

Russia attacks Ukraine with 48 drones

Buildings, infrastructure facilities hit; Kyiv downs 41 drones

REUTERS, *Kyiv*

Russia launched a major drone attack on southern, central and eastern Ukrainian regions, damaging privately-owned and commercial buildings as well as infrastructure, Kyiv officials said yesterday.

Air defences shot down 41 of 48 Russian drones launched from Russia's western Kursk region and the occupied peninsula of Crimea seized by Moscow in 2014, the air force said. Only Iranian-made "Shahed" drones were used for the attack, it said.

Drone attacks have happened almost nightly for weeks and the latest strike was the largest one so far this month.

The Ukrainian President's office said people's homes and commercial buildings were damaged by drone debris in various regions.

Unspecified infrastructure facilities in several regions and a natural gas pipe in the northeast Kharkiv region were damaged, it said in a statement.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy producer, said one of its thermal power stations located in a frontline region in the east was shelled for the sixth time this month.

It said on Telegram messenger that heating to residents was disrupted but did not give a specific number of people affected. Temperatures in Ukraine are well below zero Celsius.

As a second winter of war sets in, Ukrainians fear that Russia plans to target its energy system.

Meanwhile, the United States imposed fresh Russia-related sanctions on Tuesday, targeting a defense procurement network consisting of people and entities in Belgium, Sweden and Hong Kong, among other places, as Washington cracks down on Moscow's evasion of Western sanctions imposed over the war in Ukraine.



Firemen putting out the flames in a bus of Ekushe Express at the capital's Maniknagar around 5:00pm yesterday. The vehicle was torched around 4:45pm along with two other buses of the same operator in the same area. PHOTO: FIRE SERVICE AND CIVIL DEFENCE

Govt okays import of 40MW power from Nepal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government, following India's move, is going to import electricity from Nepal.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs at a meeting, presided over by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, yesterday approved the import of 40 megawatts of electricity from Nepal using India's power grid.

The Bangladesh Power Development Board will buy the electricity through direct purchase method.

The development comes months after Kathmandu and Dhaka agreed to sign a

25-year agreement for electricity import from the Himalayan nation. The two sides, however, are yet to negotiate the tariff.

Nepal and Bangladesh inked a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the power sector in 2018.

Nepal and India have agreed to cooperate in the power sector at the sub-regional level of the "Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal" initiative, according to the Kathmandu Post.

Bangladesh is turning to external sources to diversify electricity supply and increase the share of renewables in its energy mix.

The country is eager to buy 500MW of electricity from Nepal, which has the potential to produce more than 72,000MWs from hydropower.

Yesterday, the cabinet committee on purchase also approved the draft of "Terminal Use Agreement and Implementation", initiated between the state-owned Petrobangla and Summit Oil and Shipping Co Ltd.

Under the agreement, Petrobangla will pay \$300,000 a day to Summit Oil as regasification charge for using Summit's floating terminal that has a capacity of 600 million cubic feet per day in Moheshkhali.

12TH NATIONAL POLLS EC allows 29 more local observers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday allowed 29 more local observers to monitor the upcoming national election.

In a statement released in the evening, the EC said that these observers will get registration for five years.

Among the new local observers, two organisations -- Election Monitoring Forum (EMF) and Saarc Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) -- have faced criticism for bringing in some inexperienced foreign nationals as observers in the last national election.

EC Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath said that the EMF and SHRF got approval as they fulfilled all criteria set by the EC.

Applications of these two organisations were rejected in the first phase.

With the new approvals, the total number of registered local observers now stands at 96.

In the 2018 election, 118 local observers got registration.

Amendment to labour bill in next parliament: law minister

BSS, *Dhaka*

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said necessary corrections in the labour amendment bill will be made in the next parliament after the general election.

"There was a typing error in the bill which could have undermined the rights of the workers. President Mohammed Shahabuddin has sent the bill back to the parliament. It is a reflection of the government's goodwill towards labour rights," he told reporters at his secretariat office.

"A sentencing term was misplaced in a provision, which was a typing error," the minister said.

"You know a number of bills were swiftly passed in the last parliament and that's why the error was identified a little late," the law minister said.

"When the bill was taken to the president for his assent the error was found, and as the president was informed about it, he sent it back to the parliament for necessary correction," Anisul said.


The law minister further said the president took the right decision as per his legal prudence.

Dhaka stares down the barrel of water

FROM PAGE 1

upazilas -- Tongi, Savar, Dhamrai, Dohar, and Nawabganj. At the moment, under the central parts of Dhaka, the maximum dip in the water level of the upper aquifer is 73 metres (240ft), and the deeper aquifer, which is separated from the upper one by thick layers of clay and not sand, is 85 metres (278ft).

However, the unique sand layers



“You really can’t take groundwater for guaranteed. As a national priority, the government must manage aquifers and use water scientifically.”

