

## CONGRESS SPEECH

## China's Xi spotlights nat'l security Calls for unification with Taiwan

AFP, Beijing

China's Xi Jinping yesterday emphasised the need to strengthen national security, in his first address since being handed a historic third term as the country's president.

Xi became China's most powerful leader in generations last week when he was re-anointed for another five years at the helm of the world's most populous nation, in a break with long-standing political precedent.

Xi, 69, yesterday thanked the thousands of delegates at Beijing's Great Hall of the People for giving him a third term, vowing to "take the needs of the country as my mission, and the interests of the people as my yardstick".

"Security is the bedrock of development, while stability is a prerequisite for prosperity," Xi told the assembled delegates at the NPC's closing session. "We must fully promote the modernisation of national defence and the armed forces, and build the people's armed forces into a Great Wall of steel that effectively safeguards national sovereignty, security and development interests."

He also called for consolidated stability in once-restive Hong Kong and unification with the self-ruled island of Taiwan. "The trust of the people is the greatest driving force pushing me forward, and also a heavy responsibility on my shoulders," he said. "The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has entered an irreversible historical process."

At a press conference in Beijing held to mark the closing of NPC, new premier Li Qiang warned that the country's five-percent growth target for 2023 would not be "easy" to achieve.



Anti-monarchy demonstrators protest against the Royal family outside Westminster Abbey in London yesterday, before members of Britain's Royal Family attend a Commonwealth Day service ceremony.

PHOTO: AFP

## RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

## European arms imports double in 2022: SIPRI

AFP, Stockholm

Arms imports into Europe almost doubled in 2022, driven by massive shipments to Ukraine, which has become the world's third-largest destination, researchers said yesterday.

With a 93 percent jump compared to the year before, imports have also increased due to accelerating military spending by European states including Poland and Norway, said the report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

And the rate of imports is expected to accelerate further,

it said. "The invasion has really caused a significant surge in demand for arms in Europe, which will have further effect and most likely will lead to increased arms imports by European states," Pieter Wezeman, a senior researcher at SIPRI, told AFP.

Excluding Ukraine, European imports have nevertheless already risen 35 percent in 2022, according to SIPRI data. Ukraine was until last year a negligible importer of arms.

But in 2022 it very quickly became the third-largest arms destination in the world, behind Qatar and India, as



Western nations delivered arms following Russia's invasion.

Ukraine alone accounted for 31 percent of arms transfers to Europe and eight percent of world deliveries overall, according to SIPRI's data.

Ukraine's imports, including donations, grew more than 60-fold last year, the institute found. The deliveries to Ukraine were mainly weapons

lifted from stockpiles.

Among them were some 230 artillery pieces from the US; 280 Polish armoured vehicles; and more than 7,000 British anti-tank missiles, as well as more newly produced pieces such as anti-aircraft systems, SIPRI said.

The world's top five exporters over the past five years remained the United States (40 percent); Russia (16 percent); France (11 percent); China (5 percent); and Germany (4 percent).

In its rankings of the global arms trade, the institute uses its own units of value, rather than dollars or euros.

## Army man killed

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Nazim died of bullet wounds on the spot.

Son of late Shamser Ali, Nazim was from Ghaghatpara village of Rangpur Sadar upazila. He had been serving Bangladesh Army for the last 30 years with the outmost honesty, dedication and professionalism, added the release.

Army chief Gen SM Shafiuddin Ahmed offered deep condolences to the family members of the slain army man.

KNA is the armed wing of the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) that had provided arms training to members of a new militant outfit called Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya in the hilly areas of Bandarban, the release added.

ISPR said the operatives of KNA recently sought to extort money from civilian contractors, suppliers and labourers engaged in the construction of Thanchi road and later threatened to stop work.

As the work was still being carried out under the army's supervision, the KNA men kidnapped 12 workers on March 11.

Of the workers, one was shot and four were still held hostage while seven were released in exchange for ransom, the press release said.

## We'll see

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whoever else does this should realise it."

If the government believes in transparency and fair polls, then it will be probably better not to do these things on the polling day. Because it will raise doubts. Many will think that this has been done for committing misdeeds," he added.

When journalists raised the issue of police barring reporters from entering polling centres in previous elections, Habibul said, "We will have to take it seriously if police do not allow journalists in even after they are granted permission by the Election Commission."

Journalists urged the EC to make sure that all journalists can enter polling stations without any obstacles. They also said journalists should be allowed to use motorbikes on the polling day, and the movement of all vehicles carrying newspapers should not be restricted during the election period.

They also called for including the media in the directives that list emergency services which would be kept out of the purview of the restriction on vehicular movement imposed during elections.

## Charges framed against

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At the beginning of the hearing yesterday, the prosecution explained the roles of the accused in the murder.

Public Prosecutor Abdur Rashid told reporters, "We appealed to the court to frame charges against the seven accused. After hearing, the court did so. We told the court that the murder was committed as per the plan when Babul was in Dhaka."

"Babul hired Musa, Bhola, Motaleb, and Wasim and carried out the murder after holding several meetings. Later, Babul tried to mislead the investigators by filing the case himself."

The PP also appealed to the court to move Babul to Chattogram Central Jail for smooth trial proceedings from Dhaka Central Jail.

The court said it would not pass any order on the appeal of the prosecution, but the accused could submit their statements before the court or the jail authorities.

In the nearly one-hour hearing, Shishir Monir, lawyer for Babul, told the court that "there is no sufficient evidence in the case to frame charges. Babul was the first plaintiff of the case, but his father-in-law lodged another case. The investigators submitted the

final report of the case and later filed the charge sheet of the case lodged by Babul."

The lawyer told the court that "the evidence of the second case [filed by Babul's father-in-law] cannot be considered in the first case and how come the statements given in the second case were added in the first case."

Shishir added that 11 people, who were the first witnesses in the case filed by Babul, testified in 2017 and again 2021 under section 161. "But there is a contradiction between two statements."

"Besides, there is record in the case dockets about the statements of 26 witnesses who gave their depositions soon after the murder. They did not mention Babul's name in the case," he added.

"Musa executed the plan but where is Musa? The PBI mentioned that the murder took place following an affair between Babul and one Gayetri. But where is she now?" he said.

In the 2,084-page charge sheet, the Police Bureau of Investigation made 97 people witnesses.

On June 5, 2016, Mitu was stabbed and shot dead when she was walking her son to his school bus stop at the port city's GEC intersection.

## Govt rolls back almost

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The austerity stance could have been continued for another six months at least, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

"I don't know how the government suddenly have the means to afford these non-essential expenses. The government's revenue collection is declining. The government is seeking funds to cover the budget deficit," he said.

More importantly, the economic storm has not blown over.

The global economic situation is the same as when the austerity stance was adopted as the volatility and risks stemming from the Ukraine war remain, Hussain said.

"Our crisis remains. Our dollar and revenue crisis remain. Everything is the same as before. The government should have been more restrained," said Mansur, a former economist of the International Monetary Fund.

As of March 7, foreign currency reserves stand at \$31.1 billion, enough

to cover about three months' import bill, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank. At the beginning of the fiscal year, reserves were about \$41.1 billion, an import cover of about six months.

In the first eight months of the fiscal year, inflation averaged 8.74 percent, way above the budgetary target of 5.6 percent, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The government never disclosed how much savings it made as a result of the austerity stance, according to Hussain.

"I don't think there were much savings. If there were, did we see its impact on inflation or dollar shortage? Inflation remains over 8 percent and the dollar shortage is there. Then what is triggering the relaxation of austerity?"

The relaxation of the austerity stance is sending out the wrong message to the government staff, he said. "Is this prudent when there are not enough dollars?"

## Tigers eye

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desperate to clinch a win in the third game. If they fail to do so, it will be the first time they have been whitewashed since they lost 3-0 to Australia in 2014.

Meanwhile, there were talks that newly-appointed head coach Chandika Hathurusingha may look to make changes to the playing eleven and test the bench strength. Uncapped players such as left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam, pacer Rejaur Rahman Raja and wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan Sohan will be hoping to feature for the first time this series.

The Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium surface will once also again feature prominently in discussions and it will be interesting to see whether the team management allows the batters to work on their batting with a sporting track.

## Keep watch

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protocol to the agreement on the movement of traffic in-transit between Bangladesh and Bhutan.

According to the draft, Bhutan could use Bangladesh's ports for importing and exporting goods. "Bhutan will be able to use our ports to transport goods to the country as per the agreement," he said, adding that Bhutan already has an agreement with neighbouring India.

"We've given Bhutan the facilities as it is a landlocked country. They don't have any seaport that is why they want to use our seaports," he said, adding that the transit route is fixed in the draft agreement.

In reply to another query, the cabinet secretary said the National Board of Revenue will fix the tax rate before the matter reaches the final stage. "As it is approved, now it will be sent to the NBR to fix the tax rate."

The cabinet also approved the draft Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority Act-2023 in principle.

The Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) under the planning ministry is responsible for managing procurement of government bodies. "The unit will be upgraded to an independent and full-fledged authority," he said.

When the CPTU was formed in 2002, the government procurement amount used to be roughly Tk 18,000 crore. In recent periods, the government procurement amount reached over Tk 2 lakh crore per year.

"It is difficult for the unit to handle the huge procurement activities. Sometimes they fail to give us the expected services. That is why the authority is being formed," said the cabinet secretary.

## AL's left partners

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In reply, Amu said the Islamist parties who have already expressed their willingness to join the 14-party combine can form a separate alliance, and that it might be included in the AL-led grand alliance.

Menon expressed his reservations about launching of electioneering by the AL unilaterally.

"The Awami League has already started its election campaign, and is seeking vote for 'boat'. Then where are we? Should we start campaigning on our own? Should we start seeking 'vote' for our electoral symbol?" he said.

