterday. It collected Tk 3.18 crore in tolls from 42,199 vehicles, Ahsan Masud Bappy, an executive engineer of the Bangladesh Bridge Authority said.

He said they had collected Tk 2.99 crore from a record 52,730 vehicles on May 13 ahead

hoarding excessively.

Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said “Consumers are the victims. The businesses are simply trying to make more profits.”

He urged the government to take appropriate measures immediately.

“I have never seen such a crisis of soyabean oil before Eid,” he said.

This paper spoke to consumers and traders in 15 districts for this report.

of Eid-ul-Fitr of last year.

The government has increased the toll rates since then.

There is a 12km tailback on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway from Abdullahpur to Joydevpur. But no major congestion was reported.

Visiting Gabtoli Bus Terminal and nearby Amin Bazar, a correspondent of The Daily Star reported that the rush of home-goers increased after 4:00pm.

Amid a crisis of vehicles, many transport operators starting asking for extra.

Bus operators said the rush intensified following the closure of garment factories and other establishments for the festival.

Like previous years, many were seen travelling on trucks and pickups, putting their lives at risk.

Some bus passengers

alleged that they were being charged more than usual.

Mostafizur Rahman, who came from Narayanganj, was one of them.

He said he went to several bus counters at Gabtoli could not get any ticket for Rangpur.

He then managed to board a bus to reach his destination, paying Tk 1,200. The usual fare is Tk 700. The bus is also not a long-haul one. It is supposed to ply only inside the capital.

An official at the control room of Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association said they could not do anything over buses which don’t have tickets counters at the terminals.

[Our correspondents from Tangail, Pabna, Gazipur, Manikganj and Munshiganj contributed to the report]

Islamic State ‘Beate’ Kotey sentenced to life in jail by US court

AFP, Washington

Alexanda Kotey, part of the Islamic State kidnapping and-murder cell known as the “Beatles,” was sentenced to life in prison Friday, with relatives of victims addressing him and another member directly in the US court.

Kotey, a 38-year-old former British national, pleaded guilty in September, admitting his role in the deaths of four American hostages in Syria as well as the kidnapping and torture of other journalists and relief workers.

He was captured along with another former “Beatle,” El Shalee Elsheikh, by a Kurdish militia in Syria in January 2018 and handed over to US forces in Iraq before being flown to the United States in 2020 to face trial.