

## UK slaps new sanctions on Russia & Iran

AFP, London

The UK yesterday announced new sanctions against senior Russian military commanders, as well as Iranians involved in the production and supplying of drones to target Ukraine.

The government said 12 Russian top brass would be subject to assets freezes and travel bans, including Major General Robert Baranov, who is said to be in charge of a unit programming and targeting cruise missiles.

The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said more than 6,000 Ukrainian civilians are thought to have been killed since the Russian invasion in February, mainly as a result of missile and artillery strikes.

The latest UK sanctions target four Iranians, include the managing director of the company that manufactures engines for drones used by Russia to attack Ukraine, he added.



A man walks in an empty park following a snowfall in Sofia, Bulgaria, yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## QATAR BRIBE PROBE

# EU parliament sacks VP Kaili

AFP, Strasbourg

The European Parliament yesterday sacked one of its own vice presidents amid corruption accusations allegedly linked to World Cup host Qatar, as the institution tries to contain the scandal.

The assembly's MEPs voted 625 to one to strip Greek socialist MEP Eva Kaili of her vice presidential role, despite her lawyer declaring that she was innocent and "has nothing to do with Qatar's bribes".

As the 44-year-old former TV news presenter sat in a Brussels jail cell, her colleagues in the Strasbourg parliament are scrambling to distance themselves from the taint of scandal. The parliament's president, Maltese conservative Roberta Metsola, called the vote after reaching agreement with the leaders of the parliament's political groupings, amid fears the scandal will spread.

Kaili was arrested last week during a series of raids by Belgian graft investigators on the homes and offices of several MEPs and their assistants or associates.

Belgian prosecutors said 600,000 euros (\$630,000) were found at the home of one suspect, 150,000 euros at the flat of an MEP and several hundred thousand euros in a suitcase in a hotel room. Some of these "bags of cash" were found in Kaili's home, a judicial source said, leading a judge to conclude that, as she had apparently been caught red-handed, her parliamentary immunity from prosecution would not apply.

A Belgian judicial source told AFP that investigators believe that figures representing Qatar had been paying off European politicians to burnish the country's image.

Qatar is a key energy supplier to Europe, and plays an important intermediary role in several diplomatic tangles, but it has also been criticised for the alleged mistreatment of migrant workers, most notoriously those who built the World Cup stadiums.

Kaili visited Qatar just before the competition and called it a "front-runner in labour rights", to the consternation of activists and some of her colleagues. She has also defended Qatar's quest to win EU visa waivers for its citizens.

Qatar has denied any involvement in the corruption.



# What is nuclear fusion?

## Harnessing the power of stars without harming nature

AFP, Washington

The US Department of Energy's nuclear fusion laboratory was set to officially announce a "major scientific breakthrough", as media report that scientists have finally surpassed an important milestone for the technology: getting more energy out than was put in. The announcement has the scientific community abuzz, as nuclear fusion is considered by some to be the energy of the future, particularly as it produces no greenhouse gases, leaves little waste and has no risk of nuclear accidents.

ENERGY OF THE STARS  
Fusion differs from fission, the technique currently used in nuclear power plants, by fusing two atomic nuclei instead of splitting one. In fact, fusion is the process that powers the sun. Two light hydrogen atoms, when they collide at very high speeds, fuse together into one heavier element, helium, releasing energy in the process. "Controlling the power source of the stars is the greatest technological challenge humanity has ever undertaken," tweeted physicist Arthur Turrell, author of "The Star Builders."

TWO DISTINCT METHODS  
Producing fusion reactions on Earth is only possible by heating matter to extremely high temperatures – over 100 million degrees Celsius (180 million Fahrenheit). "So we have to find ways to isolate this extremely hot matter from anything that could cool it down. This is the problem of containment," Erik Lefebvre, project leader at the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), told AFP.

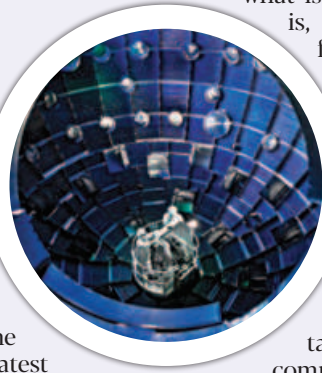
One method is to "confine" the fusion reaction with magnets. In a huge donut-shaped reactor, light hydrogen isotopes (deuterium and tritium) are heated until they reach the state of plasma, a very low density gas. Magnets confine the swirling plasma gas, preventing it from coming into contact

with the chamber's walls, while the atoms collide and begin fusing.

