

INTERNATIONAL

'You can trust me to do what it takes'

Britain's Truss appeals for party support on economic plans

REUTERS, Birmingham

Prime Minister Liz Truss yesterday asked her Conservative Party to trust her, pledging to steer Britain through "stormy days" and transform a stagnant economy in a pitch to restore her authority over a party in revolt.

Addressing Conservative lawmakers and members at an annual conference beset by internal bickering and policy confusion, Truss sought to reassure her party, the public and investors that her plan was the right way to reignite growth.

An early interruption from protesters holding a banner asking "who voted for this?" seemed to fire up the audience and the prime minister, whose criticism of what she called "the anti-growth coalition" received loud cheers and applause.

For many in the audience, Truss, who has admitted that she is not the slickest communicator, had done a decent job at a time when she is under pressure from what one Conservative member called "some snakes in the party" undermining her plans. She might have bought herself a little more time to reassert herself over a party

that is increasingly divided and fearful about opinion polls showing it could be all but wiped out in a national election. Some Conservative lawmakers are openly questioning whether she should be in charge. "I am ready to make hard choices. You can trust me to do what it takes. The status quo is not an option," she told the party faithful in the central English city of Birmingham.

"We gather at a vital time for the United Kingdom. These are stormy days We need to step up. I'm determined to get Britain moving, to get us through the tempest and to put us on a stronger footing."

The conference, once expected to be Truss's crowning glory after she became prime minister on September 6, had turned into a personal nightmare after she announced a new economic policy that sparked a crisis of confidence among investors. Her attempt to cut 45 billion pounds (\$51 billion) of taxes and hike government borrowing sent markets into a tailspin and left her party facing potential electoral collapse.



People wait in line to buy sacks of rice from a wholesaler in Monrovia, Liberia yesterday. Liberians around the city have been queuing for weeks outside wholesalers hoping to buy the nation's staple food after rumours of a coming rice shortage began about six months ago. Prices for a twenty-five kilogram bag have risen from thirteen US dollars to twenty-five US dollars in the meantime. PHOTO: AFP

Goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030 out of reach
Warns World Bank

AFP, Washington

Covid-19 has dealt the "biggest setback" to global poverty reduction efforts in decades, and the World Bank warned yesterday that the goal to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 likely remains out of reach.

Poverty rose sharply during the pandemic, and the development lender estimates about 70 million people were pushed into extreme poverty in 2020 – the biggest one-year spike since monitoring began in 1990.

The report offers the first tally of those struggling to live on less than \$2.15 a day, the new global definition of extreme poverty, but follows many warnings from the global development lender that poorer nations are being left behind.

Earlier this year it warned that as many 95 million people would fall back into extreme poverty by the end of this year. Ukraine war, rising inflation and slowing global growth have put further pressure on the bank's mission to lift people out of poverty.

"Inflation, currency depreciations, and broader overlapping crises" point to a grim outlook, World Bank President David Malpass said. "Progress in reducing extreme poverty has essentially halted in tandem with subdued global economic growth," he said.

Extreme poverty had fallen to 8.4 percent by 2019 from 38 percent in 1990, but pandemic triggered first rise in more than two decades.

RESPONSE TO N KOREA MISSILE TEST
South Korea, US fire missiles into the Yellow Sea

Failed missile launch triggers panic in South Korean city; UNSC set to discuss N Korea

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea and the US military conducted rare missile drills and an American supercarrier repositioned east of North Korea after Pyongyang flew a missile over Japan, one of the allies' sharpest responses since 2017 to a North Korean weapon test.

Nuclear-armed North Korea test-fired an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) farther than ever before on Tuesday, sending it soaring over Japan for the first time in five years and prompting a warning for residents there to take cover.

The White House National Security Council called North Korea's latest test "dangerous and reckless" and the US military and its allies have stepped up displays of force.

South Korean and American troops fired a volley of missiles into the sea in response, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said yesterday, and the allies earlier staged a bombing drill with fighter jets in the Yellow Sea.

The USS Ronald Reagan, an American aircraft carrier that made its first stop in South Korea last month for the first time in years, will also return to the sea between Korea and Japan with its strike group of other warships.

