

## NAGORNO-KARABAKH Almost all ethnic Armenians fled

AFP, Kornidzor

The flood of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh dwindled to a trickle yesterday as Armenia said nearly the entire population of the breakaway territory had already fled after Azerbaijan seized back control.

An AFP journalist at the Kornidzor crossing into Armenia saw only several ambulances arrive as border guards said they were waiting for a final few buses.

In the nearest town of Goris, hundreds of exhausted refugees waited amongst their baggage in the central square for the government to offer accommodation.

Azerbaijan's lightning military takeover of the ethnic Armenian enclave last week sparked a sudden exodus that has rewritten the centuries-old ethnic makeup of the disputed region.

Armenia said yesterday 100,417 people from an estimated population of 120,000 had fled since the breakaway region saw its decades-long fight against Azerbaijani rule end in sudden defeat.

Artak Beglaryan, a former separatist official, said that according to unofficial information "the last groups" of Nagorno-Karabakh residents were on their way to Armenia yesterday.

"At most a few hundred persons remain, most of whom are officials, emergency services employees, volunteers, some persons with special needs," he wrote on social media.

Yerevan has accused Azerbaijan of conducting a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" to clear Nagorno-Karabakh of its Armenian population.

But Baku has denied the claim and has publicly called on the Armenian residents of the territory to stay and "reintegrate" into Azerbaijan.

The United Nations has said it will send a mission to Nagorno-Karabakh this weekend, mainly to assess humanitarian needs, the first time the international body has had access to the region in about 30 years.

France lashed out at Azerbaijan for only allowing the mission in after most residents had already fled.



Migrants cross the Rio Grande amid strong currents from Mexico in Eagle Pass, Texas, US, on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Moscow may annex more Ukrainian regions

Says Medvedev; Africa interested in making Ukrainian weapons, claims Kyiv

AFP, Kyiv

Russia's former leader Dmitry Medvedev suggested yesterday that Moscow may annex more regions of Ukraine, as he marked one year since the Kremlin claimed four Ukrainian territories as its own.

Moscow held elections in the four regions this month, but does not fully control any of them and is currently battling a Ukrainian counteroffensive to take them back.

"The special military operation will continue until the complete destruction of the Nazi regime in Kyiv," said Medvedev, who now serves as deputy chair of Russia's Security Council.

"Victory will be ours. And there will be more new regions within Russia," he said.

Russia uses the term "new regions" to refer to the Ukrainian territories of Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson that Moscow claimed to annex last September.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said at the first International Defence Industries Forum in Kyiv that African countries are interested in not just buying weapons from Kyiv but manufacturing them.

Officials from over 30 countries and 250 defence firms gathered for the forum, which was held as Ukraine seeks to attract weapons manufacturers to bolster its domestic arms industry. While Ukraine was not currently able to sell any weapons to Africa, African countries were interested in producing Ukrainian

weapons and ammunition on their own territory, Kuleba said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky opened Kyiv's first International Defence Industries Forum in a bid to attract more manufacturers to build arms in Ukraine.

"Our first task is to win this war and return a lasting and, most importantly, reliable peace to our people. We will accomplish this task through our cooperation with you," Zelensky said in a speech at the opening on Friday.

"We are interested in localising the production of equipment necessary for our defence... and advanced defence systems used by our soldiers that give Ukraine the best results at the front today," he said.



PHOTO: REUTERS

A passenger plane passes in front of the Harvest supermoon as it makes its landing approach towards Heathrow airport, London, Britain on Friday.

## There could be a legal way out

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without the court's consultation. It is only a matter of government decision, he added.

The government can make executive decisions for the greater good of the state, or even of individuals, he said. "If the government wants, it can let her go abroad right away."

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumdar said, "First, the government can declare Khaleda Zia's home or hospital cabin as a sub-jail. Then when Khaleda applies for bail, the attorney-general's office will not oppose it. Once she gets bail, there should be no bar on her travel abroad."

