

Russia must rival Western AI: Putin

AFP, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that the West had a “dangerous” monopoly over artificial intelligence and Russia needed to rival “biased” Western chatbots with its own technology.

The race to develop AI has heated up since the breakout launch of the ChatGPT generative chatbot last year, with Russia and China spending billions to rival the United States’ dominance in the field.

“I think you are well aware that some Western search engines, as well as some generative models, often work in a very selective, biased way,” Putin told an AI conference in Moscow. “They do not take into account Russian culture, and sometimes simply ignore it...,” he said.

China grapples with respiratory illness spike

REUTERS, Shanghai

China called for vigilance yesterday as a surge of respiratory illness hit schools and hospitals and the World Health Organization, which has asked the government for disease data, said no unusual or novel pathogens had been detected.

China is grappling with a spike in respiratory illnesses as it enters its first full winter season since it lifted strict Covid-19 restrictions in December, with cases among children appearing especially high in northern areas like Beijing and Liaoning province where hospitals are warning of long waits.

The State Council said influenza would peak this winter and mycoplasma pneumoniae infection would continue to be high in some areas in future. The situation came into the spotlight this week when the WHO asked China for more information on infection.



Palestinians inspect the damage to their homes in the eastern district of Khezaa in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, following a four-day ceasefire that began early in the morning.

PHOTO: AFP

Gaza war leaves West hesitant on Iran nuclear crackdown

AFP, Vienna

Western powers have been reluctant to get tough on Tehran for fear of aggravating Middle East tensions as Iran grows its nuclear programme and reduces cooperation with the UN watchdog, diplomats say.

Worries of a wider regional conflict have sharpened since Israel-Hamas war began on October 7.

At this week’s Board of Governors meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, the United States and the so-called E3 group – France, Germany and the United Kingdom – condemned Tehran’s lack of cooperation.

Despite stressing that Iran’s actions had “pushed unprecedented boundaries”, they held off on submitting a binding resolution.

“The picture is pretty bleak, but the fact at the moment is that there is no appetite to provoke a reaction in Iran in the context of the war in the Middle

East,” a senior diplomat summed up the current deadlock.

The 2015 deal curbing Iran’s nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief started to unravel in 2018 when then US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from it and reimposed sanctions.

Iran retaliated by stepping up its nuclear activities. Efforts to revive the deal have been fruitless so far with European-led talks on hold since 2022.

Last week’s confidential IAEA report showed that Iran now has enough uranium enriched up to 60 percent – just short of weapons grade – to theoretically manufacture three bombs.

“That’s quite an amount, especially if you don’t use it for anything,” said a diplomatic source. Iran has repeatedly denied seeking nuclear weapons.

While Iran has been dragging its feet on reinstalling IAEA monitoring equipment it disconnected last year, it recently also withdrew the accreditation

of several agency inspectors.

According to diplomats, eight inspectors from France and Germany have been affected by Tehran’s decision.

Earlier this year, another IAEA inspector – a Russian – had been barred following the detection of a technical modification in centrifuges that had caused enrichment to peak at 84 percent.

Iran’s barring of experienced agency inspectors has dealt a “very serious blow” to the IAEA’s ability to monitor Tehran’s nuclear programme, its head Rafael Grossi said on Wednesday.

Kelsey Davenport of the Arms Control Association think-tank said that while the reluctance of the IAEA Board of Governors to act is “understandable”, it also constituted “a case of geopolitics trumping nonproliferation norms.”

But viewing Iran “in a vacuum” and failing to hold it accountable over its advancing nuclear programme “sends the wrong signal to Tehran and other would-be proliferators,” she cautioned.

Planes losing GPS signal over ME

Indian regulator flags threat

NDTV ONLINE

Concerned over reports that civilian aircrafts may sometimes be flying blind over parts of the Middle East, India’s civil aviation regulator DGCA has issued an advisory to all Indian airlines. There have been several reports in recent days that navigation systems of civilian aircrafts are being spoofed when they fly over parts of the Middle East. This is fast emerging as a major safety hazard and the DGCA advisory aims to alert airlines of the nature of the threat and how to respond to it. “The aviation industry is grappling with uncertainties due to new threats and reports of GNSS (Global Navigation Satellite System) jamming and spoofing,” the circular states. The report takes note of “increasing reports of GNSS interference over airspace in the Middle East in the recent past” and calls for the development of contingency measures to deal with the jamming of navigation systems. The DGCA has also sought the creation of a threat monitoring and analysis network.

