

DNIPRO EAST BANK
Ukraine carries out 'successful' attacks

Downs nine of 10 Russian drones over Mykolayiv

AGENCIES

Ukraine said yesterday it had carried out a series of successful attacks on the Russian-occupied eastern bank of the Dnipro river, days after Moscow admitted Kyiv's forces had gained a foothold there.

A sustained Ukrainian breakthrough across the frontline river would mark a significant tactical success for Kyiv, whose wider counteroffensive has so far failed to turn the tide of the 21-month war.

"The Defence Forces of Ukraine conducted a series of successful operations on the left bank of the Dnipro River, along the Kherson front," Ukraine's Marine Corps said in a statement on social media.

"In cooperation with other units of the Defence Forces, (the marines) managed to gain a foothold on several bridgeheads," the statement added.

The statement said more than 1,000 Russian forces were killed during the operations and that over 1,200 pieces of hardware had been destroyed, claims that AFP could not independently verify.

In other developments, Ukraine's air defences shot down nine out of 10 Russian drones overnight over the southern Mykolayiv and Odesa regions and also near Zhytomyr in the centre and in the Khmelnytskyi region in the west of the country, the air force said yesterday.

Russian and Ukrainian forces have been entrenched on opposite sides of the Dnipro since Moscow withdrew from the western part of Kherson region last November, in an embarrassing setback for the Kremlin.



A man evacuates a wounded girl after Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, amid ongoing battles between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas.

PHOTO: AFP

WHO voices concern over spread of disease in Gaza

More than 70,000 cases of acute respiratory infections, over 44,000 cases of diarrhoea recorded

REUTERS, Geneva

The World Health Organization said yesterday it was very worried about the spread of disease in Gaza as weeks of Israeli bombardments have led to the population crowding into shelters with scarce food and clean water.

"We are extremely concerned about the spread of disease when the winter season arrives," said Richard Peepern, WHO Representative in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

He said that more than 70,000 cases of acute respiratory infections and over 44,000 cases of diarrhoea had been recorded, figures significantly higher than expected.

WHO has previously warned of "worrying trends" in the spread of disease in Gaza, where bombardments and a ground offensive have disrupted the health system, access to clean water and caused people to crowd into shelters.

The start of the rainy season and the possibility of flooding has also increased fears that the densely populated enclave's sewage system will be overwhelmed and disease will spread.

The absence of fuel already has forced the shutdown of sewage pumping stations and desalination plants, increasing the risk of water contamination and the outbreak of disease.

The United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said yesterday that about 813,000 internally displaced people are staying in at least 154 shelters run by UNRWA, the UN Palestinian refugee agency.

"Overcrowding is leading to the spread of disease, including acute respiratory illness and diarrhea, raising environmental and health concerns," OCHA warned.

Civilians in Gaza also faced "the immediate possibility of starvation" as food and water have become scarce, the WFP warned.

A trickle of humanitarian aid arriving via Egypt has done little to remedy the shortages, made worse by power cuts and a lack of fuel for generators.

Farmers pay the price of progress

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Zahidul Miah, also from the same village, said only a handful of people got work opportunities at the project site, despite the assurance that none of us would remain unemployed.

Over the past decade till March this year, industrialisation has eaten up some 7,413 acres of arable lands, including the those acquired for the economic zone, in Araihaazar upazila, according to the Department of Agriculture Extension.

"The loss of such huge tracts of farmland is alarming," said Rafur Rabbi, senior vice president of the Narayanganj Nagarik Committee.

"Economic zones are essential for the country's economic growth, but so are farmlands, canals, and waterbodies. The low-income groups, especially farmers, were directly affected by the project. The authorities should have made alternative arrangements for their livelihoods."

Meanwhile, BEZA officials told this correspondent that around one lakh people would get employment opportunities after the economic zone starts functioning in full swing.

Contacted, BEZA Executive Chairman Shaikh Yusuf Harun said those affected would get employed once the foreign companies start their production.

"There is even a plan to set up training centres in the project area to enhance workers' skills. The project's infrastructural work will be completed by 2026."

Waterlogging has become another major problem in the area since canals and waterbodies were filled up to facilitate the project's infrastructural construction.

The filling up of the Dewrakhali canal has been causing long-term waterlogging problems in the area, villagers said.

Visiting Maizpara recently, this correspondent found many

homesteads inundated.

Momotaj Begum, 55, said, "The entire area gets waterlogged when it rains heavily. Even if we want to visit our neighbours, we have to make a detour."

PD Saleh Ahmed said, "We have a plan to re-excavate four canals in the project area. Walkways and drains would also be constructed. The issue of waterlogging will be solved after these are implemented."

He also said a special plan will be carried out in phases for arranging accommodation for people working in the economic zone.

Several multi-storey buildings, hotels, and restaurants are being built by private companies. Such urbanisation, many villagers allege, is going on in an unplanned way.

