

'UN lightning rod for propaganda'

Rights chief decries disinfo attacks

A FP, Geneva

The UN rights chief decried yesterday disinformation and other attacks that aim to "undermine the legitimacy" and work of the United Nations and other institutions, describing them as "profoundly destructive".

Speaking at the opening of the UN Human Rights Council's main annual session, Volker Turk slammed widespread "disinformation that targets UN humanitarian organisations, UN peacekeepers and my office".

"The UN has become a lightning rod for manipulative propaganda and a scapegoat for policy failures," he warned.

"This is profoundly destructive of the common good, and it callously betrays the many people whose lives rely on it."

During his opening speech, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed that the United Nations was "uniquely equipped to enable states to discuss and resolve pressing global issues".

"This convening power is particularly vital now, when the magnitude of conflict, planetary peril and digital transformation requires urgent solutions," he said.



A displaced Palestinian child stands outside a makeshift tent attached to a school hosting families from other parts of the Gaza Strip in the Rafah refugee camp in southern Gaza yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli strikes on east Lebanon kill 2 Hezbollah members

AFP, Baalbek

Israel struck Hezbollah targets near the city of Baalbek yesterday, killing two group members, security sources said, the first such attack on Lebanon's east since hostilities began after the Gaza invasion. The Israeli army said the strikes targeted Hezbollah air defence systems in retaliation for the Iran-backed group downing one of its drones in south Lebanon earlier yesterday. "Two Hezbollah members were killed in the Israeli strikes near Baalbek," a security official in Lebanon told AFP. Another security source confirmed the toll. Earlier Monday, one of the sources had said Israeli strikes hit a building used by Hezbollah in a Baalbek suburb, and a warehouse near Baalbek belonging to the Shiite Muslim group. Both sources requested anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the press. The Israeli army said it struck Hezbollah "aerial defence" sites in the Bekaa valley in response "to the launch of a surface-to-air missile" which downed the Israeli drone. It was the first Israeli attack on Hezbollah outside Lebanon's south since Israel's attack on Gaza began.

Navalny was close to being freed in prisoner swap Says ally

REUTERS

Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny was close to being freed in a prisoner swap at the time of his death, a close ally said yesterday, repeating an allegation by his family and supporters that President Vladimir Putin had him killed. Speaking on YouTube, Maria Pevchikh said talks about exchanging Navalny and two unnamed US nationals for Vadim Krasikov, a Russian FSB security service hit man in jail in Germany, were in their final stages at the time of his death. "Alexei Navalny could be sitting in this seat right now, right today. That's not a figure of speech, it could and should have happened," said Pevchikh. "Navalny should have been out in the next few days because we got a decision about his exchange. Putin was offered to exchange the killer Vadim Krasikov."

Does Sweden joining make Baltic Sea 'Nato lake'?

AFP, Brussels

Sweden's accession to Nato adds a final puzzle piece to the alliance around the shores of the strategically important Baltic Sea -- but Russia still poses a threat above and below water.

After Finland joined last year, Sweden's membership -- with Hungary's vote on ratification yesterday -- means all the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea, except Russia, will be part of the US-led military alliance.

That has led some to label the sea a "Nato lake", with the Western allies now appearing well-placed to strangle Russia's room for manoeuvre in the crucial shipping route if a war with Moscow ever breaks out.

But analysts warn that while Sweden's entry makes it easier for Nato to exert control and reinforce its vulnerable Baltic states, Russia can still menace the region from heavily-armed exclave Kaliningrad and threaten undersea infrastructure.

"If you look at a map then geographically the Baltic Sea is becoming a Nato lake, yes," said Minna Alander a research fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

"But there is still work to do for Nato."

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a series of high-profile incidents involving pipelines and cables under the Baltic Sea have given Nato a wake-up call over its vulnerabilities. Nato has bolstered its naval deployments in response and is looking to step up its monitoring capabilities,

but keeping an eye on what's happening beneath the water is a major task.

"It's very difficult to have overall control of a sea as you would control territories on land," said Julian Pawlak, a researcher at Germany's Bundeswehr University in Hamburg.

"What the Nord Stream sabotages have shown, among others, is that it remains hard to be aware exactly what is happening below the surface and on the seabed."

Sweden has long had a close partnership with Nato but its formal membership will allow it to be fully integrated into the alliance's defence plans. Beyond its long Baltic coastline, Sweden brings with it the island of Gotland which would play a central role in helping Nato impose its

will. But just across the water Russia has its own vital outpost -- the exclave of Kaliningrad.

Wedged between Poland and Lithuania, Moscow has in recent years turned the region into one of the most militarised in Europe, with nuclear capable missiles stationed there.