A second method is inertial confinement fusion, in which high energy lasers are directed simultaneously into a thimble-sized cylinder containing the hydrogen. Inertial confinement is used to demonstrate the physical principles of fusion, while magnetic confinement seeks to mimic future industrial-scale reactors.

STATE OF RESEARCH  
For decades, scientists have attempted to achieve what is known as "net energy gain" – that is, more energy is produced by the fusion reaction than it takes to activate it. According to reports by the Financial Times and the Washington Post, that will be the "major scientific breakthrough" announced Tuesday by the NIF. But Lefebvre cautions that "the road is still very long" before "a demonstration on an industrial scale that is commercially viable." He says such a project will take another 20 or 30 years to be completed. To get there, researchers must first increase the efficiency of the lasers and reproduce the experiment more frequently.

FUSION'S BENEFITS  
The NIF's reported success has sparked great excitement in the scientific community, which is hoping the technology could be a game changer for global energy production. Unlike fission, fusion carries no risk of nuclear accidents. "If a few lasers are missing and they don't go off at the right time, or if the confinement of the plasma by the magnetic field... is not perfect," the reaction will simply stop, Lefebvre says. Nuclear fusion also produces much less radioactive waste than current power plants, and above all, emits no greenhouse gases. "It is an energy source that is totally carbon-free, generates very little waste, and is intrinsically extremely safe," according to Lefebvre, who says fusion could be "a future solution for the world's energy problems."



# Govt to decide on proposal if BERC delays

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The BERC raised about 19.92 percent bulk power tariff on November 21 with effect from December 1.

Subsequently, six power distribution entities submitted their respective proposals to the BERC seeing a similar 19.44 percent hike in retail power tariff at the consumer level.

But within a week, the Cabinet on November 28 approved an

amendment to the BERC Ordinance 2022 to empower the government to set fuel tariffs on its own under special circumstances without waiting for the commission's public hearing and decision.

Nasrul Hamid said the government has been working to provide electricity at an affordable price.

"But the situation is not in the hands of the government as we have

to depend on the global market for primary fuel import," he added.

He, however, said the government is thinking of considering the petroleum fuel price adjustment in consistency with the global downtrend in energy prices.

"We've asked the officials to examine whether we could adjust prices every three months keeping in line with the global market," he added.

# Jamaat chief remanded

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Shafiqur from his home in the capital's Bashundhara area.

Rafat and one of his associates were arrested in Sylhet last month. Before that, Rafat's three other associates, who left home for hijrat, were arrested in the capital's Jatrabari area on November 1.

During interrogation, Rafat and the four other arrestees admitted that they were involved in Chhatra Shibir when they were students, CTTC officers said.

Before joining the new outfit Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya, Rafat was an active member of Al-Qaeda-inspired militant outfit Ansar Al Islam, said CTTC chief Asaduzzaman.

Rafat was the first among those who left home for hijrat in Sylhet region, Asaduzzaman said, adding

that he and 11 others went to a training camp in Bandarban, but he returned after failing to contact the top leaders of the new militant outfit and KNF.

Asaduzzaman said Rafat returned from Bandarban after taking permission from his father.

Intending to dodge the law enforcer, Shafiqur brought them back in two minibuses – one came to Dhaka and one other to Sylhet, he said.

Asked whether Jamaat leaders were being radicalised to join militancy, Asaduzzaman said, "We will interrogate [them]. The new militant outfit may have a mutual understanding with the Jamaat or may cooperate fully with Jamaat."

"A top leader of the outfit during interrogation revealed that the outfit had Jamaat's support," he added.

A Dhaka court yesterday placed

Shafiqur on a seven-day remand in a case filed earlier with Jatrabari Police Station under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury passed the order. Meanwhile in Rajshahi, Sub-Inspector Abu Haider and constable Ahad of Boalia Police Station were injured in an attack allegedly by Jamaat men.

Jamaat supporters marched in the city demanding immediate release of Shafiqur around 2:00pm, and as police tried to stop them, they thrown bricks at the law enforcers, injuring the duo, said Maharul Islam, officer-in-charge of Boalia Police Station.

Jamaat activists also marched in the capital's Mirpur-10 around 10:00am and held a rally for around four minutes in front of Al Helal Hospital, demanding Shafiqur's release, according to witnesses.

# Now 100 roads set to open

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3.5 metres wide, which increased the risks of crashes, said an additional chief engineer of the RHD, adding that most of those roads had been widened to 5.5 metres or more under different projects.

