

UKRAINE WAR Russian forces take control of 3 settlements

AGENCIES

Russian forces have taken control of two more settlements in Ukraine's north-east Kharkiv region and one in the southern Zaporizhzhia region, the defence ministry said yesterday, building on a run of incremental gains that have alarmed Kyiv.

The defence ministry said in a statement that units from Russia's "North" military grouping had captured the settlements of Hlyboke and Lukyantsi in the Kharkiv region after intense fighting and had advanced "deep into the enemy defences."

Blinken announces an additional \$2bn in military financing for Kyiv

The ministry spoke of heavy fighting in other parts of Kharkiv region too where it said Russian forces had repelled three Ukrainian counter attacks, reports Reuters.

Moscow's claims came as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced an additional \$2bn in foreign military financing from the US for Ukraine while in Kyiv, and said Washington had not explicitly prohibited Ukraine from using Western weapons to strike targets inside Russia.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky cancelled planned trips abroad over the fresh offensive and the military was sending more troops to Kharkiv to hold back Russian advances, Kyiv said.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed his country's troops for advancing on "all fronts" on the battlefield in Ukraine, reports AFP.

"In all directions our troops are constantly, every day, improving their positions," Putin said.



Palestinian protesters hold symbolic keys during a rally in the northern West Bank city of Nablus yesterday, marking the 76th anniversary of the "Nakba" or "Catastrophe" of the creation of Israel, which sparked the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948.

PHOTO: AFP

Women, children make up 56pc of Gaza dead: UN

AFP, Jerusalem

Women and children make up at least 56 percent of the thousands killed in the Gaza offensive, the UN said Tuesday, amid controversy over the toll based on numbers from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza.

The United Nations was clarifying a fresh breakdown of the death toll in Gaza, after Israel slammed the world body for "parroting... Hamas's propaganda messages".

"Anyone who relies on fake data from a terrorist organisation in order to promote blood libels against Israel is antisemitic and supports terrorism," Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on X, formerly Twitter, late Monday.

Due to a lack of access, UN agencies have since the beginning of the Gaza offensive on October 7 relied on death tolls provided by the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. This has drawn criticism from Israel, but the United Nations says the ministry's tolls before the offensive were deemed reliable, and that it will strive to verify the

figures "when conditions permit".

The ministry said Tuesday that at least 35,173 people have been killed in the territory due to Israeli military operations. Gaza authorities have consistently said women and children make up a large majority of those killed in the territory.

But a fresh breakdown provided by the health ministry and published by the UN last week appeared to cast doubt on that assertion. The ministry said that as of April 30 it had fully identified nearly 25,000 of those killed, with identification elements missing for the remainder of the nearly 10,000 others who had died.

Of those fully identified, it said 40 percent were men, 20 percent women and 32 percent children, while another eight percent were elderly -- a category not broken down by gender. WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier told reporters in Geneva that by applying the same ratio to the unidentified and assuming women represent half of the elderly, it could be expected that at least "56 percent women and children" were among the more than 35,000 dead.

RAKHINE STATE Myanmar air strike injures 20 at clinic

AFP, Bangkok

A Myanmar military air strike on a medical clinic wounded around 20 people in western Rakhine state, according to an ethnic armed group, a resident and local media yesterday.

Clashes have rocked Rakhine since the Arakan Army (AA) attacked security forces in November.

AA fighters have seized territory, including along the border with India and Bangladesh, piling further pressure on the junta.

CONTROVERSIAL LAW India issues first set of citizenship certificates to 14

REUTERS, New Delhi

India yesterday granted citizenship to a first batch of 14 people under a controversial law that has been criticised for discriminating against Muslims, midway through general elections in which religious divisions have taken centre stage. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) grants citizenship to Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Christians who fled to India from Muslim-majority Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan before December 31, 2014 because of religious persecution. Enacted in 2019, the law was not immediately implemented due to strong protests and sectarian violence in New Delhi and other places that resulted in the death of scores of people. India implemented the act in March, weeks before the ongoing elections. Yesterday, the recipients were administered the oath of allegiance and granted citizenship after their documents were verified, the home ministry said in a statement, without elaborating on their identities.

Ex-Pak PM Imran Khan gets bail but can't leave jail

REUTERS, Islamabad

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was granted bail in Islamabad yesterday on land corruption charges but will have to stay in jail to serve time in two other cases, his lawyer said. The former cricket superstar was indicted last week on charges that he and his wife were gifted land by a real estate developer when Khan was prime minister from 2018-22 in exchange for illegal favours. Khan, who denies wrongdoing, had filed a bail application before Islamabad High Court. His party lawyer, Naeem Haider Panjutha, confirmed the granting of bail on social media platform X but said Khan remained in custody after two convictions - one involving the leaking of state secrets and the other his marriage violating Islamic law. Khan, 71, has been in jail since August last year. In total, he has been convicted in four cases, but sentences in two cases have been suspended.

