

300 Myanmar soldiers flee to India after rebel gains

AFP, GUWAHATI

Nearly 300 Myanmar soldiers crossed the border into India to flee an advance by armed insurgents fighting the country's junta, an Indian paramilitary officer told AFP yesterday.

Clashes have rocked parts of Myanmar near the Indian border since the Arakan Army (AA) attacked security forces in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since a 2021 military coup.

This week, the group said it had taken over the major town of Paletwa and six military bases along the border of India's Mizoram state, where the soldiers had crossed on Wednesday.

A total of 276 troops carrying their arms and ammunition arrived at Bondukbangsora village, an officer from the Assam Rifles paramilitary force, who declined to give a name, told AFP.

Hundreds of other Myanmar troops have fled to India to escape fighting since the ceasefire ended in November, according to local media reports.

"We have given them shelter at our camp," he said, adding that the arriving soldiers were "given all the support they require".

The officer said that his unit was collecting biometric data from the soldiers and had sought approval from the defence ministry in New Delhi to return them to Myanmar.

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Two Myanmar military aircraft arrived in Aizawl, the Mizoram state capital, to collect and repatriate soldiers who retreated from the conflict.

In October, an alliance of the AA and two other ethnic minority armed groups launched a joint offensive across Myanmar's northern Shan state, capturing towns and seizing vital trade hubs on the China border.

Last week, the alliance announced a China-mediated ceasefire in Shan state after months of conflict that posed the biggest threat to the junta since it seized power.

The agreement does not apply to areas near the Indian border where fighting between the military and insurgents has raged on.



Campaign materials hanging from electricity cables are posing risk to road users in Barishal city's Amtala Mor area yesterday, nearly two weeks after the national polls.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

US ship hit in Gulf of Aden attack

Say Houthis as US launches fresh strikes on rebel targets in Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed another attack on a US ship early yesterday, after the United States launched fresh strikes on rebel targets over their aggression towards vessels in and around the Red Sea.

While the Iran-backed rebels maintained they had struck the commercial vessel in the Gulf of Aden, the US military later said the group's missiles had missed their mark.

The Houthis said in a statement posted to social media that their "naval forces... carried out a targeting operation against an American ship" -- identified as the Chem Ranger -- "with several appropriate naval missiles, resulting in direct hits".

It did not give a time nor other details for the latest attack in international shipping lanes.

The US military's Central Command, which is responsible for the Middle East, said the Houthis "launched two anti-ship ballistic missiles at M/V Chem Ranger, a Marshall Island-flagged, US Owned, Greek-operated tanker" on Thursday night.

"The crew observed the missiles impact the water near the ship. There were no reported injuries or damage to the ship," the command said on social media

platform X.

Meanwhile, a senior Houthi official has promised safe passage for Russian and Chinese vessels through the Red Sea.

In an interview published by Russian outlet Izvestia yesterday, senior Houthi official Mohammed al-Bukhaiti insisted the waters around Yemen, which some shipping firms are avoiding due to the ongoing aggression, were safe so long as vessels were not linked to certain countries, particularly Israel.

And Beijing yesterday emphasised the area was an "important international trade route for goods and energy".

"We call for an end to the harassment of civilian vessels, in order to maintain the smooth flow of global production and supply chains and the international trade order," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

Russia said on Thursday the United States should halt its strikes against the Houthis to aid a diplomatic resolution to the attacks on merchant vessels.

"The most important thing now is to stop the aggression against Yemen, because the more the Americans and the British bomb, the less willing the Houthis are to talk," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters in Moscow.

N Korea tests underwater nuclear drone

Slams US-led joint drills

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea has conducted a test of its underwater nuclear weapons system in a protest against this week's joint military drills by South Korea, the United States and Japan, state media KCNA said yesterday.

The test of the "Haeil-5-23" system, a name North Korea has given to its nuclear capable underwater attack drones, was carried out by the defence ministry's think tank in the waters off its east coast, the report said, without specifying a date.

The ministry's unnamed spokesman accused the United States, South Korea and Japan of "getting frantic" with military exercises, warning of "catastrophic consequences."

"Our army's underwater nuclear-based countering posture is being further rounded off and its various maritime and underwater responsive actions will continue to deter the hostile military manoeuvres of the navies of the US and its allies," the North Korean ministry spokesman said in a statement, according to KCNA.

Port city reels from abrupt gas outage

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Ali Abbas, a resident of Alkaran area, said when the gas supply stopped on Thursday morning, they thought it was the usual problem that they had been facing since October.

"But when the supply halted at 9:00pm after a brief resumption, we thought something was wrong."

Regretting that the authorities hardly look into their plight, he said, "We pay fixed monthly bills for gas, but we don't have the supply."

The impact extended to local restaurants which saw people queuing up for food. A lot of them had to return home empty handed as the eateries could not meet the increased demand.

"I visited three restaurants in Anderkilla area but could not buy food. Now I am going to Chawkbazar to see if I can have some food," said Debashish Chakraborty, a resident of Momin Road area.

The businesses and industries in and around Chattogram city were hit as well. Staffers at CNG filling stations sat idle for hours as they could not serve the vehicles.

Long queues of CNG-run auto-rickshaws and other vehicles were seen before the filling stations since midnight on Thursday.

"I have been in a queue for about eight hours but I have yet to refill my vehicle," said Md Forkan, driver of an auto-rickshaw, in Kadamtoli area yesterday morning.