DUBLIN RIOTING Violence motivated by hate: Irish PM

AFP, Dublin

Rioters who torched vehicles and looted shops in Dublin following a knife attack outside a school brought “shame” on Ireland, Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said yesterday, condemning the worst violence in decades which authorities blamed on right-wing groups.

Thursday night’s unrest came after three children were injured in a stabbing near the centre of the Irish capital. The violence – which resulted in 34 arrests – started when a group broke through a police cordon around the attack area in Parnell Square East, north central Dublin. The protesters set buses and trams alight and looted shops in one of Dublin’s most famous thoroughfares, O’Connell Street. “Those involved brought shame on Dublin, brought shame on Ireland and brought shame on their families and themselves,” a visibly angry Varadkar told reporters, describing the rioters as “criminals”.



Two election commissioners

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demanding the polls under a non-partisan caretaker government.

Soon after the EC announced the polls schedule on November 15, the BNP and its allies rejected it and called for nationwide hartals and blockades.

“Deferral of the election schedule is not in the EC’s consideration so far. Why will we do that?” said Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana while replying to a reporter’s query in Rangpur yesterday.

The election will be held as per the schedule, she said.

She made the comments after a meeting with administration and election officials of Dinajpur, Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, and Nilphamari at the Rangpur divisional commissioner’s office.

High costs

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Nirod Baran Saha, president of the Rice and Paddy Stockists and Wholesalers Association in Naogaon, said the price of paddy is almost the same as last year. After a month or so, the price would increase when the paddy will be drier.

“If the production cost increases, the profit margin of farmers decreases, the government should have taken measures and compensated farmers,” he said.

Many farmers, however, cannot afford to wait for the prices to rise as they have debts to pay.

“If the paddy price is so low, how will we survive when everything is so expensive?” asked Sabirul Islam, a farmer in Khochabari area of Thakurgaon.

He got just Tk 7,000 after selling 7 maunds of paddy a week ago, and expressed despair over unpaid debts due to the inadequate prices.

AMAsaduzzaman, former research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said the situation of farmers is not improving.

“Middlemen, wholesalers and millers control prices in the paddy market and make profits. The government has failed to control them,” he said.

When asked whether the government can purchase paddy directly from the local market to minimise the influence of the millers and wholesalers, he said the government does not have the capacity to do so.

This year, the government has set a target to cultivate Aman, the second biggest rice crop, on 59.3 lakh hectares, according to DAE officials.

Rashida expressed confidence in the field-level administration’s readiness to conduct the election.

Meanwhile, Anisur said the EC wrote to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, asking it not to shut down internet on the election day.

However, everyone should be aware that no propaganda can be spread through IPTVs, he said yesterday.

Internet Protocol television (IPTV) is the delivery of television content over internet protocol networks.

“We are holding discussions with returning officers, members of law enforcement agencies, and other persons concerned so that the election is free from biases,” he said.

[Our correspondents in Moulvibazar and Dinajpur contributed to this report]

Drilling snag

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be reassembled, a government statement said.

An estimated 15 metres (49 feet) of the debris pile is left to be drilled through and a study using ground penetration radar shows there is no metallic obstruction for the next 5 metres, said Bhaskar Khulbe, a senior tunnel project official.

But, rescue team faced a technical glitch once again yesterday and auger machine was brought out once again, reports ANI. In a press conference earlier in the day, the National Disaster Management Authority advised media not to make guesses on timeline for completion of rescue operations as it creates a wrong perception.

The rescue plan involves pushing a pipe wide enough to pull the trapped men out on wheeled stretchers. Rescue workers rehearsed the evacuation by going into the pipe and being pulled out on stretchers, a video clip provided by authorities showed.

A second plan to drill vertically from atop the hill is also being pursued and the drilling machines are being assembled.

The men have been getting cooked food since a larger lifeline pipe was pushed through earlier this week and the government statement said they were sent 200 rotis or Indian round flat bread, lentils and mixed vegetable curry.