Must recognise girls as driving force

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Bangladesh, Bulgaria and Japan along with the UNFPA are hosting the conference at the Hotel Intercontinental.

Hasina said Bangladesh has adopted the National Adolescent Health Strategy (2017-2030) and its implementation plan.

"To ensure health services for adolescents, we have established adolescent-friendly health service corners in 1,253 union-level service," she said.

She mentioned that an initiative has been taken to distribute free sanitary napkins to nearly 5 million adolescent girls studying in grades six to 12.

Furthermore, the government has launched the "School Meal" programme nationwide to meet the

nutritional needs of school-going students.

She said since 2010, the government has implemented the world's largest free textbook distribution programme at the secondary level, distributing approximately 464 million books until 2024.

"In addition, we have introduced a stipend programme to promote girls' education from primary to higher secondary level. Girls' education has been made free up to 12th grade."

She mentioned that the government has allocated 30 percent of the national budget for the social and economic empowerment of women.

"In line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we are implementing a national

policy and plan of action for women's development," she said.

Currently, 42.6 percent of the total workforce comprises of women. "And we aim to increase it to 50 percent by 2030. We have also set targets to ensure 25 percent female participation in the ICT sector by 2026 and 50 percent by 2041," she said.

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem, Minister of Social and Family Development of the Maldives Aishath Shiham, Kiribati's Minister for Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs Martin Moretti, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Yasushi And State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Rokeya Sultana also among others spoke at the programme.

Rab arrests 'Arsa acting chief'

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as most of the top leadership were arrested. The drives also seized a large tranche of arms and explosives.

The ensuing leadership crisis left the group mostly inactive, it added.

However, in recent times, crimes have been rising in the camps again as, according to the Rab official, some prominent Arsa members from the neighbouring country were sent there to reorganise the group's leadership.

A resident of camp no 15 in Ukhiaya, Solim, came to Bangladesh in 2017. According to Rab, he previously served as a bodyguard of Arsa chief Ataullah for two months. He was a zone commander of Arsa in Myanmar.

There are several cases against him, including three for murder.

Legal proceedings are underway against the arrestees, the Rab official said.

Battery-run rickshaws

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The mayors of two Dhaka city corporations, several secretaries and representatives of transport associations, who are members of the advisory council, were present at the meeting.

This was the maiden meeting of the council although the BRTA Act, which stipulates the formation of the council, was enacted in 2017. The authorities cited several reasons, including Covid-19 pandemic, for the delay in holding the meeting.

Israel-Hamas gun battle

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dozens of homes destroyed or damaged, while Palestinian medics said dozens of civilians had been killed and wounded.

Global watchdog The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said at least 105 media workers were among the dead in Gaza.

As the fighting intensifies, ceasefire talks mediated by Qatar and Egypt are at a stalemate, with Hamas demanding a permanent end to Israeli attacks and Netanyahu's government saying it will not stop until the group is annihilated.

Meanwhile, a group of Harvard students said on Tuesday they would peacefully end a pro-Palestinian protest encampment after the university agreed to discuss its endowment with the protesters and begin reconsidering involuntary leaves it imposed on some.

Swiss police moved in early yesterday

to remove dozens of pro-Palestinian student protesters holed up in the University of Bern, reports AFP.

In Australia, students have protested in Melbourne calling for universities to cut ties with companies linked to Israel.

Slovak PM

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During a three-decade career, Fico has moved between the pro-European mainstream and nationalistic positions opposed to European Union and US policies. He has also shown a willingness to change course depending on public opinion or changed political realities.

Emergency Services said they had received information about a man being shot in Handlova shortly after 2:30 pm (1230 GMT) and sent an emergency helicopter to a 59-year old patient.

Mango harvest

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this time. They also hope the Gopal Bhog variety which may appear in the market after May 25 will be Tk 1,200 per maund, almost double of last year.

There was no activity at Rajshahi's largest mango market in Baneshwar yesterday morning. Traders say it will take a few more days for business to pick up because most early varieties have not ripened yet.

Anwarul Haque, a farmer in Zinnahagar area, has 10 trees of the

early variety. "Only three have borne fruit," he says.

He already harvested some 10 maunds of Gutti, and from next week, he will start picking up a type of Gutti called Dudheshwar next week.

The DAE is expecting 2,60,315 tonnes of mangoes from 19,602 hectares of land in Rajshahi district.

Rajshahi Deputy Commissioner Shamim Ahmed says executive magistrates are monitoring the orchards and markets to make sure chemicals are not sprayed on mangoes.

PGCBL's rejoinder, our reply Wait for Ctg expressway

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occurred in the said import process. The explanation of Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd. (PGCB) is as follows to eradicate the misunderstanding created in the public mind due to the published news about a state-owned organization functioning with transparency:

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the state-owned organization, Power Grid Company of Bangladesh Ltd (PGCB), signed a contract through international open bidding with TBEA Co. Ltd., China, on July 23, 2020, for the construction of 230kV transmission lines under the Package 2 of "Enhancement & Strengthening of Power Network in Eastern Region (ESPNER) Project". As per the contract, payment is being made to the contractor through Direct Payment by development partner, the World Bank. There is no Letter of Credit (LC) process between PGCB and the contractor in this regard.

