

Myanmar rebels claim gains in offensive against junta

AFP, Yangon

An alliance of Myanmar ethnic minority groups said it made more gains in its offensive against the ruling junta yesterday, with the regime vowing it would hit back at the biggest military challenge it has faced since it seized power.

Fighting has raged for a week across a wide area of northern Shan state near the China border, forcing more than 23,000 people from their homes, according to the UN.

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA) say they have captured dozens of outposts and four towns and blocked vital trade routes to China.

TNLA fighters seized an outpost from the military near the town of Namhkam near the China border yesterday, the group told AFP. The



military had called in air and artillery strikes, a TNLA spokesman said.

The MNDAA said on its media channel that its fighters had made gains in battles in the Kokang region, around 100 kilometres (60 miles) to the east.

A junta spokesman on Thursday dismissed as "propaganda" claims that the alliance had captured several towns in Shan state.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said the military "will launch counter-attacks" against the groups, in comments carried by the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper yesterday.

A junta spokesman said on Wednesday that the military had lost control of Chinshwehaw town, a major trade hub on the border with China's Yunnan province.

A resident in Hsenwi, a strategic transport node around 90 kilometres (55 miles) from Chinshwehaw, told AFP that locals were hiding in their homes as clashes raged.

"It's chaos – neither the military nor the alliance groups are in control of the town," the resident told AFP by phone, requesting anonymity to protect their safety.

"There is fighting every day, with heavy artillery shelling and air strikes as well," the resident added.

Govt filing 'ghost cases'

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Claiming himself innocent, Khasru told the court that he was not involved in the incident. He said police implicated him in the murder just to harass him.

The BNP leader said false cases are being filed to steal votes in the next general election so that the government can stay in power.

"The case filed against me is not the first false case. Thousands of such 'ghost cases' have been filed. A new word 'ghost case' has been added to the dictionary. This word is not used anywhere in the world," he added.

The BNP leader said "Why would we resort to violence? We don't need to commit violence... Lakhs of people gather at our rallies spontaneously... It is a pity that the government has destroyed the state institutions."

Detectives arrested Khasru from a house in the capital's Gulshan around 1:00am yesterday, hours after picking up Swapan from the same area.

According to Dhaka Metropolitan Police, over 2,100 people were arrested in the capital in 12 days from October 21. A total of 66 cases were filed during the same period over the clashes on October 28 and violence, vandalism, and arson on the following days.

Police filed a case with Paltan



A Palestinian woman is lifted way in her wheelchair following an Israeli air strike on Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, amid the ongoing battles between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas. PHOTO: AFP

Time running out to prevent Gaza 'genocide'

Say UN-mandated experts

AFP, Geneva

A group of UN-mandated human rights experts, including the special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, said Thursday "time is running out to prevent genocide and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza", which Israel called Hamas "propaganda".

Israel has heavily bombarded Gaza after Hamas carried out an attack last month.

The Hamas-run Gaza health ministry says more than 9,000 people have been killed in Israel's bombing campaign, mostly women and children.

"We remain convinced that the Palestinian people are at grave risk of genocide," the experts said in a joint statement.

"Israel's allies also bear responsibility and must act now to prevent its disastrous course of action."

UN special rapporteurs are unpaid, independent figures mandated by the Human Rights Council. They do not speak for the United Nations but report their findings to it as part of the council's fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms.

"The situation in Gaza has reached a catastrophic tipping point," the experts said, warning of the "dire need" for food, water, medicine, fuel and essential supplies and the risk of looming health hazards.

The statement was signed by Francesca Albanese, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

The other signatories were the special rapporteurs on safe drinking water; food; physical and mental health; internally displaced persons; freedom of expression; and on contemporary racism.

Israel's embassy in Geneva said on X, formerly Twitter, that it was "deplorable and deeply concerning" that UN special procedure mechanisms "repeated propaganda" led by Hamas.

The UN experts called for the immediate release of all civilians being held captive since the Hamas attack.