More than a dozen doctors, including psychiatrists, have been at the site, talking to the men and monitoring their health.

They have been told to do light yoga exercises, walk around in the 2-km space they have been confined to, and keep talking to each other.

Gazans fill streets, head home as truce begins

AFP, Khan Yunis

With children and pets in their arms and their belongings loaded onto donkey carts or car roofs, thousands of displaced Gazans headed home yesterday as a four-day Israel-Hamas truce began.

The din of war was replaced by the horns of traffic jams and sirens of ambulances making their way through crowds emerging from hospitals where they had taken refuge.

For nearly seven weeks, Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip had been relentless. But yesterday morning, no more shots were heard in Khan Yunis, in the south of the Palestinian territory.

Hayat al-Muammar was among those hurrying to take advantage of the truce deal, under which hostages seized from Israel will be freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

“I’m going home,” said the 50-year-old, who had been sheltering in a school. “We fled the death, destruction and everything,” she told AFP. “I still don’t understand what happened to us – why did they do this to us?” she asked.

The lives of Gazans have been turned upside down since the Israeli offensive began on October 7. Weeks of sustained Israeli bombardment has killed nearly 15,000 people, around two thirds of them women and children, Gaza’s Hamas government said.

Some 1.7 million of the territory’s 2.4 million people are estimated to have been displaced, the United Nations said.

With more than half of homes damaged or destroyed according to the UN, Gazans were unsure if would still have a roof over their heads when they return.

Whipping a donkey pulling his cart, Ahmed Fayad, 30, hit the road heading back to his village with 70 members of his family who he said had taken refuge in a school.

An elderly man walked by with a bag on his shoulder, saying he felt safe enough to return to his home near the border with Israel.

Around them, a multitude of men, women and children travelled on foot, carts or tuk-tuks with the few belongings they had taken with them when the war started.

One woman carried her cat in her arms through the streets.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Displaced Palestinians return to their homes as they pass by a house destroyed in an Israeli strike during the conflict, amid the temporary truce between Hamas and Israel, in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

Help keep stability in the region

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the briefing that was also attended by Muhammad Imran, Bangladesh ambassador to the US.

About 90 heads of missions were invited to the event, but some 60 of them attended, according to officials present at the briefing.

The foreign secretary highlighted the significant development achieved by Bangladesh over the last 15 years.

He added that Bangladesh and India are trusted friends of each other and have implemented many vital projects that are critical for bilateral and regional development.

TEESTA DEAL

During the Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) yesterday, Dhaka requested New Delhi to expedite the process of signing the Teesta water-sharing deal and other treaties concerning shared rivers.

In 2011, Bangladesh and India failed to seal the Teesta deal due to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s last-minute opposition.

Bangladesh also requested the removal of trade barriers to ensure an uninterrupted supply of essential

commodities between the two countries, according to a foreign ministry statement.

Foreign Secretary Momen and his Indian counterpart Vinay Mohan Kwatra led their respective countries to the FOC at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi.

This is the second FOC between Bangladesh and India. The first one was held in February this year in Dhaka. This FOC ahead of the upcoming national elections in both countries is considered significant as the polls were discussed in parts of the world.

In a bilateral meeting between New Delhi and Washington on November 10, India shared its perspectives on Bangladesh, saying that the country wants to see a democratic, progressive, and stable Bangladesh.

The US, however, has been calling for free and fair elections in Bangladesh.

Before leaving for Delhi, the foreign secretary had told the media that political issues among other things might be discussed, and if

India enquired, he would provide an update on the elections.

Although the foreign ministry statement did not mention whether politics or elections were discussed, it stated that Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra stressed the importance of maintaining stability in the region.

Masud requested Vinay Kwatra to expedite the visa issuance process to expand the people-to-people contacts. He also sought India’s assistance in resolving the Rohingya crisis.

They further emphasised bolstering cooperation in important areas such as development, trade and commerce, regional connectivity, regional power grid connection, security and water-related issues, and consular and cultural issues.

India is Bangladesh’s second-largest trading partner, with the trade volume amounting to about \$15 billion in 2021-22.

Terming Bangladesh a trusted neighbour, Kwatra assured the commitment of the Indian leadership to further strengthen the relationship with Bangladesh.