

## RUSSIAN INVASION Nato vows to modernise Ukraine's military

AGENCIES

Nato yesterday branded Russia the most “direct threat” to allied security after Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine and vowed to modernise the beleaguered Ukrainian military, saying it stood four-square with Kyiv in “the heroic defence of their country”.

Completing a summit dominated by the geopolitical upheaval caused by the invasion, Nato formally invited Sweden and Finland to join the alliance and pledged to reinforce combat-ready and rapid-reaction forces on its eastern flank, closest to Russia.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Nato’s expansion was “destabilising” and would not boost its members’ security.

President Joe Biden announced additional US land, air and sea deployments across Europe, including a permanent army headquarters with accompanying battalion in Poland, the first full-time US deployment on Nato’s eastern fringes.

As Western leaders met in Madrid, in Ukraine officials complained that Russian missiles had hit civilian housing and businesses in and around the cities of Dnipro, Mykolaiv and Kharkiv, leaving at least seven dead and 14 wounded, reports Reuters.

Russian said it had inflicted severe casualties on Ukrainian troops defending the town of Lysychansk, in the eastern Donbas region, and said the Kharkiv attack had hit Ukrainian command centres and a training base for foreign “mercenaries”.

Britain’s Ministry of Defence said Russia was likely to keep making major strikes in an effort to hamper Ukrainian resupplies to frontlines, and more civilian casualties were likely.



Two Indian fishing trawlers anchored at Kheya Ghat in Mongla yesterday. Bangladesh Navy seized eight Indian trawlers and detained 135 crew members from the Bay of Bengal on Monday night.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

# Petrobangla has to return Tk 12,227cr

BERC says in public hearing verdict; the state-owned oil company took the money from security, development funds

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission in the verdict of a public hearing has ordered the Petrobangla to return Tk 12,227 crore taken from its security and development funds.

The state-owned oil company took Tk 9,227 crore from its Energy Security Fund to import liquefied natural gas from the international market. It also deposited in the exchequer Tk 3,000 crore from the Gas Development Fund as surplus money.

The public hearing on gas price adjustment was held on March 21-24 where a consumer rights body, energy experts and political leaders demanded refund of the money. They said it is a misuse of public money as it is not the income of Petrobangla.

The verdict was released on Monday.

Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) representative Prof M Shamsul Alam at the hearing said the funds operated by the Petrobangla without any concern of BERC is a “conflict of interest”.

The Petrobangla didn’t mention separately how much gas they imported

from the spot market and how much under long-term agreements. “With the gap between the figures, it created the scope of misappropriation of the money,” he added.

But the Petrobangla representative didn’t agree with the arguments. AKM Benjamin Riaz, director (finance) of the company, claimed they had no surplus money for the LNG import purpose.

However, the BERC’s Technical Evaluation Committee found that from August 2018 to June 2021, Petrobangla’s expenditure for LNG import stood at Tk 47,214 crore while it generated Tk 49,752 crore for this purpose, leaving a surplus of Tk 2,538 crore.

According to the verdict, Petrobangla in fiscal 2019-20 and 2020-21 imported 558 mmcfd and 589 mmcfd (million cubic feet daily) of gas on an average respectively. The import estimation was 850 mmcfd in the 2019 gas pricing order of BERC.

The commission said Petrobangla also imported LNG at less than the projected cost, and the total distribution cost at consumer level decreased by Tk 7,284

crore and Tk 7,648 crore respectively.

“Compared to the LNG import cost till June 30, 2021, the Petrobangla’s LNG charges and related income were higher and that’s why it should return the money taken from the Energy Security Fund,” said the order.

Besides, the BERC ordered refunding the Gas Development Fund’s Tk 3,000 crore, which was deposited with the government treasury as surplus money of Petrobangla. The return has to be with interest.

The company took Tk 12,227 crore from the two funds since 2018 till June 30, 2021.

In January 2020, parliament passed the Deposit of Surplus Funds of Autonomous, Semi-Autonomous, State-Owned, and Public Non-Financial Corporations into the Government Treasury Act.

Under this act, Petrobangla deposited Tk 5,871 crore with the government treasury. Of that amount, Tk 3,000 crore was collected from the consumers for GDF.

The fund was created by an order of BERC in July 2009.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

## Fresh floods loom as rivers keep swelling

FROM PAGE 1

The Dharla was flowing 23cm above the danger level at Shimulbari point in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila yesterday morning, while the Teesta was flowing just 7cm below the danger level at Teesta Barrage point, according to the local WDB office.

