

Iran cuts Syria presence after strikes blamed on Israel

AFP, Beirut

Iran has reduced its military footprint in Syria after a succession of strikes blamed on Israel, a source close to Iran-backed group Hezbollah and a war monitor said yesterday.

Iran has provided military support to Syrian government forces through more than a decade of civil war but a series of strikes targeting its commanders in recent months has prompted a reshaping of its presence, the sources said.

"Iran withdrew its forces from southern Syria," including both Quneitra and Daraa provinces, which abut the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, the source close to Hezbollah said.

But it still maintains a presence in other parts of the country, the source added.

Recent months have seen a series of strikes on Iranian targets in Syria, widely blamed on Israel, culminating in an April 1 strike that levelled the Iranian consulate in Damascus and killed seven Revolutionary Guards, two of them generals.

That strike prompted Iran to launch a first-ever direct missile and drone attack against Israel on April 13-14 that sent regional tensions spiralling.

But Iran had already begun drawing down its forces after a January 20 strike that killed five Revolutionary Guards in Damascus, including their Syria intelligence chief and his deputy, the source close to Hezbollah said.

Britain-based war monitor, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said Iranian forces had withdrawn from Damascus and southern Syria.

Iran-backed Lebanese and Iraqi fighters had taken their place, Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Iran has said repeatedly that it has no combat troops in Syria, only officers to provide military advice and training.



Bangladeshis reach the BIWTA jetty in Cox's Bazar's Nuniarchara from Myanmar yesterday after serving jail terms in the neighbouring country on different charges. The Myanmar authorities sent back 173 Bangladeshis. PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVU

282 million people faced acute hunger last year

Say UN agencies, development groups; conflicts, particularly in Gaza and Sudan, cited as key reason

AFP, Paris

Food insecurity worsened around the world in 2023, with some 282 million people suffering from acute hunger due to conflicts, particularly in Gaza and Sudan, UN agencies and development groups said yesterday.

Extreme weather events and economic shocks also added to the number of those facing acute food insecurity, which grew by 24 million people compared with 2022, according to the latest global report on food crises from the Food Security Information Network (FSIN).

The report, which called the global outlook "bleak" for this year, is produced for an international alliance bringing together UN agencies, the European Union and governmental and non-governmental bodies.

2023 was the fifth consecutive year of rises in the number of people suffering acute food insecurity - defined as when populations face food deprivation that threatens lives or livelihoods, regardless of the causes or length of time.

Much of last year's increase was due to report's expanded geographic coverage, as well as deteriorating conditions in 12 countries.

More geographical areas experienced "new or intensified shocks" while there was a "marked deterioration in key food crisis contexts such as Sudan and the Gaza Strip", Fleur Wouterse, deputy director of the emergencies office within the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), told AFP.

Some 700,000 people, including 600,000 in Gaza, were on the brink of starvation last year, a figure that has since

climbed yet higher to 1.1 million in the war-ridden Palestinian territory.

Since the first report by the Global Food Crisis Network covering 2016, the number of food insecure people has risen from 108 million to 282 million, Wouterse said.

Meanwhile, the share of the population affected within the areas concerned has doubled 11 percent to 22 percent, she added.

Protracted major food crises are ongoing in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Syria and Yemen.

"In a world of plenty, children are starving to death," wrote UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in the report's foreword. "War, climate chaos and a cost-of-living crisis - combined with inadequate action - mean that almost 300 million people faced acute food crisis in 2023."

Thailand gives grand welcome to Hasina

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for the official passport holders, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on energy cooperation and two other MoUs on cooperation in tourism sector and duty-related mutual cooperation, to boost the relations, said Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud at a media briefing on Monday.

Bangladesh will seek support from Thailand regarding Rohingya repatriation, the minister said, adding that the issue of shipping connectivity will also be discussed.

On April 26, Hasina will be formally received by her Thai counterpart Srettha. On the same day, she will hold bilateral talks with Srettha at the Government House (Prime Minister's Office), witness the signing of documents, and participate in a joint press conference.

The Bangladesh premier will then attend a state lunch to be hosted by Srettha in her honour.

During the visit, Hasina will call on Maha Vajiralongkorn Phra Vajiraklaochoyuhua and Suthida Bajrasudhabimalalakshana, the king and queen of the Kingdom of Thailand, at the Palace.

The premier is scheduled to attend the 80th Session of ESCAP and deliver a speech there on April 25.

On the same day, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and ESCAP Executive Secretary Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana will call on Hasina.

Defiant MPs

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instructions are not followed, he said. The deadline for withdrawal of candidatures in the first phase was April 22.

"Action has been taken against those who disobeyed the party's decision in the 12th national parliamentary election," said the AI general secretary.

At least 16 close relatives or family members of ministers and MPs were running for upazila chairman posts in the first phase of the election, slated for May 8.

Only one of them, Lutful Habib, a brother-in-law of State Minister for Posts, Telecommunications, and Information Technology Zunaid Ahmed Palak, quit the race.