The development work will improve durability and strength of these roads, he said, wishing not to be named.

The RHD has a 22,476km road network in which there are 3,991km national highways, 4,897km regional highways and 13,588km district roads.

National highways connect the capital to divisional cities, sea ports, land ports and international

highways. Regional highways connect district towns to river ports and land ports. District roads link district towns with upazilas or one upazila with another.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on November 7 opened 100 new bridges. Those bridges are on regional highways and district roads. Some of those replaced old, risky Bailey bridges.

After the successful opening of the bridges, constructed spending Tk 906.32 crore, the authorities set the target for the roads.

The Prime Minister's Office yesterday wrote to the secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Division fixing December 21 to open

the roads, sources said.

On the day, the PM will address events in Tangail, Khulna and Rangpur from the Gono Bhaban, they added.

Meanwhile, the division will sit at a meeting today to prepare for the inauguration programme.

The RHD is one of the departments that received the highest allocation from the Annual Development Programme since Awami League came to power in 2009.

The department received Tk 2,430.90 crore in the 2011-12 fiscal year under the ADB. The amount rose to Tk 23,440.86 crore in the last fiscal year, according to the RHD's 2021-22 annual report.

# ‘Complete’ Roman-era cemetery found

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"So far, 51 Roman tombs dating from the first century AD have been found," including the 31 initially found by the construction workers, he said.

"We expect to find 75 to 80 tombs in total," Atal added, hailing the discovery of the "first complete Roman-era cemetery found in Gaza".

The 2,000-year-old burial site is located near the ruins of the Greek port of Anthedon, on the road leading to ancient Ascalon – now the Israeli city of Ashkelon by the Gaza border.

The antiquity ministry team has

been focusing on "documentation, research and protection of the site," Atal said. "Our aim is to ascertain... the causes of death."

Jamal Abu Reda, in charge of antiquities at the ministry, said the site is "of great importance and believed to be an extension of the site" of ancient Anthedon.

Archaeology is a highly political subject in Israel and the Palestinian territories, and some discoveries have been used to justify the territorial claims of each people.

In Gaza, both research and

## UN NATURE SUMMIT

# Still no major progress at COP15

AFP, Montreal

The world had just eight days to seal a historic deal to stem the destruction of nature. But half way into the COP15 biodiversity talks, there has been no major progress either on increased funding for conservation in developing nations, or towards a pledge to protect 30 percent of the world's land and seas.

The general view is that negotiations will get tough on Thursday, when the environment ministers of the 196 members of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will take over from their delegates in Montreal.

But the chances of ending on December 19 with agreement for an ambitious "peace pact with nature" – 20 objectives to stop the destruction of water, forests and living things by the end of the decade – will be undermined if the draft agreement remains as it is now.

Despite long hours put in by the 5,000 delegates since December 3, the text is far behind schedule, weighed down by dozens of points still under negotiation.

Only five of the 22 or 23 objectives envisaged have been settled.

Brazil on Saturday reiterated, on behalf of the African continent and 14 other countries including India and Indonesia, their demand for "financial subsidies of at least \$100 billion per year or one percent of world GDP until 2030."

That increase is deemed unrealistic by rich countries, whose aid earmarked for biodiversity in 2020 amounted to \$10 billion.

# UN: Aid staves off Somalia famine

AFP, Geneva



Humanitarian aid and support from local communities have helped avert a dreaded famine declaration in Somalia this year, but the situation remains "catastrophic," the UN said yesterday. The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA said the latest assessment found that, technically, Somalia was not yet in the grip of full-blown famine. But, he warned, that "does not mean that people are not experiencing catastrophic food shortages". Somalia has been wracked by decades of civil war, political violence and an Islamist insurgency. Millions of people are at risk of starvation across the wider Horn of Africa, in the grip of the worst drought in four decades after five consecutive failed rainy seasons wiped out livestock and crops.

# New Zealand set to ‘ban tobacco’

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand will phase in a near-total tobacco ban from next year, prohibiting anyone born after 2008 from ever purchasing cigarettes and reducing the amount of nicotine in products sold in the meantime. Under legislation passed by parliament yesterday, cigarettes will be much weaker, more difficult to buy and permanently unavailable to anyone currently under 14 years old. The legislation effectively raises the smoking age every year, and is designed to almost immediately reduce the number of people using tobacco products. As well as a steadily increasing age limit, the new law will slash the number of retailers able to sell tobacco products to a maximum of just 600 nationwide, a massive drop from the current figure of 6,000. It will also reduce the amount of nicotine in tobacco products.