

DU GIRLS' WASHROOM BCL leader barges in, makes obscene gesture at student



Rescue workers inspect the site of a destroyed hostel as a result of a missile strike in the second largest Ukrainian city of Kharkiv late on Wednesday, amid Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. PHOTO: AFP

War in 'strategic deadlock'

Says Ukraine; Russia strikes Kharkiv ahead of Zelensky's meet with UN chief, Erdogan; Moscow rejects UN call to demilitarise Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant

AGENCIES

Russia's war on Ukraine has reached a 'strategic deadlock' a senior presidential adviser said yesterday as strikes battered the northeast Ukrainian region of Kharkiv.

The strikes came hours ahead of a much-anticipated meeting where Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky was set to discuss various issues with UN chief António Guterres and Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

Moscow meanwhile denied it had deployed any heavy weapons at the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine where a recent escalation in fighting has increased fears of a nuclear disaster.

Russia's foreign ministry also rejected a proposal by Guterres to demilitarise the area around Zaporizhzhia, saying it would make the facility "more vulnerable".

"Russian forces have achieved only minimal advances, and in some cases we have advanced, since last month," Oleksiy Arestovych, the advisor, said in a video. "What we are seeing is a 'strategic deadlock'."

Ukrainian forces yesterday said they

had beaten back a Russian attack in the southern region of Kherson.

"The stakes of the Russian Federation in this war have been raised," Arestovych added.

Ukraine's ministry of defence said Russian forces were also moving aircraft further back into Crimea and away from the reach of Ukraine's forces following the recent strikes in Crimea.

The head of the Kharkiv region Oleg Syneubov said Moscow's forces had launched eight missiles from Russian territory at around 0430 local time (0130 GMT) striking across the city.

"Three people died, including a child. Eight people, including two children, were rescued," the emergency services said.

Syneubov posted images from the scene of one strike showing the smouldering remains of several burnt out buildings and twisted wreckage of destroyed vehicles nearby.

In separate strikes on the town of Krasnohrad south west of Kharkiv, bombardments that damaged residential buildings left two dead and two more injured, he said.

The strikes in the war-scarred east of the country come a day after bombardments killed at least seven in the city and as

Erdogan and Guterres were convening in the western city of Lviv.

The two were key brokers of a deal last month with Moscow and Kyiv allowing the resumption of grain exports from Ukraine after Russia's invasion blocked essential global supplies.

A spokesman for Guterres said that the UN chief, Zelensky and Erdogan will discuss the grain deal, as well as "the need for a political solution to this conflict".

He added that he had "no doubt that the issue of the nuclear power plant" would be raised.

In his regular nightly address on Wednesday, Zelensky said he and Guterres would "work to get the necessary results for Ukraine".

The UN chief is slated to travel today to Odessa, one of three ports involved in the grain exports deal - hammered out in July under the aegis of the UN with Ankara's mediation.

He will then head to Turkey to visit the Joint Coordination Centre, the body tasked with overseeing the accord.

According to the UN, the first half of August saw 21 freighters authorised to sail under the deal carrying more than 563,000 tonnes of agricultural products, including more than 451,000 tonnes of corn.

Man arrested for killing mother in Chattogram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

A man was arrested on Wednesday for killing his mother in Chattogram's Patiya upazila a day earlier.

The victim is Jesmin Akhter, 52, wife of the late Shamsul Alam Master, former municipality mayor of Patiya.

The arrestee is Md Mainul Islam, 29, said Lieutenant Colonel MA Yousuf, commanding officer of Rab-7, during a press briefing.

A case was filed against him with Patiya Police Station yesterday.

Mainul confessed to killing his mother and Rab handed him over to police, he added.

Rashedul Islam, inspector (investigation) of the station, said Jesmin was shot dead by Mainul with his father's licensed firearm at their home in the upazila's Samzarpara area during an altercation over property on Tuesday.

He managed to flee by the time neighbours rushed to the spot. Rab arrested him along with the weapon on Wednesday evening Notun Bazar area of the port city.

One more dies from Covid

UNB, Dhaka

One more person died from Covid-19 and 170 tested positive in Bangladesh in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

With this, the total number of fatalities rose to 29,315, and the caseload to 2,009,604, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The daily test positivity rate fell to 3.52 percent from Wednesday's 4.54 percent as 4,824 samples were tested.

The mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.46 percent. The recovery rate rose to 97.18 percent from Wednesday's 97.17 percent.

In July, the country reported 142 Covid-linked deaths and 31,422 cases, the highest monthly death toll and caseload since March this year.

