

Ireland petrol station blast kills nine

AFP, Creeslough

At least nine people have been killed in an explosion at a petrol station in County Donegal in Ireland's northwest, police said yesterday.

The Garda Siochana police forces said eight people had been hospitalised and that it "can now confirm nine fatalities as a result of this incident" in the village of Creeslough.

The cause of the explosion remained unknown and police had yet to announce the launch of an inquiry as the search through rubble went on.

Rescue efforts by Ireland's emergency services went on through the night after the blast on Friday ripped through a petrol station forecourt and a nearby apartment complex.

An aerial photograph taken after the explosion showed the petrol station building destroyed. Two two-storey residential buildings behind had collapsed.



Relatives sit in front of the coffins of victims of the nursery mass shooting at Wat Si Uthai temple in Thailand's northeastern Nong Bua Lam Phu province yesterday, as relatives hold funeral rites for those killed in the massacre. Heartbroken families prayed for the victims of a Thai nursery massacre as the king offered his support, telling relatives he "shares their grief" in a rare public interaction with his subjects. An ex-policeman murdered 24 children and 12 adults on a three-hour gun and knife rampage in a rural area in Thailand on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

N Korea defends missile launches

Says tests legitimate to counter threats as US, allies stage drills

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday defended its recent flurry of missile tests as a legitimate counter to US military threats.

The reclusive communist country has conducted six sanctions-busting launches in less than two weeks, the latest coming Thursday with the firing of a pair of ballistic missiles. On Tuesday, it fired an intermediate-range ballistic missile over Japan, prompting an alert for people in affected areas underneath to take cover.

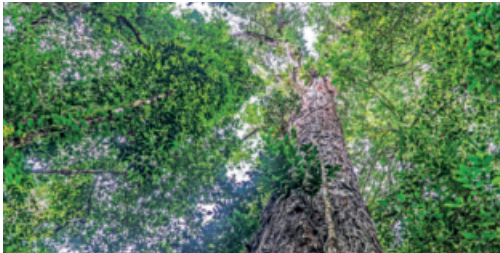
"The missile test launch by the DPRK is a regular and planned self-defensive step for defending the country's security and the regional peace from the US direct military threats that have lasted for more than half a century," North Korea's civil aviation agency said, without specifying which launch, according to state-run news agency KCNA.

Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have ramped up joint military drills in recent weeks, and carried out more exercises Thursday and yesterday involving a US Navy destroyer from the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier's strike group.

The launches are part of a record year of weapons tests by isolated North Korea, which leader Kim Jong Un has declared an "irreversible" nuclear power, effectively ending the possibility of denuclearisation talks.

North Korea yesterday released a separate statement, saying it was "seriously approaching the extremely worrisome development of the present situation", referring to the nuclear-powered USS Ronald Reagan being part of the US South Korea military drills this week.

Scientists reach tallest tree ever found in Amazon



AFP, Rio de Janeiro

After three years of planning, five expeditions and a two-week trek through dense jungle, scientists have reached the tallest tree ever found in the Amazon rainforest, a towering specimen the size of a 25-storey building.

The giant tree, whose top juts out high above the canopy in the Iratapuru River Nature Reserve in northern Brazil, is an angelim vermelho (scientific name: Dinizia excelsa) measuring 88.5 meters tall and 9.9 meters around – the biggest ever identified in the Amazon.

Researchers first spotted the enormous tree in satellite images in 2019 as part of a 3D mapping project.

But after several expeditions, reserchers only could reach the tree in a September 12-25 expedition where they travelled 250 kilometres by boat up rivers with treacherous rapids, plus another 20 kilometres on foot across mountainous jungle terrain.

But it was worth it, says forest engineer Diego Armando Silva of Amapa Federal University, who helped organize the trip.

"It was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. Just divine," Silva, 33, told AFP.

"You're in the middle of this forest where humankind has never set foot before, with absolutely exuberant nature."

UKRAINE'S RESISTANCE AGAINST RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE

US ammo supplies dwindle as war drains stockpiles

AFP, Washington

The United States will soon be unable to provide Ukraine with certain types of ammunition that are essential to Kyiv's battle against Russia's invasion, as supplies are being used up faster than they can be replaced.