PROF. K. MATIN AHMED
Prominent hydrologist

of this largest delta in the world have stopped the cave-in from culminating in land subsidence. Thick sedimentary layers of the upper aquifer could absorb the pressure of water loss so far, with sand particles readjusting and resettling the structural change. But groundwater experts start to worry when the deep tubewells of Wasa and others bore through the clay layers to extract water from deeper aquifer beyond 300 metres (984ft).

"Clay layers behave just the opposite to sand layers. A cone of depression in clay layers [which is up to 60ft thick] is most likely to lead to land subsidence and destruction of aquifers for good," warned Kazi Matin Ahmed, a professor at the Department of Geology, Dhaka University.

If the current trend continues, a disaster some decades down the line may put a full stop to freshwater for Dhaka as well as raise the possibility for subsidence like Jakarta, which is regarded as the world's fastest sinking metropolis mainly due to uncontrolled exploitation of groundwater. One-third of the Indonesian capital is feared to be submerged by 2050 due to the continuous plundering of aquifers.

38 BNP men jailed in cases filed 5yrs ago

FROM PAGE 1

and activists of the BNP and its front organisations took out a procession in front of Babubazar bridge around 10:30am on September 13, 2018. They blasted crude bombs, assaulted cops and obstructed them from performing their duties.

Following the incident, police filed the case against 14 leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations with Kotwali Police Station.

Also yesterday, another Dhaka court sentenced 26 BNP leaders and activists to different terms of imprisonment

"You really can't take groundwater for granted. As a national priority, the government must manage aquifers and use water scientifically," added the internationally referred groundwater expert.

Groundwater is considered by geoscientists as nature's very special gift to the people in the Bengal basin, a vast sediment-filled region upon which lies Bangladesh and a part of West Bengal. The enormous underground reservoir for freshwater was crafted slowly over thousands of years by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra that brought in tonnes of silt and sediment every year from as far away as the Himalayas to form the delta's spongy soil. The entire ecosystem of nature works like a well-oiled machine: we pump water out and the porous soil quickly captures the rain-running flood water before sending it down to the aquifer with filtration through layers of soil on the way. But, the mindless extraction of groundwater upsets the ecosystem to an incredible extent.

"The thumb rule for groundwater management is: the extraction should not be more than the amount recharged," insists Dr Anwar.

But there comes the challenge of resolving the time puzzle of withdrawal and recharge of groundwater: draining by humans takes seconds and refilling by nature ages. The concretisation of the capital city and the gradual extinction of waterbodies also appear as serious barriers to natural recharging of aquifers. Roughly, it takes at least 100 years for rainfall or floodwater of today to reach aquifers down to 100 metres (328ft) and thousand years beyond 300 metres (984ft), depending on the types of sediments that formed the groundwater reservoir.


Dhaka is in dire straits for sure. The impacts of climate change are also compounding the freshwater crisis. Rising sea level is a growing threat to sweetwater reserve. Yet, Dhaka can stay out of danger through scientific governance of groundwater, believes Dr Anwar.

"But for that, policymakers need to be convinced first that the water crisis is just around the corner. If they believe in it, groundwater governance will become every government's top priority," he said.

The government enacted the Water Act in 2013, formulated rules in 2018 and hardly enforced it until now. Then there are a lot of inadequacies in the act, which deals with all water resources, giving the least focus on groundwater that is being used and abused the most.

The law outlines water priority for sectoral use, budget for water-stressed areas, and conservation of water resources with Warpo (Water Resources Planning Organisation) at the helm for implementation. In reality, Warpo, led by a bureaucrat and not a geoscientist or engineer, is only involved in planning and not implementing.

The Warpo is not even designed to dictate terms of groundwater usage by multiple water authorities like Wasa, DPH (Department of Public Health), let alone that of private entities. As per the water priority provision for water-



“Policymakers need to be convinced first that water crisis is just around the corner. If they believe in it, the groundwater governance will become every government’s top priority.”

DR ANWAR ZAHID,
groundwater expert

stressed areas, drinking water comes first and water for industry eighth. In that light, no industry should have been able to use groundwater without the permission of the Warpo.

The most critical issue is the governance of groundwater. Ideally, a fully empowered single authority under the water resources ministry should govern the endangered resources, argued Dr Anwar.

"A groundwater commission, led by geoscientists or groundwater experts, may save Dhaka from dying without water," he quipped.

as their involvement in the incident was not proven beyond reasonable doubt.

Twelve prosecution witnesses testified during the trial.

According to the case statement, a group of ward-level leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations on September 30, 2018 assaulted some police personnel and prevented them from discharging their duties in the capital's cantonment area.

Following the incident, police filed the case accusing 30 leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations.

Arsonists torch 11 vehicles

FROM PAGE 1

Sayedabad, and Gulistan terminals for different districts.

Speaking to The Daily Star, bus operators expressed dissatisfaction, saying the number of passengers was still too low as they feared violence on the roads.

360 BNP ACTIVISTS HELD

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi at a press briefing yesterday said over 360 party members were arrested in 18 cases over the last 24 hours and 1,785 named and many unnamed were accused.