Harun said, "The issue of planned urbanisation is under the jurisdiction of the National Housing Authority. We will cooperate with them, if necessary."

Indonesia

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"We're fed up with their presence because when they arrived on land, sometimes many of them ran away. There are some kinds of agents that picked them up. It's human trafficking," Saiful Afwadi, a community leader in North Aceh, told AFP yesterday.

Chris Lewa, director of Rohingya rights organisation the Arakan Project, said the villagers' rejection seemed to be related to a lack of local government resources to accommodate the refugees and a feeling that people smugglers were using Indonesia as a transit point to Malaysia.

"It is sad and disappointing that the villagers' anger is against the Rohingya boat people who are themselves victims of those smugglers and traffickers," Lewa told AFP yesterday.

UN aid to Gaza

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The health ministry in Gaza said 24 patients have died in the past two days at the hospital owing to power cuts, reports AFP.

With the war about to enter its seventh week, there is no sign of any let up in Israeli assault despite international calls for a ceasefire or at least for humanitarian pauses.

More than 11,500 Palestinians, at least 4,700 of them children, have now been killed in Israel's military assault on Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry - a toll that far surpasses previous bouts of conflict in recent years.

Whole neighbourhoods of Gaza have been flattened in air and artillery strikes, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes, and the humanitarian situation is catastrophic, aid agencies say.

WFP Executive Director Cindy McCain said nearly the entire population was in desperate need of food assistance. "Supplies of food and water are practically non-existent in Gaza and only a fraction of what is needed is arriving through the borders," she said in a statement.

An Israeli official said later yesterday that Israel's war cabinet had approved letting in two fuel trucks a day into Gaza to help meet UN needs, following a US request, reports Reuters.

In the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Hamas's Al-Quds Brigades said they had engaged Israeli forces for several hours in the city of Jenin overnight into yesterday, unleashing a "torrent of fire" and laying ambushes with explosives.

Thaw coming to BNP

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This alliance has remained largely inactive since the 2018 election, marred by alleged vote rigging.

In the face of widespread criticism for its alliance with Jamaat, which opposed the liberation of Bangladesh and sided with Pakistan during the 1971 war, BNP had been keeping distance from the Islamist party for the last several years.

BNP and Jamaat faced heavy criticisms at home and abroad over a series of arson attacks on public transport and government establishments that also saw scores of deaths of innocent people in 2013-2014. The deadly violence eventually subsided, and BNP maintained a distance from Jamaat since.

The strain became visible in late 2018, after the Election Commission cancelled Jamaat's registration in line with a High Court verdict. In 2013, the HC declared Jamaat's registration with the EC illegal on grounds that, among other things, some provisions of Jamaat charter are in conflict with the country's constitution and election laws.

The matter is now pending before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, but at the moment, Jamaat is not eligible for joining the upcoming election.

The BNP-led 20-party alliance dissolved in December last year after BNP asked its allies not to use the name of the alliance, essentially formalising the end of relations with Jamaat, many of whose leaders have been convicted and hanged for war crimes.

Political analysts had observed at the time that BNP's distancing itself from Jamaat was the first step by the former to rebuild its image at home and abroad, although Jamaat high-ups were displeased at BNP's "tactical shift" in direction.

However, before the October 28 Nayapaltan rally, BNP high-ups contacted top Jamaat leaders, seeking to mend the ties and mount pressure on the government to realise its one-point movement demanding elections under a non-party government, multiple Jamaat leaders said.

According to Jamaat sources, BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman, living in exile in London since 2007, contacted top Jamaat leaders in the run-up to the grand rally to discuss the matter.

Subsequently, since October 31, Jamaat has enforced the nationwide blockades simultaneously with BNP, lending force to BNP's protest programmes.

Maldives will have no foreign military presence: Muizzu

REUTERS, Male



Maldives will use diplomacy to ensure there is no foreign military presence on its soil, its new president said yesterday, reaffirming his support for the departure of a small Indian force from the islands where India and China vie for influence. Mohamed Muizzu was speaking at his inauguration after winning a presidential election in September, beating incumbent Ibrahim Solih in a second round runoff. Solih had followed an "India first" policy, but Muizzu in his election campaign promised to remove a small Indian military presence of about 75 personnel from the Maldives. The Indian Ocean island chain will have a "thick red line" when it comes to security related issues, Muizzu said in his inauguration speech. Muizzu had said last month he would work to return Indian military personnel "as soon as possible", but he has also emphasised his commitment to stronger investment ties with both India and China to foster growth.