Washington has become by far the largest supplier of arms to Ukraine since Russia launched the invasion on February 24, with more than \$16.8 billion in military assistance provided since that date.

But US stockpiles of some equipment are "reaching the minimum levels needed for war plans and training," and restocking to pre-invasion levels could take years, Mark Cancian of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies wrote in a recent analysis.

Washington is "learning lessons" from the conflict about ammunition needs in a great power war, which are "far greater" than expected, a US military official acknowledged on condition of anonymity.

American defence firms were forced to drastically reduce production in the 1990s as the United States slashed defence spending following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and their number fell dramatically, from dozens to single digits.

Now, the US government must convince the industry to reopen assembly lines and relaunch production of items such as Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, which have not been made since 2020.



Some US-provided equipment has become emblematic of the war in Ukraine, such as Javelin anti-tank weapons that were widely used by Kyiv's forces to blunt the Russian advance on the capital, and the Himars, a precision rocket system now playing a key role in counter-offensives against Moscow's troops in the east and south.

But US stocks of ammunition for Himars – which fires GPS-guided rockets known as GMLRS, with a range of more than 80 kilometers (50 miles) – are dwindling.

"If the United States sent one-third of that inventory to Ukraine (as has been the case with Javelin and Stinger), Ukraine would receive 8,000 to 10,000 rockets. That inventory would likely last several months, but, when the inventory is exhausted, there are no alternatives," said Cancian, who previously worked on weapons procurement for the US

government.

"Production is about 5,000 a year. Although the United States is working to increase that amount, and money has recently been allocated for that purpose, it will take years," he said.

The US has provided some 8,500 Javelin missiles to Kyiv, but annual production of a weapon that has become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance is only about 1,000.

The US has also supplied more than 800,000 Nato standard 155 mm artillery shells to Kyiv, according to official Pentagon statistics.

US production of these shells currently stands at 14,000 per month, but the Pentagon has announced that it aims to increase that figure to 36,000 within three years. That would still only bring annual production to 432,000 – less than half of what has been provided to Ukraine in seven months.

AIR TRAVEL

Deal eyes net-zero emissions by 2050

AFP, Montreal

UN aviation agency members on Friday set the year 2050 as their goal for achieving net-zero carbon emissions for air travel – an industry often criticized for its outsized role in climate change. Representatives from 193 nations reached the decision at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) headquarters in Montreal. The industry is currently responsible for 2.5 percent to three percent of global CO2 emissions. According to airlines, it will require massive investments – \$1.55 trillion between 2021 and 2050 – to decarbonize aviation.

ISRAEL'S LATEST WEST BANK RAID

Two Palestinian teens shot dead

AFP, Jenin



Two Palestinian teenagers were shot dead yesterday in an operation by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, prompting the Palestinian leadership to warn such military action may lead to "a point of no return" in the territory. Eleven others were wounded in the latest violence to hit the

West Bank, a day after two other Palestinian teenagers were killed by Israeli forces elsewhere in the territory. Israel's military said troops came under attack as they entered Jenin to detain a 25-year-old Palestinian it said was a member of the Islamic Jihad militant group. "The soldiers responded with live fire towards the armed suspects," an army statement said without explaining further.

Teen raped

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sub-inspector of Dhaka Railway Police Station.

Of the arrestees, Sumon and Nayeem made confessional statements before a Dhaka court yesterday, said Ferdous Ahmed Biswas, officer-in-charge of Dhaka Railway Police Station.

The prime accused Imran remains on the run. Police are trying to arrest him, he added.

The victim was sent to the one-stop crisis centre at Dhaka Medical College Hospital for forensic tests, he further added.

Pink diamond sells

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proved high-quality diamonds could still fetch major prices in a shaky economy.

"Hard assets such as world-class diamonds have a history of performing well even in times of instability," he said.

3 BCL men die trying

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Sajib Ahmed, who was injured in the attack, said, "I jumped into a pond after they hacked me on the neck."