The South Korean military called it a "highly unusual" move designed to show the allies' resolve to respond to any threats from North Korea.

The South Korean military separately confirmed that one of its Hyunmoo-2C missiles failed shortly after launch and crashed during the drill, but that no one

was hurt.

Footage shared on social media by a nearby resident and verified by Reuters showed smoke and flames rising from the military base.

The fire was caused by burning rocket propellant, and although the missile carried a warhead, it did not explode, South Korea's military said.

It apologised for causing residents to worry.

It's not rare for military hardware to fail, and North Korea has suffered several failed missile launches this year as well.



The Hyunmoo-2C is one of the South's latest missiles, however, and analysts say its capability as a precision "bunker buster" make it a key part of Seoul's plans for striking the North in the event of a conflict.

The fiery failure threatened to overshadow Seoul's efforts to demonstrate military prowess in the face of North Korea's increasing capabilities.

In its initial announcement of the drill, the South Korean military made

no mention of the Hyunmoo-2C launch or its failure, but later media briefings were dominated by questions about the incident.

President Yoon Suk-yeol, who has made such displays of military force a cornerstone of his strategy for countering the North, had vowed that the overflight of Japan would bring a decisive response from his country, its allies and the international community.

The UN Security Council was set to meet yesterday to discuss North Korea at the request of the United States, despite China and Russia telling council counterparts they were opposed to an open meeting of 15-member body.

They argued that the council's reaction should be conducive to easing the situation on the Korean Peninsula, diplomats said.

US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida condemned North Korea's test in the "strongest terms," the European Union called it a "reckless and deliberately provocative action", and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the launch and said it was a violation of Security Council resolutions.

It was the first North Korean missile to follow a trajectory over Japan since 2017, and its estimated 4,600 km (2,850 mile) flight was the longest for a North Korean test, which are usually "lofted" into space to avoid flying over neighbouring countries.

Analysts and security officials said it may have been a variant of the Hwasong-12 IRBM, which North Korea unveiled in 2017 as part of what it said was a plan to strike US military bases in Guam.

Amit Shah rules out talks with Pakistan
Says won't tolerate terror

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Home Minister Amit Shah yesterday ruled out talks with Pakistan and said the Modi government will wipe out terrorism from Jammu and Kashmir to make it the "most peaceful place in the country" and assured the holding of fresh assembly polls in the area with "full transparency".

Addressing a public rally in Baramulla district of north Kashmir, Shah also said that assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir will be conducted once the Election Commission completes the exercise of publishing the revised electoral rolls.

On if India would talk to Pakistan in Kashmir, he said "why should we? We will talk to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Prime Minister Narendra Modi government will stamp out terror from the state."

Urging the youths to shun the path of violence, Shah said terrorism has claimed 42,000 lives in Jammu and Kashmir since 1990s and asked whether it has ever benefited anyone.

"We have started a political process. I want to assure you that once the work of publishing electoral rolls by the Election Commission is completed, elections will be conducted with full transparency and your own elected representatives will govern here," he said.

The Modi government had scrapped the special constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir as also its status as a state in August, 2019 and turned it into a federally-administered territory.

Shah briefly stopped his speech during a rally in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir as 'Azaan' was going on from a nearby mosque. After a brief moment, he said the call for prayer has now stopped and asked if he would continue his speech.



Funding setback may delay the start

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Bangladesh-Japan Joint PPP Platform meeting in Japan, and the final decision is expected to be taken there, officials said.

The joint PPP platform meeting began on October 3 and will go on till October 7.

The physical work of the 24km-long line was slated to start in 2024 and be completed by 2030. There now may be a delay due to the recent developments over financing and the mode of implementation, the officials said.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL), the implementing agency of the metro rail projects, sent a proposal to the road transport and highways division last month for a feasibility study of the project.

The financier for the study, however, has not been fixed yet.

The government plans to build around 130km metro rail network with six lines crisscrossing Dhaka and adjacent areas within 2030 in efforts to reduce traffic

congestion and pollution. The first metro line from Uttara to Motijheel is scheduled to be partially open to traffic this December.