EU passes law to hold brands accountable

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Human Rights Watch said the ministerial vote could be held in May.

The vote coincided with the 11th anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse, which claimed 1,134 lives. At least 29 global brands, many European, were sourcing from the garments factories housed there.

"The 11th anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster is a somber reminder of why a due diligence law is long overdue," said Aruna Kashyap, associate director on corporate accountability at the HRW. "The European Parliament's vote sends a strong message that the EU should no longer let large corporations get away with human rights and environmental abuses."

"It is a radical change," said Lara Wolters, a member of the European Parliament and rapporteur on the first EU due diligence rules for companies, while addressing a press conference after the vote.

"We are doing our bit to make sure that there are no more products in the market that come at the cost of human lives and environmental destruction.

A press release of the parliament said the law will deal with slavery, child labour, labour exploitation, biodiversity loss, pollution or destruction of natural heritage.

The law, titled "Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive", will apply to EU companies and non-EU companies that generate a threshold of turnover in the EU. The European Parliament said the implementation of the law will happen in phases.

From 2027, this law will be applicable to companies with over 5,000 employees and worldwide turnover higher than 1,500 million euros.

From 2028, this will be applicable to firms with over 3,000 employees and a 900 million euro worldwide turnover.

The other remaining companies within the scope of the thresholds defined by the law will come under this directive from 2029.

"In order for the due diligence to have a meaningful impact, it should cover human rights and environmental adverse impacts generated through the majority of the life-cycle of production, distribution, transport, storage and disposal of a product [...]" states the text of the law, which was approved on March 15, 2024, and released publicly.

The law can be used to fine violators up to 5 percent of their global turnover.

It terms the manufacturing and trading of textiles, clothing leather,

and related products "high impact" sectors.

It states that the law aims to give those affected by the failure to respect corporate due diligence access to justice and legal remedies.

The final draft of the law states that human rights and environmental impacts might occur at the level of raw material sourcing, manufacturing, or at the level of waste disposal. It states that the impacts could be caused by the companies' own operations, operations of their subsidiaries, and their business partners.

Rights violations, or "damages caused to a person's protected legal interests" include death, physical or psychological injury, deprivation of personal liberty, loss of human dignity, or damage to a person's property.

The law also states that companies have a responsibility to ensure living wages.

Living wage is different from a minimum wage as it takes into account the minimum income required for an individual to live with dignity, as opposed to only earning enough for subsistence.

The law states, "companies should adapt business plans, overall strategies and operations, including purchasing practices, and develop and use purchase policies that contribute to living wages and incomes for their suppliers."

It said that companies are responsible for using their influence to contribute to this.

Persons affected by "adverse impacts" should have a window of five years to make the claims, said the law.

It also adds that injured parties can authorise trade unions, non-government human rights or environmental organisations to bring civil liability actions.

"Companies should develop and implement a prevention action plan," reads the text of the law.

It suggests that companies link business incentives to human rights and environmental performance.

The law also encourages companies to support SMEs who can get jeopardised or risk bankruptcy while adhering to this code of conduct with "targeted and proportionate financial support, low-interest loans, direct financing, guarantees of continued sourcing, or assistance in securing financing."

"Today's vote is a milestone for responsible business conduct and a considerable step towards ending the exploitation of people and the planet by cowboy companies. This law is a hard-fought compromise and the result of many years of tough negotiations," said Lara Wolters.

IS BANGLADESH READY?

A survey was conducted by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Bangladesh in February 2023 to assess how compliant the RMG sector is with European laws on due diligence.

It found that child labour existed in the country's RMG supply chain even though it almost vanished from the RMG factories themselves.

"Organisation-wise analysis show employment of child workers is higher in yarn and thread manufacturing industries, followed by printing, dyeing and washing factories," said the study.

A total of 57 percent of yarn factory respondents said their organisations had child labour, while it was 31 percent for printing.

Only 51 percent of the respondents said their factories had effluent treatment plants.

Nearly 87 percent of workers in printing, dyeing, washing factories and transport workers said they cannot refuse dangerous or hazardous work like using heavy machinery or dangerous chemicals without protective equipment.

The study was done keeping in mind a separate due diligence law that was enacted in Germany in 2023.

Bakhtiar Uddin Ahmed, who has been working on the law over the last few years and is also the chief operating officer of Narayanganj-based Fakir Apparels Ltd, said compliance as per the new law will require a lot of investment to replace fossil fuel with renewable energy.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the country is almost ready for the law.

Md Towhidur Rahman, president of Bangladesh Apparels Workers Federation, however, said there were still some shortcomings in terms of preparing for this law.

Nine workers killed

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Chakma, told The Daily Star that three dead bodies were brought to the hospital at 9:20pm, and one worker died while undergoing treatment at the hospital.

According to the Road Safety Foundation, 367 people were killed in 358 road crashes between April 4 and 18.

In the corresponding period last year, 285 people were killed in 240 road crashes.