"All parties must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law," they said.

"We demand a humanitarian ceasefire to ensure that aid reaches those who need it the most. A ceasefire also means channels of communication can be opened to ensure the release of hostages," the experts said.

Gaza's Hamas-ruled government said 195 people were killed in two days of Israeli strikes on Jabalia, Gaza's largest refugee camp, with hundreds more missing and wounded.

Bhutan calls elections for January

AFP, Thimphu

Bhutan said yesterday it would stage only the fourth general election in its history in January, with the incoming prime minister expected to prioritise happiness on par with the economy.

Wedged between China and India, the tiny Himalayan kingdom is famed for its philosophy of "Gross National Happiness", which sees the country benchmark itself on citizen wellbeing instead of economic growth.

The "Land of the Thunder Dragon" has been governed for the past five years by Prime Minister Lotay Tshering.

Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck appointed a caretaker government on Wednesday after dissolving the lower house of parliament ahead of the vote.

Delhi blanketed by toxic haze

Some schools shut

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's capital New Delhi was wrapped in a thick layer of toxic haze yesterday and some schools were ordered closed as the air quality index (AQI) plummeted to the "severe" category.

New Delhi again topped a real-time list of the world's most polluted cities compiled by Swiss group IQAir, which put the Indian capital's AQI at 640 in the "hazardous" category yesterday, followed by 335 in the Pakistani city of Lahore. Regional officials said a seasonal combination of lower temperatures, a lack of wind and crop stubble burning in neighbouring farm states had caused a spike in air pollutants.

Many of New Delhi's 20 million residents complained of irritation in the eyes and itchy throats with the air turning a dense grey as the AQI hovered around 480 in some monitoring stations. An AQI of 0-50 is considered good while anything between 400-500 affects healthy people and is a danger to those with existing diseases.

"In my last 24 hours duty, I saw babies coughing, children coming with distress and rapid breathing," Aheed Khan, a Delhi-based doctor, said on social media platform X. There were fewer people in the city's parks such as Lodhi Garden and India Gate, popular with joggers. Residents snapped up air purifiers. One service centre for the appliances said there was a shortage of new filters and fresh stocks were expected on Monday.

5 civilians killed in blast targeting Pakistan police

21 people injured

AFP, Peshawar

A bomb blast targeting a Pakistan police van in northwestern Pakistan yesterday killed five civilians and wounded 21 people, officials said.

The attack happened in Dera Ismail Khan, a city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province near the Afghan border where militancy has spiked in recent months. "The bomb was planted in a motorcycle. The target of the blast was a police van," Zafar Islam, a senior government official in the district, told AFP. "Five people have been killed. All those killed were civilians." A woman and a seven-year-old child and eight police personnel were among the wounded, he said.

Bilal Faizi, a spokesperson for Rescue 1122, confirmed the blast and the number of casualties. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack but Pakistan's home-grown Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (ITP) movement is active in the region. The group has been emboldened by the return to power of the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2021. Islamabad regularly accuses its neighbour of harbouring militants, a charge Afghanistan denies. They have largely focused on targeting security forces, with civilians sometimes caught up in the violence. A caretaker government led by Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has been running the South Asian country since parliament was dissolved on August 9.

Temporarily shut RMG factories to reopen today

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Nearly 500 factories in Ashulia, Konabari, Gazipur, Mirpur, Mouchak and Savar areas were closed due to the unrest that also continued yesterday.

In Savar, several thousand workers from some factories staged a demonstration blocking a road in Ashulia's Norshinghopur for around half an hour yesterday morning. The workers burnt tyres on the road, said witnesses.

Police said some factories in Ashulia were kept open on the weekend yesterday. Protesting the move, some workers demonstrated at 8:00am.

On information, police went there, used water cannons and lobbed

teargas to disperse the workers, said Sarwar Alam, superintendent of Ashulia Industrial Police-1.

Garment workers have been demonstrating demanding a hike in their wage as prices of daily commodities and house rent went up abnormally and the time has come for a revision of their salary.