Bangladesh registered its highest daily caseload of 16,230 on July 28 last year and daily fatalities of 264 on August 10 the same year.

16 killed, many missing in China floods

AFP, Beijing

Sixteen people were killed and many left missing in flash flooding in northwest China, state media reported yesterday, as the country battles extreme weather that has shuttered factories and caused rolling power cuts.

The deluge comes during a summer of soaring temperatures and torrential rains in China, with multiple cities clocking their hottest days on record and floods causing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage.

Floods hit this week in a mountainous region of Datong county in Qinghai province, affecting more than 6,200 people from six villages, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Photos of the aftermath showed roads covered in mud, uprooted trees, damaged homes and rescue workers carrying shovels.

Covid jab coverage in poorer countries hits 50pc: Gavi

AFP, Geneva

Half of people in poorer countries have now received two vaccine doses against Covid-19, a global vaccine alliance said yesterday, hailing progress in closing the vaccine equity gap.

Gavi, which co-leads the Covax global vaccine distribution scheme with the World Health Organization and others, said the 92 lower-income countries receiving donor-funded jabs had reached 50-percent coverage on average.

Gavi, the WHO and others have long condemned the stark inequities in access to vaccines developed to battle the still raging Covid pandemic.

Safety issues in focus, at last

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After his visit, the DNCC called a meeting over safety at the project sites in its areas. The meeting was supposed to be held yesterday but was deferred to Sunday as yesterday was a public holiday.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA), which is implementing several projects, including Dhaka Elevated Expressway and Dhaka-Ashulia Expressway, has issued directives to step up safety at all project sites.

Quazi Muhammad Ferdous, chief engineer of BBA, issued written directives to all project chiefs on Tuesday.

"We have asked them [the project authorities] to follow international safety standards," Ferdous told The Daily Star yesterday.

Replying to a question, he said, "We have issued the directives after Monday's incident so that no such incident happens in our projects."

In February this year, a construction worker died when he suffered serious injuries while placing a girder of Dhaka Elevated Expressway project in the Tejgaon railway station area in Dhaka.

A major development project being implemented in Dhaka city is Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line-6, the first metro rail in the country. A pedestrian died after bricks fell on him

at the construction site of the project in Pallabi area in May this year.

MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL), the implementing agency of metro rail projects, however, said regular safety measures are in place.

Asked about the death of the pedestrian, he said the man had entered the restricted area, which he should not have done, and that's why they had nothing to do here.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Prof Hadiuzzaman, also the director of Buet's Accident Research Institute, said project work on active roads in Dhaka city is very risky but there were no general work-zone safety guidelines until June this year.

The ARI, under a project of Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA), has prepared such a guideline in June this year, which is still not in practice, he told this correspondent.

Prof Hadiuzzaman also said project safety in Bangladesh mainly depends on the financier.

"When the financier puts pressure on the authority over the safety issue, the implementing agency becomes active to ensure it. If the financier is not serious about it, the contractor and implementing agency becomes slack," he said.

He said a contractor is a business entity and it will try to optimise profits,

so the implementing agency has a major role in ensuring safety through proper monitoring, but they had been lacking in here.

An additional chief engineer of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) said that for all major projects, there is a general safety plan, usually prepared by the contractor and approved by the consultants of the implementing agencies. The safety plan is also included in the contract.

Besides, the contractor is supposed to submit a work methodology to the consultants, who will approve it upon scrutiny before starting any major project work, the engineer said wishing not to be named.

Then, the contractor will send a "request for inspection" to the consultant. It also needs to be approved and the persons concerned are supposed to be present at the time of the inspection.

"These are the steps in a major project to be followed to ensure safety. But unfortunately, most of the officials of implementing agencies are either unaware of this process or nonchalant," he said, adding that they often depend on the consultant in this regard.

"The employer [the implementing agency] should at least monitor whether the consultants are discharging their duties properly. Unfortunately, the

monitoring is not done properly," he added.

The engineer said there should be dedicated manpower to oversee the compliance issues.

SAFETY PLAN FIRST

BRT project authorities on Tuesday decided to suspend physical work of the entire project after the Asian Development Bank, the main financier, called for ensuring foolproof safety or suspension of work.

But different newspapers yesterday reported that physical work of the project continued on Wednesday in some parts without maintaining safety measures.

It prompted the Road Transport and Highways Division to write to the chief engineers of RHD and BBA and the managing director of Dhaka BRT Company Ltd to submit a report on this issue upon inspections.