It means road crashes and deaths saw 39.20 percent and 20.19 percent rise respectively compared to last year, it said.

Supreme Court gets 3 new judges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three High Court judges have been elevated to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

With the appointments, the number of apex court judges now stands at eight.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin made the elevation as per the constitution, according to a gazette notification issued by the law ministry yesterday.

The three judges are Justice Muhammad Abdul Hafiz, Justice Md Shahinur Islam and Justice Kashafa Hussain.

Their appointment will come into effect after Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan administers their oath at the Judges' Lounge of the SC at 10:30am today, its Registrar General Md Golam Rabbani said in another notification.

Grocer stabbed to death over Tk10 note

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A youth was stabbed to death and his father sustained critical injuries when neighbours attacked on them over a trifling matter in Mymensingh's Tarakadna upazila.

The victim is Iqbal Hossain, 22, a grocer of Digarkadna village in Tarakanda, reports our Mymensingh correspondent quoting police.

Quoting locals, Md Wazed Ali, officer-in-charge of Tarakanda Police Station, said an altercation broke out between Iqbal and Faruq Mia at the local Majhiali Bazar around 9:00pm on Tuesday over the exchange of a worn out Tk10 note.

At one stage, Faruq and his younger brother Parvez Mia stabbed Iqbal to death, he added. When Iqbal's father Sadek Munshi rushed to the spot to save his son, he was also stabbed indiscriminately.

Police detained two people for interrogation. However, Faruq and Parvez managed to flee.

Police has sent the body to Mymensingh Medical College and Hospital morgue for autopsy. No case has been filed yet over the matter, the OC added.

CDA gets new chairman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Freedom Fighter Mohammad Younus has been appointed as the new chairman of the Chattogram Development Authority (CDA).

According to a circular issued yesterday by Ministry of Public Administration, Mohammad Younus has been appointed to the post contractually for 3 years as per the directive of the president.

Contacted, Mohammad Younus confirmed to The Daily Star that he got an appointment letter from the ministry.

7 arrested in Australian 'terrorism' raids

AFP, Sydney

Australian police arrested seven teenagers in a wave of anti-terror raids yesterday, with top officers claiming the network may have been plotting an attack and posed an "unacceptable risk" to the public.

More than 400 officers were involved in searches at 13 locations across Sydney following the non-fatal stabbing of an Assyrian bishop last week.

A 16-year-old boy was already in custody for that attack but police said

seven more "religiously motivated" juveniles that were part of a "wider network of associates and peers" have now been arrested.

Deputy police commissioner Dave Hudson said "intense" surveillance of the network painted an alarming picture that demanded immediate action.

"Their behaviour, whilst under surveillance, led us to believe that, if they were to commit any act, we would not be able to prevent that," he told reporters after the raids.

Rural areas bear the brunt

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as around 731MW of load was managed by cutting power to REB, according to data.

REB subscribers constitute more than 55 percent of the country's electricity users.

On that day, Mymensingh and its five adjacent districts received 1,100MW against a requirement of 1,500MW, according to the PDB data.

Yesterday, there was a shortage of around 1,500MW. REB got 1,000MW less than its demand, according to PDB data.

Khandaker Mokammel Hossain, a member of PDB, said the situation in the region is particularly bad as there are no major power plants in the area.

A gas-fired plant in Mymensingh's Shambhuganj has a capacity of 150MW, but it has been producing around 30-35MW in recent days due to inadequate gas pressure, he said.

"The problem has been persisting for a long time. There are some other liquid fuel based power plants in the region, but those are not designed to run for an entire day," he added.

Residents of the regions that do not have regional power producers are facing major outages.

According to PDB data, a major

power producer in Rangpur region is the 525MW Barapukuria power plant.

Only a 275MW unit is running mainly because of shortage of coal.

Abdul Halim, a farmer of Kaliganj upazila in Lalmonirhat, said he had not been able to irrigate his paddy fields for several days.

"The scorching heat is opening up cracks on my farmland. This is becoming an emergency situation for me," he added.

PDB's total power generation capacity and the near 3,000MW imported from India totals to around 26,000MW.

Currently, the power sector is getting around 1,300 million cubic feet of gas per day, which is the highest ever. The gas-fired power plants are producing up to 7,900MW while the coal-based plants are producing up to 3,500MW.

Furnace oil-based power plants generate around only 2,000MW as the fuel is comparatively expensive.

"We are short of liquid fuel. Besides, there are some technical problems with running these kinds of plants 24/7. But we are trying to keep the power supply stable," said Mokammel Hossain.

US warns Pakistan

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that were proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and the means of their delivery."

He said that these entities were based in China and Belarus.

Iran and Pakistan on Tuesday inked eight memoranda of understanding for collaboration in a range of areas. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi witnessed the MoU signing ceremony.

The accords included cooperation in veterinary and animal health, judicial support in civil cases, and security matters.

Last week, the US State designated four entities targeting proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. These entities have supplied missile applicable items to Pakistan's ballistic missile program, including its long-range missile program.