Eight suspected Kashmir rebels killed: India police

AFP, Srinagar

Eight suspected rebels have been killed in Indian-administered Kashmir in a series of separate clashes with soldiers over the past two days, police said yesterday. Shooting broke out on Thursday when Indian soldiers launched a search for reported militants in the southern Kargil area, with five men killed yesterday, police said. The five were all local men affiliated with the Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, according to police. In a separate clash, also on Thursday, Indian security forces killed two militants near the heavily militarised dividing line with Pakistan. Another fighter was killed yesterday in the Rajouri area during a shootout with soldiers, a police statement said, reporting a "huge" stash of arms had been seized. Rebel groups have waged an insurgency since 1989, demanding independence or a merger of the Himalayan territory with Pakistan. The conflict has left tens of thousands of civilians, soldiers and militants dead.

Foreign countries' meddling

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in Bangladesh ahead of the January 7 parliamentary polls.

"Election is an internal affair of Bangladesh. When too many people talk about it and give us advice, it brings disgrace to our country," Dr Imtiaz Ahmed, a professor of international relations at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star.

Some analysts said the difference between the positions of India and the US on the elections is now quite clear, meaning the US keeps up the pressure on the Awami League while India continues its support for the ruling party.

As the US says it does not support any party over the other, the opposition parties feel emboldened and try to mobilise support from the foreign countries, they said.

Imtiaz said it is logical for India to back the AL because regional connectivity had a boost and stability in India's northeast was ensured during the tenures of successive AL governments.

He said the global powers are taking more interest in the Indo-Pacific region to achieve their national objectives. Keeping this reality in mind, Bangladesh needs to make more mature decisions on its political and economic affairs to achieve its national objectives, he added.

Bangladesh can surely cooperate with the foreign countries when its interests converge with theirs. However, this cannot be achieved if there is a lack of domestic cohesion and sustainable economic progress,

the DU teacher observed.

Experts say Bangladesh has achieved economic progress over the years, but questions remain about its sustainability. Also, the nation is deeply polarised politically.

"We have created scope for foreigners to talk much about our domestic issues. Our political parties feel threatened by one another," said Imtiaz.

Political parties, when in opposition, depend on foreign countries to ascent to power. They need to remember that this means shooting themselves in the foot, he said.

Former election commissioner M Sakhawat Hussain said people over the years have lost their trust in the country's institutions, including the Election Commission, the electoral system, political parties and their conducts. This trust deficit, particularly after the 2009 general election, allowed the foreigners to step in.

Visits by then Indian foreign secretary Sujatha Singh, UN Under-Secretary General Oscar Fernandez Taranco and US Under Secretary for South and Central Asia Nisha Desai Biswal to mediate between the bickering parties ahead of the 2014 elections are some examples of foreign interventions in the country's domestic politics.

Such interventions have increased against the backdrop of allegations of irregularities in the 2014 and 2018 parliamentary polls.

Imtiaz said the caretaker government system was working well,

but the BNP destroyed the system by raising the retirement age of Supreme Court judges from 65 to 67 to ensure that KM Hasan, a former party secretary of BNP who sat on the Supreme Court as a judge, becomes a caretaker government.

The AL's rivalry with the BNP deepened following the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally during the BNP rule in 2004, he said.

"I don't think the political parties can now find a compromise. The Westminster-style of parliamentary democracy is not working here. We need to think for alternatives," Imtiaz said.

Sakhawat said Bangladesh may face economic challenges if the next election is not made acceptable.

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute President M Humayun Kabir said the country's development over the last two decades is the result of a combination of domestic efforts and international support.

The weakening of the international community's trust in us will affect our development journey, he told The Daily Star, referring to Bangladesh's reliance on exports, remittance and development assistance.

The country will face many challenges in the changing geopolitical landscape and the post-LDC era after 2026. Consensus and cohesion is vital for overcoming those challenges, said Humayun.

"We need to sit down and talk. We need a democratic environment. Otherwise, we will not be able to tackle those challenges."

It is not about becoming close or parting [with Jamaat]. The people of the country and BNP will stand beside any political parties, irrespective of their ideologies, if they join the ongoing anti-government movement," he added.

As BNP and Jamaat seek to bridge their gaps, the government is allegedly giving some concession to Jamaat, by allowing it to carry out political activities in efforts to create division and confusion between the two parties.

One Jamaat leader said this is evident in the way the government is clamping down on one opposition camp, and not the other.

"Many top-tier BNP leaders have been arrested during the ongoing movement, but no Jamaat top leaders have been put behind bars," he said.

Police are also treating the two parties differently. Law enforcers are allowing Jamaat to hold processions in the city, while BNP leaders and activists face police action, according to Jamaat leaders.

Comments from police were not immediately available.

Jamaat leader Rezaul Karim said the government is putting pressure on them to take part in the election,

"But we will not give in to any pressure. We will continue our movement until our demand is met," he said.

Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif dismissed the claim of putting pressure on any political party.

"The election schedule has already been announced. Any political parties eligible for the election can take part in it," he said.