Jhenidah BCL Vice-president Fahim Ahmed who allegedly led the attack could not be contacted as his phone was switched off.

Talking to The Daily Star, Jhenidah BCL General Secretary AL Imran said Fahim might have led this attack to establish supremacy in the college.

Sohel Rana, officer-in-charge of Jhenidah Sadar Police Station, said police rescued Sajib and took him to a hospital.

Medical Officer Taufiq Hasan of Jhenidah Sadar Hospital said the deceased men appeared to have died from head injuries.

Sajib yesterday filed a case with Jhenidah Sadar Police Station accusing Fahim and seven other

named and 20 unnamed individuals of attempted murder, police said.

In another crash, three 12th-graders of a college were killed after their motorcycle was rammed by a bus on Benapole-Jashore highway on Friday night.

Asif, Arman, and Salman were students of Natunhat Public College in Jashore, police said.

Tajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Jashore Kotwali Police Station, said, "Around 10:00pm, a truck coming from the opposite direction collided with the motorbike, leaving Asif and Arman dead on the spot."

Salman died of his injuries after he was taken to Jashore General Hospital.

Police are looking for the truck driver, the OC added.

[Our Jhenidah and Jashore correspondents contributed to this report]

Third Shitalakkhya

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was found that the Chinese company was debarred by a multi-lateral lender, leading the authorities to go for the second bidder. The process also took time.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the slow flow of money from Saudi are the other reasons behind the long delay of the project, they said.

In the meantime, project cost rose to Tk 608.56 crore and the rise in cost for the land acquisition is one of the major reasons for the cost escalation.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the project in February 2014 and the project authorities signed an agreement with the Chinese company Sinohydro Corporation Ltd in February 2017.

The bridge will establish a direct road link between Narayanganj city and Bandar upazila and will ultimately create direct connectivity between two major national highways – Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga-Barishal-Patuakhali highways.

As a result, vehicles from southern districts would not need to come to the capital's Jatrabari for going to Chattogram, RHD officials said. However, RHD must expand the existing road for establishing a better link, they added.

Former UP chairman

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accusing the two and 13 others. The accused obtained anticipatory bail, said Mohammad Shibirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Durgapur Police Station.

"The accused will now be facing charges of murder," he added.

US lays stress on need

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government to withdraw the sanctions on Rab as soon as possible. The US in December last year had imposed sanctions on the force and seven of its current and former officials for human rights violations.

Sherman reiterated that the US would continue its collaboration with Bangladesh on its fight against terrorism and violent extremism, a Bangladesh foreign ministry statement said.

Noting the progress made in the labour sector in Bangladesh, she stressed on strengthening cooperation between the two countries to increase bilateral trade.

Shahriar sought US support at the World Trade Organization on LDC-related matters so that countries like Bangladesh could attain a smooth and sustainable LDC graduation.

The state minister expressed Bangladesh government's willingness to work more closely with the US on climate change and migration. He also drew attention to an action-oriented discussion on the issue of loss and damage in the upcoming COP-27, scheduled for November in Egypt.

Deputy Secretary Sherman appreciated Bangladesh's leadership role in climate change and encouraged Bangladesh to join the Global Methane Pledge prior to COP27.

Shahriar thanked the US

government for delivering nearly 88 million Covid vaccine doses to Bangladesh, as well as the US humanitarian support to the Rohingyas and efforts to ensure repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar.

He also urged the US government to expedite the deportation of Bangabandhu's killer Rashed Chowdhury to Bangladesh, mentioning that the issue was of utmost importance to the people of Bangladesh and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He emphasised the conclusion of an extradition treaty between Bangladesh and US as early as possible.

Sherman lauded the contribution of Bangladeshi peacekeepers in global peacekeeping, and expressed condolences for the deaths of three Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers, who were killed in the line of duty in Central African Republic on October 4.

The Russia-Ukraine war and the global food and energy security were also discussed at the meeting.

Later that day, Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher, special assistant to the US president and also the incoming senior director for South Asia at the White House National Security Council, paid a courtesy call on the state minister at the Bangladesh embassy in Washington, DC.