Trade union leaders have been suggesting immediate announcement of an acceptable minimum wage by the government.

"The only solution to quell the unrest is to announce the wage board for the workers as early as possible," said Towhidur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Apparels Workers Federation.

Nazma Akter, president of

Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, suggested announcing the wage board quickly to bring back normalcy in the garment sector.

The board already held five meetings and the owners' representative proposed Tk 10,400 as minimum monthly salary for the workers. Currently, the minimum salary for them is Tk 8,000.

The workers' representative proposed Tk 20,393 as minimum wage for the workers.

State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Monnujan Sufian at a press briefing on Thursday hinted that the new wage structure may be fixed in a meeting on November 7 with an acceptable rise in wage.

Delhi weather adds to misery

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ahead of the Sri Lanka fixture. However, it was not meant to be as infamous weather in the Indian capital came in the way.

Bangladesh team director Khaled Mahmud stated that players suffered breathing difficulties during their outing in the city on Thursday, hence the team management opted to defer the training session.

"Because we have two more practice days before the match [against Sri Lanka], we have time to see if the weather improves. We might have to train tomorrow [today], but we don't want any of our players to suffer on fitness ground," Mahmud told reporters.

In recent days, the city has been grappling with hazardous air quality, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) hitting critical levels, far beyond what is considered unhealthy. It led to New Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal declaring on Thursday that

all government and private primary schools in the city will be closed for the next two days.

Yesterday's 24-hour average AQI was 261 and it is predicted to worsen in the following days. Despite the inclement weather, members of the Bangladesh squad went to offer Friday prayers at the Shahi Masjid near the team hotel. Skipper Shakib, Mahmudullah Riyad, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, and others wore face masks as precaution.

Things have not been going well in the Bangladesh camp since their repeated failures in this World Cup. Sorely needing a break from the dreary atmosphere, a trip around the city could have done wonders to their mood but all Bangladesh players resorted to confining themselves to their hotel rooms.

"We don't feel like going out these days. When the team perform badly, as a player, it's always

difficult to feel good. Things are not going in our favour but we are trying our best," a Bangladesh player, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star.

However, few of those who did venture outdoors to briefly stroll around had to deal with questions about their abysmal show in the tournament so far.

Another cricketer, also requesting anonymity, said, "Wherever we go, once people notice us, the first question they ask is, 'Why are you guys playing so bad?'"

"It's not that they are saying it in a negative tone as they are showing sympathy towards us, but at times it doesn't feel good as a player. It's a long tournament and it is important to have a good mental state to play well. We mostly try to talk with our family members and video-call them. That is the only way we are trying to ease this situation."

Commonwealth likely to send assessment

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The Commonwealth is sending a pre-election assessment mission after the same type of mission from the European Union and the US has already visited Bangladesh ahead of the next polls.

The EU exploratory mission visited Bangladesh from July 6-22 while the US joint mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) visited Bangladesh from October 8-11.

Based on the report of exploratory mission, the EU decided not to send a full observer mission. The EU, however, later said that they would send a four-member observer team to monitor the polls.

The US has yet to declare whether it will send a full mission

or not. It, however, has made five recommendations as a roadmap for progress toward credible, inclusive, participatory, and nonviolent elections.

The recommendations include moderating rhetoric and engaging in open and substantive dialogue on key election issues, protecting freedom of expression, and ensuring an open civic space where dissent is respected.

Meanwhile, Election Commission officials said that they are planning to invite international observers from 43 countries and the secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The EC would also send invitations to members of the Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia

(FEMBoSA). Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the members of the organisation.

During the last election, 38 observers from the Commonwealth, OIC, and Philippines-based Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA), among others came to Bangladesh on EC's invitation.

Besides, 62 foreigners and 69 Bangladeshis in different foreign missions worked as international observers in the 2018 election.

According to EC sources, 169 international observers monitored the 2018 election, compared to 593 in 2008 and 225 in 2001.