Low-lying villages of Mogholhat, Kulaghat and Barabari unions in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila have been inundated again due to the recent rise in water level, said locals.

“In the first phase, we had to leave our house and stay at a flood shelter for 10 days. We returned home on June 22 as the water had receded.

But our house has gone under around three feet of water today [yesterday],” said Sakhina Beva, 60, a resident of Char Falimari village in Mogholhat union.

“If water continues rising, we will have to leave our house again and go to the shelter,” she told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Our house was damaged by flooding in the first phase and we are yet to repair it. The flood has hit us again and it has become very difficult for us to survive,” said Nazrul Islam, 65, a farmer of Char Shiberkuti village at Kulaghat union.

River erosion is also

taking a serious toll on some areas, said Habibur Rahman, chairman of Mogholhat Union Parishad.

In Sirajganj, the Jamuna started swelling again since yesterday morning.

“The water level was receding for the last four days. But it has started rising again today [yesterday] due to excessive rain upstream. If the rains continue, flood may hit the region again,” said Md Nasir Uddin, sub-divisional engineer of WDB in Sirajganj.

Flood-hit people are in fear of further hardship.

“We have been stuck in floodwater for the last couple of weeks. We have

come to a flood shelter and then felt relief as we saw water receding. That relief was short-lived ... we are worried again as the water is rising once more. We don’t know when we will be able to return home,” said Sharif Hossain, a resident of Choto Koyra village in Sirajganj Sadar upazila.

[Dwoha Chowdhury, Mintu Deshwara, S Dilip Roy and Ahmed Humayun Kabir Topu contributed to this report]

## Govt takes aim at wealth stashed abroad

FROM PAGE 1

undisclosed assets stashed away abroad looks handy on paper.

“If the NBR can pursue it in good faith and set examples in a clean way, it would be beneficial in cracking down on tax evasion and money laundering,” said Mansur, also the chairman of Brac Bank.

The amended finance bill accommodated another feedback, and this time it was from the

business community.

In the proposed finance bill placed in the parliament on June 9, the corporate tax for non-listed companies was slashed by 2.5 percentage points to 27.5 percent provided the banking system is used to accept all income and receipts as well as for expenses and investments of more than Tk 12 lakh.

Businesses found the Tk 12 lakh threshold impracticable and hence

the benefit of the reduced corporate tax would evade them.

Now, in the amended finance bill, the ceiling for cash transactions has been raised from Tk 12 lakh to Tk 36 lakh.

In another amendment, the supplementary duty of cars of 2,001-3,000cc has been increased from 200 percent to 250 percent and for cars from 3,001-4,000cc from 350 percent to 500 percent.

“I have accommodated 17 of the suggestions made by the members of parliament on the budget. Were the economic conditions normal, more of their observations would have been there,” Kamal said.

He also said Bangladesh saw the highest increase in GDP in the world between 2009 and 2019: 188 percent. China’s GDP expanded the next highest in that period: by 177 percent.

## GP barred from selling SIM cards

FROM PAGE 1

calls, despite BTRC’s earlier instructions to do so.

The regulator said it enforced the ban in the face of numerous complaints from policymakers and general customers.

“We have already sent a letter to GP instructing it not to sell SIMs,” Subrata Roy Maitra, vice-chairman of the BTRC, told The Daily Star.

Mustafa Jabbar, telecom minister, said the operator will have to improve their services if they want to gain new subscribers.

According to the results of a nationwide drive-test published in March, GP’s average call drop rate was at 0.29 percent in Dhaka division, with exception to city corporation areas, in December.

Meanwhile, Robi’s call drop rate was at 0.23 percent, Banglalink’s at 0.32 percent and Teletalk’s at 2.69 percent – highest

among the operators.

According to BTRC’s policy, the call drop rate should be less than two percent.

Market leader Grameenphone has 8.49 crore subscribers as of this May – 46.11 percent of all mobile subscribers in the country.

Earlier in a statement, GP said it has been “way ahead” of the benchmark set by the BTRC and the International Telecommunication Union. It has also been collaborating with the BTRC to improve the service quality, the statement read.

“Against this backdrop, we are currently assessing this recent unexpected letter to determine our next course of action. We believe that constructive dialogue with the regulator is the best way to resolve issues in the best interest of our existing and new customers.”