Material Dispatch Clearance in two lots were issued for the import of nut-bolts (calculated weight 74.8+104.068 tons) for the respective towers, with a total weight of 178.868 tons and a total value of 3 lakh 89 thousand 252 dollars. The project contractor submitted an invoice of 1 lac 49 thousand 558 dollars (\$149,558) against the import of 178.8 tons of nut-bolts in the first invoice and the balance of 2.1 Lac 39 Thousand 695 Dollars (\$239,695) against the import of 0.068 tons of nut-bolts in the second invoice. That is, a total invoice of 3 lakh 89 thousand 252 dollars (\$389,252) has been submitted against a total weight of 178.868 tons of nut-bolts. Therefore, the average price of nut-bolt per kg stands at 2,176 dollars. Hence, there is no scope to consider or make any payment in excess of the contract value, nor has it been done.

However, as per the invoice for the first lot, the contractor has imported 178.8 tons of nut-bolts instead of 74.8 tons. Although the price mentioned in the invoice was for 74.8 tons according to the Dispatch Clearance. As per the terms of the contract, 55 percent of the first invoice value (1 lac 49 thousand 558 dollars) i.e. 82 thousand 257 dollars (\$82,257) have been paid for the shipment of the materials. Further payment is kept withhold due to shipment of excess nut-bolts against the issued Dispatch Clearance. Later on, 2nd invoice amounting total value of 2 lakh 39

thousand 695 dollars (\$239,695) was submitted against the import of remaining 0.068 tons of nut-bolts including the price of additional nut-bolts imported against the price of the first lot invoice, though no amount has been paid to the contractor until now.

As a whole, in two invoices, a total 178,868 tons of nut-bolts worth 3 lakhs 89 thousand 252 dollars (\$389,252) were imported, but only 82 thousand 257 dollars have been paid to the contractor so far. Therefore, no corruption/misuse of government funds/money laundering has been occurred in the said nut-bolt import process.

The said matter is under process for resolving through discussion among PGCB, Contractor, Mongla Customs Authority and all other parties concerned as per the contract.

Therefore, you are humbly requested to publish the above rejoinder/explanation in your newspaper appropriately.

Our reply

The rejoinder does not challenge any facts of our story, nor does it explain how the report was defamatory for the state-run company.

The Daily Star report was based on customs documents, contract agreement and official communications between PGCB and the customs authorities.

Documents show that for about a year now, the customs authorities have been withholding the release of 68kgs of tower bolts, nuts and washers imported by PGCB at a cost of Tk 2.63 crore, which is 1,619 times the contract value.

PGCB's explanation to the customs authorities that the overpricing was the result of a mistake on the part of the Indian supplier was not accepted by the customs authorities, which we clearly mentioned in our story.

We stand by our report.

Ex-MP, 4 others

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government warehouses in FY22. As per rules, fertilisers are supposed to reach the warehouses within 50 days of their release. However, the contractor never delivered 72,000 tonnes of fertiliser, the report says.

The ACC filed a case after a preliminary investigation following a directive of the High Court to investigate the alleged embezzlement.

Wait for Ctg expressway

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"It discourages foreign buyers and investors from visiting here," said traders.

The 16.5km expressway would speed up transportation of goods and commuters, which will save time and reduce costs.

CDA's Chief Engineer Kazi Hasan Bin Shams said the expressway would reduce travel time between Patenga and Tigerpass.

"It takes around two hours to travel between the two places. But the expressway will end our sufferings as it will take 15 to 20 minutes," he added.

The CDA engineer said the expressway will also facilitate travel to the southern part of the district through Bangabandhu Tunnel.

During a recent visit to the expressway's Lalkhan Bazar point, this correspondent found that installation of lights was in progress and road signs were being installed.

City planners earlier said this new route would help boost business activities in the country's commercial city.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Omar Hazzaz termed the expressway an asset for the city dwellers as well as business community since it would add a new dimension to the port city's communication system.

The expressway will encourage businesses to invest more in the port city as road connectivity would become more efficient, he added.

In July 2017, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) approved the Chattogram Elevated Expressway project. The original cost of the project was Tk 3,250 crore and it was scheduled to be completed in June 2020.

But the government had to extend the deadline as the CDA failed to implement the project within the stipulated time.

At present, the cost of the project is Tk 4,298.95 crore, and the deadline has been moved to June this year, after two extensions.

The elevated expressway, a fully government-funded project, will be of four lanes.

It will have 14 ramps at nine points from Lalkhan Bazar to Patenga. The ramps will facilitate entry and exit at GEC, Tigerpass, Agrabad, Fakirhat, Nimalta Biswa Road, Customs area, CEPZ, Karnaphuli EPZ, and Cement crossing areas.

The expressway has been named after former city mayor and freedom fighter ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury.