

CENTRAL ASIA'S DEVELOPMENT

Xi unveils grand plan

REUTERS, Xian

Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday unveiled a grand plan for Central Asia's development, from building infrastructure to boosting trade, taking on a new leadership role in a region that has traditionally been a Russian sphere of influence.

China is ready to coordinate development strategies with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and promote the modernisation of all, Xi said in an address to a China-Central Asia Summit in northwest China.

"This summit has added new impetus to the development and revitalisation of the six counties, and injected strong positive energy into regional peace and stability," Xi said later at a press conference with his Central Asian counterparts.

"We will jointly foster a new paradigm of deeply complementary and high-level win-win cooperation."

With its engagement, China has put itself at the forefront of the race for political influence and energy assets in the resource-rich region, with Russia distracted by its war in Ukraine and the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan diminishing the US presence in the region.

The five former Soviet republics, with a network of trade corridors, offer China alternative routes to transport fuel, food and other commodities in the event of disruptions elsewhere.

The pledges of support and cooperation at the two-day summit will present a contrast to a "negative" image of China invoked at a summit of Group of Seven leaders in Japan from yesterday.

Xi said China and the Central Asian countries should deepen trust and offer "clear and strong support" on core interests such as sovereignty, independence, national dignity and long-term development.



Demonstrators gesture during a protest against Arab normalisation with Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and the Arab League's reintegration of Syria, in the rebel-held city of Azaz, Syria yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SUDAN CONFLICT

Over 1m people displaced: UN

Air strikes hammer Khartoum

REUTERS, Geneva

More than a million people have been displaced by fighting in Sudan so far, including a quarter of a million refugees, a UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) spokesperson said yesterday.

The army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have been locked in weeks of conflict that has killed hundreds of people and turned the streets of the capital Khartoum into war zones.

The latest figure includes some 843,000 people displaced internally and around 250,000 people who have fled across Sudan's borders, UN refugee agency spokesperson Matthew Saltmarsh told a Geneva briefing.

Refugees have streamed into Sudan's

neighbours, including Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan, with their own poorly-funded humanitarian crises. Egypt has so far received the highest number of Sudanese refugees with around 110,000 arriving there since the conflict broke out last month, Saltmarsh added.

"Many of those who have approached us are in a distressed state having been exposed to violence or traumatic conditions in Sudan, and having suffered arduous journeys," Saltmarsh said. The pace has increased in recent weeks, he added, with some 5,000 arriving each day in Egypt.

Meanwhile, Sudan's capital Khartoum and sister city Bahri came under renewed air attack yesterday as the war between the army and paramilitary forces entered its

fifth week.

Mass looting by armed men and civilians alike is making life an even greater misery for Khartoum residents pinned down by fierce fighting between the regular military and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), witnesses said.

Army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan took the long-anticipated step of removing RSF chief Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, better known as Hemedti, from his post as his deputy on the ruling Sovereign Council.

The two had run the council since 2019 when they overthrew strongman President Omar al-Bashir amid mass protests against his rule, before staging a coup in 2021 as a deadline neared to hand power to civilians for a transition towards free elections.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Half of world's large lakes drying up: study

REUTERS, London



More than half of the world's large lakes and reservoirs have shrunk since the early 1990s, chiefly because of climate change, intensifying concerns about water for agriculture, hydropower and human consumption, a study published on Thursday found. A team of researchers reported that some of the world's most important freshwater sources - from the Caspian Sea between Europe and Asia to South America's Lake Titicaca - lost water at a cumulative rate of around 22 gigatonnes per year for nearly three decades. That's about 17 times the volume of Lake Mead, the US' largest reservoir. Fangfang Yao, a surface hydrologist at University of Virginia who led the study in journal Science, said 56 percent of decline in natural lakes was driven by climate warming and human consumption, with warming "the larger share of that". Scientists generally think the world's arid areas will become drier under climate change, and wet areas will get wetter, but the study found significant water loss even in humid regions.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Nearly 337m life years lost: WHO

AFP, Geneva

Nearly 337 million life years were lost in the two first years of the Covid-19 pandemic, as millions of people died prematurely, the World Health Organization said yesterday. The UN health agency's annual world statistics report also showed a swelling threat from non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. The most dramatic finding, based on data up to 2022, was the estimate of how many years of life Covid had taken, WHO said. The pandemic wreaked global devastation and officially killed nearly 7 million people, with the true figure believed to be closer to 20 million. The WHO report lays bare how the broader impact of the crisis cut short the lives of millions of people. While the WHO officially registered 5.4 million deaths, its excess mortality data shows around 14.9 million actually likely died due to the crisis over that period.

A shocking savagery

FROM PAGE 12

threw many bodies into the river. People of Chuknagar and the nearby villages became so frightened that they never ventured near these rivers for the rest of the war," he said.

As Chuknagar, now a small town, was located near a navigable river channel and was too remote to be occupied by the Pakistan army, refugees considered it an ideal route for their journey to the Indian border.

Thousands of refugees started to gather at Chuknagar at the beginning of May 1971. On the 18th and 19th of May, thousands of people from Bagerhat, Rampal, Morelganj, Sharankhola, Mongla, Dakope, Batiaghata, Chalna and even many people from as far as Faridpur and Barishal started to come to Chuknagar.

They used to rest at Chuknagar after crossing the Bhadra before continuing their journey to the Indian border.

At that time, Golam Hossain, a Muslim League leader, was the chairman of the Atolia union council. When Golam (now deceased) learnt about the massive gathering of refugees at Chuknagar, he informed the Pakistan army stationed in Satkhira district. They sent a platoon of soldiers on May 20 to conduct a raid at Chuknagar, locals said.

Shushila Bairagi, now in her 90s, is one of the survivors who lost seven of her family members on that fateful day.

She said almost all the inhabitants of her village, named Aushkhali in Khulna's Batiaghata, started leaving their homes on the 4th of Jaishtha (the second month of summer according to the Bangla calendar) and boarded three boats.

Once they reached Chuknagar, they wanted to have their meal and start for the border, she said.

"As soon as we started preparation for cooking, the Pakistan army invaded the area from the west. They were firing at us and we were running to save our lives. My brother-in-law



was hit by a bullet and instantly fell on the ground," she said.

"All of a sudden, my son and my son-in-law got hit by bullets. I went to my son-in-law and saw his lifeless body. Then I ran to my son and found him dead. At that time, we could not think of anything else other than saving our lives. The entire field was covered with bodies," she added.

(The article was translated from Bangla to English by Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan)

Two Malaysian high officials

FROM PAGE 12

faced unemployment since their arrival in Malaysia," the report said.

Reports have emerged of hundreds of South Asian migrants in Malaysia claiming that recruitment agents enticed them with promises of job opportunities in exchange for exorbitant fees.

In mid-April, the Malaysian authorities recalled and remanded two officers from its high commission in Dhaka on suspicion of receiving bribes of over Tk 7.5 crore for issuing visas to Bangladeshi workers and tourists.

The Malaysiakini report quoted insiders as saying that Zaini's internal investigation also revealed that a number of lower-ranking staffers did the bidding of senior officials, and the staffers had come forward to name those who had given the orders.

Yesterday, news portal

FreeMalaysiaToday reported that at least 120 Bangladeshi workers who have been stranded without jobs since their arrival four months ago were absorbed by a new firm "with their wages paid".

The report also said several local agents are being investigated over dubious foreign worker quota approvals.

Earlier this month, Malaysia's Human Resources Minister V Sivakumar confirmed that five of his staff members had been sacked. He had said the sacking was to ensure that the ministry functions effectively and smoothly.

Last month, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) arrested three of his aides in connection with an investigation into the recruitment of foreign workers. On April 16, Sivakumar also gave his statement to MACC on the matter.

BNP making preparations

FROM PAGE 1

ambassadors, Quader said, "No matter how many complaints the BNP makes, I want to assure our foreign friends that the next election will be free, fair, unbiased and participatory. You do not have to worry about that."

The AL has been holding events that "coincide" with BNP programmes since December 10, when the opposition party held a large rally in the capital.

Quader yesterday said, "Those who are organising programmes blocking traffic will face people's wrath. We will break the arms that set fire.

"The warm up session is going on. The final game is yet to be played," he said.

Awami League Presidium Member Quamrul Islam said, "The caretaker government issue is dead. People do not want restoration of the caretaker government system."

The Jubo League also held a rally in the city's Kajla area.

AL leader

FROM PAGE 12

and hacked at his neck with sharp weapons in front of a mosque in Alekhachar village when Enamul was returning home after Juma prayers.

He was first taken to the Cumilla Sadar Upazila Health Complex and later shifted to Cumilla Medical College Hospital where he died around 3:00pm, Wadud added.

The body was kept at the hospital morgue.

Ahmed Niaz Pabel, joint general secretary of Sadar Upazila AL, said there was a longstanding dispute between Enamul and Kazi Zahir over establishing supremacy at the Alekhachar madrasa, which was established by Enamul.

Besides, Zahir had been trying to take over the madrasa for a long time, he said.

Yesterday, a video clip of Kazi Zahir consuming drugs and gambling went viral on social media. Our Cumilla correspondent obtained a copy of the clip.

Pabel claimed that Zahir blamed Enamul for the release of the video. For this, Jamaat-Shibir activists, including his brother Amanul, stabbed Enamul to death in Zahir's presence.

Inspector Mamun further said additional police personnel were deployed in the area. "The attackers went into hiding after the incident. A drive is underway to arrest the accused."

Investigate allegations of irregularities

FROM PAGE 1

example of disregard for "institutional responsibility and accountability".

"Although allegations of institutionalising irregularity and corruption in Dhaka Wasa through misuse of power were raised continuously, no visible progress to prevent these was seen," he said.

"With the influence of an invisible power, such waywardness has been established as a model of disregard for accountability," he added.

The TIB executive director added that the allegations made by the Wasa chairman are similar to what the TIB

found in a study it conducted in 2019.

In line with the study findings, TIB had earlier brought the issue of "institutionalised graft" within Wasa to the attention of the authorities concerned, stressing that Dhaka residents were deprived of services from the agency as a result, said Iftekharuzzaman, adding that the situation has not changed.

He added that the city dwellers do not get water supply from Wasa as per their demand. Moreover, they have to spend extra to purify the water supplied by Wasa.

It is imperative to control graft in

Wasa to get rid of this problem, he added.

Iftekharuzzaman added that although there is a court order to probe an allegation of embezzlement of Tk 132 crore against nine people, including the Wasa MD, there is no visible progress in this regard.

Dhaka Wasa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan runs the administration in an autocratic manner, bypassing the board, alleged board Chairman Gholam Mostafa in a letter to the secretary of the local government ministry on Wednesday.

Imran refuses home search

FROM PAGE 1

The standoff is the latest in a tussle between former cricket star Khan, 70, and the powerful military that has deepened political instability in the South Asian nation of 220 million.

Khan's home is in the Zaman Park neighbourhood of Lahore and was the site of pitched battles in March between his supporters and police who had tried to arrest Khan for not showing up in court.

Khan was eventually arrested on May 9 on graft charges, which he denies, and released on bail that expires this month.


His arrest triggered a wave of violence by supporters who attacked government buildings, public properties and military installations, including its headquarters and the house of a military commander in Lahore.

Mir said there were no plans to

rearrest Khan.

Lahore police chief Bilal Kamyana said police had arrested 14 suspects involved in the attack on the commander's house as they tried to escape Zaman Park.

A government statement said the team handed over all the evidence about the suspects to the administration of Zaman Park. It said a list of 2,200 suspects involved in the violence was also handed over to Khan.



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