According to a Supreme Court lawyer, who requested anonymity, the government can issue a similar executive order letting her leave the country as per section 401 (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedures, which states: "When any person has been sentenced to punishment for an offence, the Government may at any time without

conditions or upon any conditions which the person sentenced accepts, suspend the execution of his sentence or remit the whole or any part of the punishment to which he has been sentenced."

The government can allow this without resorting to legal complications, and it can even waive her prison sentence, the lawyer says.

In a recent interview with Voice of America, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Khaleda would have to return to jail and get permission from the court if she is to travel out of the country.

The government on March 25, 2020, issued an executive order suspending Khaleda's prison sentence and releasing her from jail on the condition that she stay in her Gulshan house and not leave the country.

The BNP chief landed in jail on February 8, 2018, after a special court sentenced her to five years in prison on corruption charges. The High Court later raised the sentence to 10 years.

The BNP chairperson's

family members fear that her condition can deteriorate anytime as she has liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, kidney diseases, and problems in her lung, heart and eyes.

She remains admitted to the Evercare Hospital since August 9. In recent days, she was taken to the coronary care unit three times.

Meanwhile, Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday told a reporter that the decision on Khaleda's treatment abroad will be made today.

On September 5, Khaleda's brother Shamim Iskandar submitted an application to the home ministry, seeking her unconditional release and permission to take her abroad for physiotherapy at an "advanced medical centre" on an urgent basis to save her life.

In the letter, Iskandar wrote that modern treatment for his sister's liver and heart problems is not available in Bangladesh.

The home ministry forwarded the letter to the law ministry.

## HAZE, POOR AIR QUALITY

## Malaysia blames Indonesian fires

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Hundreds of forest fires in Indonesia have caused haze that has worsened air quality in parts of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur's top environment official has said, a claim Jakarta denied yesterday.

Outbreaks of smog-belching forest fires in 2019 caused Malaysia to say it would pressure Indonesia to combat the annual problem, which is often caused by blazes lit to clear agricultural land.

Malaysia's Department of Environment director-general Wan Abdul Latiff Wan Jaffar said the fires were worsening air pollution on the country's west coast and in Sarawak on the Malaysian part of Borneo island. "Overall air quality in the country shows deterioration," he said in a statement issued on Friday.

## PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

## The Maldives votes in shadow of India-China power play

AFP, Male

The Maldives voted yesterday to decide its next president in an election seen as a referendum on whether to hitch its fortunes to China or India, both vying for influence in the tropical paradise.

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih faces an uphill battle to secure a second mandate after working to improve strained relations with New Delhi, the archipelago nation's traditional benefactor.

Frontrunner Mohamed Muizzu helms a party that presided over an influx of Chinese investment money when it last held power and has signalled a return to Beijing's orbit if he wins.

Muizzu won the election's first round earlier this month, taking 46 percent of the vote but finishing ahead of Solih by barely 15,000 ballots and short of the absolute majority needed to win outright.

The Maldives sits in a strategically vital position in the middle of the Indian Ocean, astride one of the world's busiest east-west shipping lanes.

Muizzu's party was an eager recipient of financial largesse from China's Belt and Road infrastructure programme.

His mentor, former president Abdulla Yameen, borrowed heavily from China for construction projects and spurned India.

Solih was elected in 2018 on the back of discontent with Yameen's increasingly autocratic rule, accusing him of pushing the country into a Chinese debt trap.

Yameen's turn towards Beijing had also alarmed New Delhi, which shares concerns with the United States and its allies at China's growing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean.

India is a member of the strategic Quad alliance alongside the United States, Australia and Japan.

But Solih's restoration of the Maldives' traditional posture has itself proved controversial, with many in the archipelago disapproving of India's outsized political and economic clout.

Muizzu has vowed if elected to free his mentor Yameen, currently serving an 11-year sentence for corruption on the same prison island where he had jailed many of his political opponents during his tenure.

The 45-year-old emerged as a candidate after Yameen's conviction barred the former president from running for public office.

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