Russia's Baltic fleet based in Kaliningrad is a shadow of what it was during the Cold War and the invasion of Ukraine has sapped some of its forces from the region.

But John Deni, a research professor at the US Army War College, said the Kremlin has kept up investments in undersea capabilities and still has the firepower to stage small-scale landings or threaten Nato supply routes.

Peace talks without Moscow is absurd Says Russia, shrugs off latest Western sanctions

REUTERS, Moscow

The Kremlin said yesterday that the idea of holding peace talks without Russia was ridiculous, after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he hoped to hold a spring summit in Switzerland to discuss his peace vision with Kyiv's allies.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters: "We have

repeatedly said that this is a strange format, to say the least, because certain peace plans are being implemented without the participation of Russia, which in itself is frivolous and even laughable."

Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, said on Sunday, however, that a blueprint from the summit in Switzerland could be handed to Russia at a later date.

"There can be a situation in which we together invite representatives of the Russian Federation, where they will be presented with the plan in case whoever is representing the aggressor country at that time will want to genuinely end this war and return to a just peace," Yermak said.

Meanwhile, Kremlin shrugged off the latest round of Western sanctions against Moscow, saying

that Russia's economy had adapted to restrictions and that those imposing sanctions were hurting themselves with any new measures.

"Nothing fundamentally new has been announced, and it is unlikely that anything fundamentally new can be thought up by those who impose these sanctions without harming their own economy," Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Gov't negotiations lack transparency

FROM PAGE 2

spied on. Where is human sanctity, human dignity?"

On the concept of multipolarity, he said, "China wants to be like the US, India wants to be like the US. So where is the multipolarity everybody is talking about?"

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed

of the Department of International Relations at Dhaka University said, "Bangladesh is better placed when it comes to multi-polarity."

"For Bangladesh to make the best of the fluid multipolarity, it has to focus on professionalism

or meritocracy."

He said, "In no way can we go back to unipolarity."

He said Bangladesh needs to enhance its engagement with regional powers like India and China.

Chairing the event, Prof Lailufar Yasmin,

also the chairperson of the Department of International Relations at DU, noted the emergence of a new assertive Bangladesh on the global stage, prompting the necessity to develop indigenous policies tailored to the country's population.

Halt issuing

FROM PAGE 2

filed by People for Animal Welfare (PAW) Foundation, a non-profit organisation working on animal rights issues, and Jaya Ahsan, a film actress, seeking necessary directives.

The petition was filed as public interest litigation

with the HC on February 18, challenging the failure of the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to prevent illegal and unnecessary

torture of elephants in the name of training, and the unnecessary use of elephants in circuses and

various social events and for street extortion.

They also urged the HC to order the government to stop issuing new elephant-rearing licences and renewing existing ones under sections 11 and 24 of the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act, 2012, and

rules 5 and 6 of the Deer and Elephant Rearing Rules, 2017.

Barrister Saqeb Mahbub

appeared for the writ petitioners, while Deputy Attorney General Amit Das Gupta represented the state during the hearing on the petition.

Viqarunnisa teacher held

FROM PAGE 12

On Sunday, students of Viqarunnisa's Azimpur branch staged a protest, calling for the dismissal of the teacher and demanding his exemplary punishment.

Following three complaints submitted to the school against Murad, a probe committee was formed and the school attached Murad to the principal's office on Saturday.

The elder sister of another victim told The Daily Star, "He consistently manipulated the students ... He also cautioned them against disclosing the

incidents to anyone with the warning that it would damage their reputation and could result in expulsion."

A parent of another victim, who filed a complaint with the school, told this newspaper, "Murad once hugged my daughter under the pretence of a friendly embrace and touched her inappropriately. When she attempted to pull away, he became angry..."

"When my daughter disclosed the incident to my eldest daughter, we stopped her from going to the coaching centre and

reported the matter to the school principal. We filed a complaint with the principal..." she said.

A former student told this correspondent, "Like many others, I wasn't aware that his actions were inappropriate. His gestures made me uneasy and uncomfortable, particularly when he touched my back, stomach, thighs, and chest while checking my notes."

"His abuse continued until I was in eighth grade, and when I realised that he was a predator, I stopped going to his coaching

centre and actively avoided him. However, I didn't report it to anyone," she admitted.

When contacted by The Daily Star before his arrest, Murad dismissed the allegations, saying that it was a conspiracy against him.

"This complaint is fabricated, and it's being orchestrated by one of the math teachers who also runs a coaching centre. She is manipulating her daughters and their friends into a smear campaign against me, aiming to damage my reputation among my students."

Special Supplement



Canadian Education Thrives in Bangladesh: CISB's Pioneering Journey

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education experience has driven us to embrace various enriching opportunities over the years.

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