Under the G2G-PPP arrangement, Bangladesh may request other governments to provide financial support to implement the project, and that particular country will select a state-owned or private entity to act as an investor.

Japan is providing funds for the first three metro rail lines – MRT Line 6, 1 and 5 (northern route) – with soft loans.

MRT-LINE 2
The 24km line, which will have both elevated and underground sections, will start from Gabtoli and touch Basila, Mohammadpur, Jigatola, Science Lab, Nilkhet, Azimpur, Central Shaheed Minar, Police Headquarters, Gulistan, Motijheel, Arambagh, Kamalapur, Mugda, and Demra before reaching Chittagong Road point.

Bangladesh and Japan had signed an agreement to implement the MRT

Line-2 project under the G2G-PPP initiative.

The matter was discussed at all four Bangladesh-Japan Joint PPP Platform meetings held between December 2017 and December 2020.

In November 2018, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs okayed in principle the proposal for implementing the project under PPP initiative, documents show.

Japan even selected a major company of its – Marubeni Corporation – as the private partner for the project.

However, the PPP research, carried out by the Japanese authorities in 2020, "did not find the project economically viable", said MAN Siddique, managing director of DMTCL.

The line had been found to be viable in the Strategic Transport Plan in 2005 and Revised STP prepared by the government in 2016.

Against this backdrop, Japan conducted another study sometime after 2020. It found the line economically viable, MAN

Siddique added.

But Japan gave several options to implement it under the PPP model, he said.

In one option, the Japanese side said metro rail authorities will build the line, and Japan will be in charge of operation and maintenance of the line under PPP initiative.

In another, it said metro rail authorities will carry out the civil works (viaduct and tunnel) and provide a certain amount of money as Viability Gap Finance, while the Japanese side will install rail tracks and other equipment, procure metro trains, and take care of operation and maintenance.

But the metro rail authorities could not agree to those options, Siddique said.

PROJECT FACES DELAY
A June 23 meeting at the Prime Minister's Office regarding the PPP projects decided to withdraw the MRT Line-2 project from the G2G PPP project list, documents show.

The meeting also decided to implement the

project with the help from development partners under a government initiative.

On August 22, the road transport and highways division sent a letter to the PPP authorities regarding the new decision and asked them to place it before the fifth Bangladesh-Japan Joint PPP Platform meeting.

"We hope a final decision will come out of the meeting," Siddique said.

He added the surveys and other works done under PPP research and the preliminary study will be helpful for future work.

Asked if the new decision will cause any delay in starting the physical work, he skipped a direct answer. He said the authorities will now have to carry out a feasibility study and some other works.

"If we can't do those within two years, we will be able to do it within three ... In that case, we will have to work fast to complete the work within 2030," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Along with the

change in the mode of implementation, there are two more developments regarding the project.

On September 26, DMTCL sent the Preliminary Development Project Proposal to the road transport and highways division to forward it to the Planning Commission for carrying out a feasibility study for the project.

DMTCL sent another project to the division on September 25 for acquiring land under Damaripara and Matuail moujas to build the metro line depot.

Inflation

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ministry nor the BBS has released the inflation data for the month of August.

Secretary of Statistics and Information Management Department Shahnaz Arefin said, "I sent the inflation information to the minister yesterday. We have not received the file back yet. So I can't say anything without approval."

ASEAN SUMMIT

Myanmar junta leader not invited

AFP, Phnom Penh

Myanmar's junta leader has not been invited to a regional summit next month, host Cambodia said yesterday, in a fresh diplomatic snub for the isolated military regime. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) has led diplomatic efforts to resolve the turmoil that has gripped Myanmar since the military seized power last year. But there has been little progress on a "five-point consensus" agreed with the junta.

Blast hits Kabul mosque, 4 killed

REUTERS, Kabul

A blast hit a mosque in Afghanistan's capital in the vicinity of the heavily fortified interior ministry compound yesterday, officials said, killing at least four people and wounding 18, according to medics. The government did not immediately say what caused the explosion in Kabul, where militants have carried out a number of attacks in recent months. "The mosque was used by visitors and sometimes by interior ministry employees," interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said.