The LNG terminal, run by Accelerate Energy, had been under maintenance for two and a half months, said Shafiqul Azam Khan, general manager (engineering service) of Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company Limited (KGDC).

"As the maintenance work was completed about three days ago, the terminal was being recommissioned

on Thursday night. But this was not possible due to a technical glitch."

Asked why the other floating terminal was not in operation, Shafiqul said it was turned off for preparation of maintenance works.

Rafiqul Islam, managing director of Rupantorito Praktitik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL), said works were going on to fix the technical glitch.

"We hope gas supply will resume by tomorrow [today]," he told The Daily Star.

Prof Sanaul Rabbi, head of the Department of Petroleum and Mining Engineering at Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology (CUET), said a technical glitch may occur any time but there should be a backup arrangement to deal with an emergency situation.

"If an alternative source of gas was there, such a crisis could have been averted," he said.

Govt keeps going back on its decisions

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microgrammes per cubic metre by 2030.

The World Bank in December 2022 published a report titled Striving for Clean Air: Air Pollution and Public Health in South Asia. It said that owing to the predominant wind direction from the northwest to

the southeast, 30 percent of the air pollution in Dhaka, Chattogram, and Khulna originates in India.

While existing government measures can reduce particulate matter, significant reduction is possible only if territories spanning the airsheds -- areas affected by the same air mass -- implement coordinated

policies, according to the report.

Termining the air quality "critical", Saber said the government is thinking of issuing alerts to make people aware of the poor air quality.

"If needed, circulars will be issued asking educational institutions to close considering the health hazards," he said.

Rice prices yet to cool

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The effect of the price fall at wholesale markets may take at least a week to bring down the price at the retail level, he added.

Meanwhile, mill owners said, despite buying paddy at a high price, they had to reduce the rice price by Tk 0.5-1 a kg.

"If the paddy price decreases, we will cut the rice price," said Nirod Boron Saha, president of Rice and Paddy Stockists and Wholesalers

Association in Noagaon, a major rice wholesale hub in the north.

Moreover, prices of vegetables remain high in the capital's kitchen markets.

This newspaper yesterday found each kg of brinjal was being sold for Tk 70-100, beans for Tk 50-80, tomatoes for Tk 50-60 and bitter gourd for Tk 80-120. Besides, a cauliflower was available at Tk 40-60, a cabbage at Tk 40-50, and a bottle gourd at Tk 70-100. Meanwhile, prices of potatoes and

onions decreased by Tk 5-15 per kg.

Customers were buying each kg of potatoes for Tk 45-55, down by Tk 5-10 from last week, and onions (local) for Tk 75-90, which was Tk 80-100 last week.

Prices of chickens and eggs remained high. Broiler chicken was being sold for Tk 200-210 a kg and chicken (Sonali) for Tk 300-340.

Yesterday, beef was costing Tk 700 a kg in the capital's kitchen markets, up by Tk 50 from two weeks ago.

UN chief, 8 more nations

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towards Rohingya refugees and efforts towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, Guterres said.

"I am also appreciative of your participation in the Global Crisis Response Group and trust that I can continue to count on your support in our ambition to address growing global challenges, including the fight against climate change and the pressing need to reform the international financial architecture," said the UN chief.

Meanwhile, in a congratulatory message, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, "I am confident that the relations between our countries based on historical and cultural ties will further deepen and strengthen during your [Hasina's] new term."

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said, "The close ties between our two countries, bound by our commonalities and shared values, have greatly benefited our people." Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, in a letter, said Egypt and Bangladesh share a long history of

friendship and cooperation and he expressed his confidence that the bilateral relations between the two countries will continue to grow over the coming years for the mutual benefit of the peoples of the two nations.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva wished Hasina's fifth term to be a resounding success and assured that Bangladesh will always have a steadfast partner in Brazil in the pursuit of peace and prosperity for the societies.

In separate letters, Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Bin Jassim Al Thani, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, UAE Vice-President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Luxembourg's Vice-Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Minister for Cooperation and Humanitarian Action Xavier Bettel extended their warmest congratulations and best wishes to Sheikh Hasina on securing the absolute majority in the 12th national election of Bangladesh.

Israel, US split

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victory," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a news conference on Thursday evening, warning that "victory will take many months".

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken used the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to renew his call for a "pathway to a Palestinian state".

But Netanyahu again flatly rejected the suggestion on Thursday. "Israel must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River," he said. "This is a necessary condition, which contradicts the idea of (Palestinian) sovereignty."

Netanyahu maintained that "a prime minister in Israel should be able to say no, even to our best friends".

Washington believes that the creation and recognition of a viable Palestinian state is necessary to achieve security for Israel.

"We obviously see things differently," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said when asked about Netanyahu's comments.

Responding to Netanyahu's remarks, the official spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas, said that without an independent Palestinian state "there will be no security and stability in the region".

The Israeli offensive in Gaza has displaced roughly 85 percent of Gaza's 2.4 million people. Many are crowded into shelters where they struggle to get food, water, fuel and medical care. UN agencies say improved aid access is needed urgently as famine and disease loom.

US rules out notion

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Miller said they remain concerned by the arrest of opposition party members and by the reports of irregularities on election day.

"We regret that not all parties participated, and we condemn the violence that took place during elections and in the months leading up to it."



A man shovels snow off a sidewalk in Washington DC, US yesterday. Local media forecasts 1 to 4 inches (2 to 10 cms) of snowfall for the region with temperatures in the 30s F (-1C) for the weekend.

PHOTO: AFP