Contacted, ABM Amin Ullah Nuri, secretary of the division, said the project authorities have verbally informed him that no construction work took place on Wednesday, rather some obstacles were removed from the project areas.

"The contractors have to submit a safety plan and get it approved by the authorities concerned. Only then the contractors would be allowed to resume work," he told The Daily Star last night.

inexperienced.

There was no traffic control and the supervisors did not contact Dhaka Metropolitan Police's traffic division for their support, the officer added.

CHINESE ENVOY MEETING

During a meeting with Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary ABM Amin Ullah Nuri at the Secretariat, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming said a high-level delegation of the Chinese contractor had arrived in Bangladesh to investigate the incident.

The delegation is ready to assist the probe committee formed by the Road Transport and Highways Division, said a press release.

EC ignores most reforms

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According to the existing law, if the commission found proof of misconduct and uses of muscle power, it could cancel the candidature of a candidate, EC officials said, adding that the EC now proposed that the candidate in question be not allowed to run in the fresh polls.

The EC also proposed empowering presiding officers to stop voting, if someone or some people legally or illegally enter a polling station and prevent officials from performing their duties. It even recommended five-year imprisonment of the presiding officer concerned for not using the provision properly.

It also recommended a clause that would allow sentencing of anyone who prevents election officials from performing their duties to up to three years in prison.

The EC suggested making it mandatory that all candidates submit income tax returns and that candidates could file nominations regularising defaulted loans and paying pending utility bills a day before.

The commission also proposed that all political parties should have at least 33 percent positions in all its

committees designated to women by 2030.

The proposals of the EC would be sent to the cabinet after being vetted by the law ministry. Once okayed by the cabinet, the bill would go to parliament for passing.

POLLS WORK PLAN

The EC is working on its own action plan for holding the 12th parliamentary elections, likely to be held in late December 2023 or early January 2024.

In its draft action plan, it identified some challenges, including some political parties' lack of confidence in the EC, a decision on the use of EVMs, having full control of field administration and police during the polls, and ensuring security of voters and candidates' polling agents, EC sources said.

They said the election commissioners were reviewing the draft and that it could be finalised early next month.

"We are reviewing the recommendations of all political parties in order to prepare a realistic action plan," Election Commissioner Brig Gen Ahsan Habib Khan (ret'd) told The Daily Star.

Mystery shrouds couple's death

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in Hyderabad Bridge area of Tongi," he said.

"We found my father in the driving seat and his wife in the driving passenger seat beside him. We were not sure whether they were dead or alive," said Miraz.

"We took them to a local hospital in Tongi's Boardbazar area. Later, we moved them to another hospital in Dhaka's Uttara where doctors declared them dead," he added.

No injury mark was found on their bodies, said Nondolal Chowdhury, officer-in-charge (OC) of Gacha Police Station under Gazipur Metropolitan

Police. He said they could not say how the couple died. Police are investigating, he added.

However, Mamun's elder brother Ripon alleged that there were black marks in the necks of the victims.

Claiming it to be murder, Ripon said the killers did not take gold ornaments or cash which were on them.

Mamun was the head teacher of Shaheed Smrity High School and Jolly was an assistant teacher at Amzad Ali High School in Gazipur.

The schools are within 500 metres of each other.



It was all primed for the disaster

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No legal action has been taken against any of the project officials.

The contractor, China Ghezhouba Group Company Limited, rented heavy equipment from IFS CON Bangladesh Limited. The latter hired the crane from Build Trade Company Limited, Moin added.

There were irregularities on the part of the Chinese contractor as well, he added.

Meanwhile, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming yesterday said his country would have no objection to punitive actions against those responsible.

The eight other arrestees are:

China Gezhouba Group Company Procurement Officer Manjurul Islam, Safety Engineer Zulfikar Ali, Build Trade Engineering Company's Administrative Officer Ruhul Amin Mridha, Marketing Manager Tofazzal Hossain, Four Brothers Guard Service employees Rubel and Afroj Mia, IFS CON Bangladesh Limited owner Iftekhar Hossain, and head of operations Ajharul Islam Mithu.

About whether government officials were responsible, Moin said that was for the government probe committee to find out.

On Monday, Amin and Rakib began operating the crane around 2:00pm

and successfully laid down a girder segment before dropping one on the car.

Zulfikar, a secondary school graduate, was appointed in 2021 as safety engineer by the Chinese contractor.

"He has no formal education or training to be a safety engineer at such a large project. He was in charge of security in the area adjacent to the project. On the day of the accident, he did not set up any safety fence," Moin added.

Since it was a holiday, there was a staff shortage at the site and the traffic management crew was new and