Amu replied saying that the AL would contest the next general election with its 14-party partners, and that the sharing of seats would be finalised in a meeting between AL President Sheikh Hasina and the alliance partners.

"A lot of time is left to settle everything as the next national election is still eight months away," said a meeting source, quoting Amu as saying.

Samyabadi Dal General Secretary

## 'Fierce' battles rage

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failed to encircle it, reports Reuters.

"Wagner assault units are advancing from several directions, trying to break through our troops' defensive positions and move to the centre of the city," the Ukrainian military said in a morning briefing. "In fierce battles, our defenders are inflicting significant losses on the enemy," it added.

"All enemy attempts to capture the town are repelled by artillery, tanks, and other firepower," Ukraine's Colonel general Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of ground forces who has vowed not to withdraw, was quoted as saying by Ukraine's Media Military Centre.

Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin said on Sunday the situation was "tough, very tough".

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said late on Sunday his forces had killed more than 1,100 Russian soldiers in Bakhmut in less than a week, and wounded more than 1,500. Russia's defence ministry said its forces had killed more than 220 Ukrainian service members over the past 24 hours in the Donetsk region. Figures of enemy losses cannot be confirmed and neither side releases regular data about its own losses.

The International Criminal Court

## MONASTERY KILLINGS

## Myanmar rebels, junta trade blame

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar's junta and anti-coup fighters yesterday traded accusations over the killing of around 30 people who were sheltering in a monastery. The Southeast Asian country has been in turmoil since a coup two years ago, with the military fighting dozens of "People's Defence Forces" (PDFs) across much of the country. Local villagers and media have reported killing and burning sprees by junta forces in many parts of the country as they struggle to crush opposition to the coup that ousted San Suu Kyi's government. Two rebel groups operating around Shan state -- the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) and the Pa-O National Defence Force -- said soldiers entered Nam Neint village on Saturday. After ordering civilians sheltering in a monastery to come out, the soldiers shot dead 33 people, including three Buddhist monks, the KNDF said. Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun confirmed there had been clashes in Nam Neint village on Saturday and some anti-coup fighters had been killed. He also confirmed that some civilians had died in the village, but blamed their deaths on the local PDF fighters. Pictures posted on Facebook by the KNDF showed a bloody aftermath of the incident, with bodies on the ground, including some who appeared to be wearing the saffron robes of the monkhood. The Pa-O said junta troops had killed 22 civilians including three Buddhist monks.

## 45 YEARS ON DEATH ROW

## Japanese man, 87, granted retrial

AFP, Tokyo

Tokyo's High Court yesterday ordered a retrial for an 87-year-old former boxer, dubbed the world's longest-serving death row inmate, nearly six decades after he was convicted of murder. Lawyers for Iwao Hakamada left the court after a brief session and unfurled banners reading "retrial" as supporters shouted "Free Hakamada now!" "I was waiting for this day for 57 years and it has come," said Hakamada's sister Hideko, 90, who has campaigned tirelessly on her brother's behalf. "Finally a weight has been lifted from my shoulders," she said. Hakamada spent nearly five decades on death row, and was certified the world's longest-serving death row inmate, before a lower court ordered a retrial and freed him while his case proceeded.

Dilip Barua told the meeting that AL presidium member Mosharraf Hossain, a lawmaker from Chittagong-1, has announced that he won't contest the next national election and his son will run for MP.

"Why should it be the son of Mosharraf? Why will I not be given the nomination?" Dilip said.

In response, Amu said, "You were made a minister. We will have to make everybody in the alliance happy."

Expressing anger over the price hike of essentials, Tariqat Chairman Nazibul Bashar said the government's measures to bring the prices within the reach of the ordinary people are not enough.

"People don't want to hear the story of Russia-Ukraine war. It seems that the government has become hostage to businesspeople," he said.

After the meeting, Amu told reporters that no Islamist party would be included in the 14-party alliance.

About the next polls, the veteran AL leader said the election will be held on time as per the constitution regardless of whether or not the BNP would participate.

will open two cases against Russian officials over the invasion of Ukraine, the New York Times reported yesterday. A spokeswoman for the office of ICC prosecutor Karim Khan said it "offers no comment about this story."

Meanwhile, negotiations began between UN officials and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin yesterday on a possible extension to a deal allowing the safe export of grain from Ukraine's Black Sea ports, the Russian diplomatic mission in Geneva said.

## Five killed

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leak, following which the vehicle fell into a roadside ditch as the driver lost control of the vehicle, said the OC.

Dolena, Zarina, Rezia and Ashik were killed on the spot.

Five injured persons were rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH).

Akkas, who sustained serious injuries was being taken to Dhaka but died on way, said Mohammad Mainuddin, officer-in-charge of Trishal Police Station.

On information, police and members of Trishal Fire Service and Civil Defence recovered the bodies.

The bodies were handed over to their families, police said.