With this, over 19,860 BNP leaders and activists have been arrested since October 28, party sources said.

Urging the aspirants to reconsider their decision to run in the January 7 national election, Rizvi said, "If you have the slightest patriotism, humanity, or conscience, then come back ... Those of you who have submitted nomination papers for such a farcical election, withdraw them. Otherwise, the people will not forgive you...."

He also urged the government officials not to "assist in the election" and called on voters to refrain from voting.

11 MORE VEHICLES TORCHED

According to the Fire Service and Civil Defence and police, at least 11 vehicles were torched in 24 hours till around 11:30pm yesterday.

Unidentified arsonists set fire to a bus of Baishakhi Paribahan in the capital's Badda around 7:50pm, said Rozina Akhter, a duty officer at the fire service headquarters, adding that two fire engines were sent to douse

the fire.

In the capital's Maniknagar, three Ekushe Express buses were set on fire by unidentified criminals around 4:45pm.

A bus was torched by unidentified criminals in Chattogram city's C&B Colony area around 11:30pm yesterday, said Pankaj Dutta, additional deputy commissioner (north zone) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

He said the bus was parked along a road in the area.

On information, a fire engine rushed to the scene and put out the blaze.

A lorry and a bus were torched in separate attacks in Gazipur's Kapasia and Chandra.

Locals doused the fire on the lorry around 10:45am. The bus in Chandra was torched around 11:30am.

Earlier in the day, arsonists set fire to a staff bus of Agrani Bank in the apital's Khilgaon.

Another parked bus was torched near Sylhet city's Kadamtali Bus Terminal around 8:15pm.

Quoting the bus driver and witnesses, Titop Sikder, warehouse inspector of the Fire Service in the city's Dakshin Surma, said, "The bus had just reached the terminal from Sherpur and the staffers left to have some snacks. In the meantime, the fire broke out.

"The Fire Service was informed at 8:21pm and two fire engines came and doused the blaze. However, the bus was completely burnt with all glasses shattered."

In Sirajganj's Shahjadpur upazila, a pick-up was set on fire, and the

firemen went to the scene around 9:25pm and extinguished the flame, said Rakibul Hassan, a fire service duty officer.

No casualties were reported in the aforementioned incidents. However, one person sustained burns when a Green Anabil bus was set on fire around 9:00pm in the capital's Matuail. Hassan Jubayer, 26, was receiving treatment at Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

Mofizul Alam, officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station, said no arrests were made yet as the arsonists could not be identified. BNP and its allies have called nationwide road-rail-waterway blockades along with hartals to protest the polls schedule recently announced by the Election Commission.

The party's Nayapaltan headquarters has been padlocked since October 28.

New LC clause

FROM PAGE 1

This is the first time the particular US buyer has mentioned the clause in the LC. BGMEA President Hassan told The Daily Star yesterday. He had not disclosed the names of the local supplier or the buyer.

Last week, the Bangladeshi mission in Washington sent a letter to the commerce ministry, highlighting the possibility of Bangladesh being slapped with a trade sanction over labour rights.

Two major RMG exporters who deal with US retailers regularly said they had not seen such a clause before.

Reserves remain under pressure

FROM PAGE 1

Spokesman Md Mezbaul Haque told journalists yesterday.

Besides, the central bank is aiming to keep the reserves at a stable position until the national election scheduled for January 7 next year, according to central bank officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to reveal internal discussions.

The fund from the IMF and the ADB would create some breathing space but the pressure point on the BoP will remain high, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

The pressure point remains high because of the outflow of trade credit, which has trebled from the previous year, he said.

Trade credit is the difference between export shipments and export receipts.

In the first four months of the fiscal year, the deficit in trade credit was \$3.65 billion. A year earlier, it was \$1.32

billion, according to data from the BB. Exporters are unwilling to bring in their export proceeds before the polls, according to BB officials.

Another reason for the deficit in financial account is the drop in short-term foreign debt by the private sector, Hussain said.

“Now, the option of taking on short-term foreign loans is no longer available even though there is an appetite for it in the private sector.”
Economist Zahid Hussain

At the end of October, there was an outflow of \$898 million in net short-term foreign debt, in contrast to inflows amounting to \$1.04 billion a year earlier.

"Now, the option of taking on short-term foreign loans is no longer

available even though there is an appetite for it in the private sector."

At the beginning of the year, total outstanding short-term foreign debt was \$16.4 billion. Ten months later, it stood at \$12.13 billion.

Between July and October, the trade gap declined 60.4 percent year-on-year to \$3.8 billion as imports dropped 20.5 percent and exports ticked up 3.6 percent.

During the period, the current account balance was \$233 million in surplus, in contrast to a deficit of \$4.48 billion a year earlier.

However, the current account surplus is of no solace: it contracted by \$877 million in October alone.

"Export growth slowed and remittance inflows are also drying up. So the current account surplus has narrowed from the previous month. The challenges on the external balance remain high and that is why the pressure on reserve lingers," Hussain added.