

CIVIL WAR IN MYANMAR Arakan Army claims control of Key town in Rakhine

AFP, Bangkok

A Myanmar ethnic minority armed group yesterday claimed its fighters had seized control of a town in western Rakhine state, in what would be another blow to the junta.

Clashes have rocked Rakhine since the Arakan Army (AA) attacked security forces in November, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since the 2021 military coup.

AA fighters have seized territory, including along the border with India and Bangladesh, piling further pressure on the junta as it battles opponents elsewhere across the Southeast Asian country.

"We seized all bases of the Myanmar Army in Buthidaung," in northern Rakhine state, the AA said on its Telegram channel on Saturday.

Those seized included a "military strategic headquarters", it added, without giving details.

Its fighters were still clashing with junta troops outside the town, it said.

Buthidaung sits around 90 kilometres (55 miles) north of state capital Sittwe, which is still held by the military.

Earlier this month, the AA said it had taken hundreds of junta personnel prisoner following an assault on a command near the Buthidaung.

A junta spokesman has been approached for comment.

Communication with Rakhine is extremely difficult, with most mobile networks down.

The AA is one of several armed ethnic minority groups in Myanmar's border regions, many of whom have battled the military since independence from Britain in 1948 over autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

The AA claims to be fighting for more autonomy for the state's ethnic Rakhine population.

Fighting had spread to 15 of Rakhine state's 17 townships since November, the UN's human rights chief said last month.



PHOTO: AFP

Ukrainian firefighters put out a fire in a food warehouse after a Russian missile strike on Odesa. The photo was taken on Friday.

RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE

Ukraine struggles on eastern front

REUTERS, Donetsk Region

For Ukrainian gun commander Oleksandr Kozachenko, the long-awaited US ammunition can't come fast enough as he and his comrades struggle to hold off relentless Russian attacks.

His unit's US-supplied M777 howitzer, which once hurled 100 shells a day at the encroaching enemy, is now often reduced to fewer than 10.

"It's a luxury if we can fire 30 shells."

America says its rushing ammunition and weapons to Ukraine following the delayed approval of a \$61 billion aid package by Congress last month. As of early May, though, two artillery units visited by Reuters on the eastern frontline said they were still waiting for a boost in deliveries and operating at a fraction of the rate they need to hold back the Russians.

Gunners with Kozachenko's 148th

Separate Artillery Brigade and the 43rd Artillery Brigade, both in the Donetsk region, said they were desperate for more 155mm rounds for their Western cannons, which had given them an edge over Russia earlier in the war.

Resurgent Russian forces, which significantly outnumber and outgun the Ukrainian defenders, have been mounting multiple attacks across the eastern Donbas region in recent months and along the country's northeastern border last week.

The drive has marked an inflection point in the conflict spawned by Russia's full-scale invasion more than two years ago.

Russia has gained more territory in 2024 than it lost control of during Ukraine's much-hyped counteroffensive in the summer of 2023, according to Pasi Paroinen, an analyst with Black Bird Group, a Finnish-based volunteer group

that analyses satellite imagery and social media content from the war.

Moscow's forces have claimed 654 sq km since the beginning of this year, outstripping the 414 sq km lost to Ukraine between June 1 and Oct 1 last year, Paroinen said. Russia has gained 222 sq km of territory since only May 2, he added. Russia's defence ministry didn't respond to a request for comment for this article, while Ukraine's military didn't immediately respond.

Colonel Pavlo Palisa, whose 93rd Mechanised Brigade is fighting near the key strategic city of Chasiv Yar, said he believed Russia was preparing a major push to break Ukrainian lines in the east. This echoed the commander of Ukraine's ground forces who said last week he expected the war to enter a critical phase over the next two months as Moscow tries to exploit persistent delays in weapons supplies to Kyiv.

Faster than global average

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Asked whether sedimentation was considered during the study, Prof AKM Saiful Islam, principal investigator of the study, said the study determined the trend of water level on Bangladesh's coast using satellite altimetry data.

He said they considered sedimentation and subsidence and still found the sea-level rise to be much faster than the global average.

He said the faster rate of rising sea level on Bangladesh's coast will increase the vulnerability of coastal people and their livelihoods.

Salinity, coastal inundation, and storm surge height will increase. It could impact agriculture, food security, disaster management, health, drinking water supply, and coastal infrastructure.

The world's largest mangrove forest and its ecosystem will be affected by rising sea level and salinity.

The DoE conducted a study on sea-level rise using tidal gauge data in 2016.

Project director of both studies, Mirza Shaukat Ali, director (climate change) at the DoE, said that experts had recommended validating the findings of the 2016 study using satellite altimetry data and assessing the impacts of sea-level rise.

The DoE then went for the study funded by the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund and conducted by the Institute of Water and Flood Management of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology and Centre for Environmental and Geographical Services (CEGS). Prof AKM Saiful Islam and Motaleb Hossain Sarker, director of CEGS, led their teams in the study.

Researchers utilised data from satellite missions, like Nasa and the French aerospace agency's Topex/Poseidon, and its follow-up missions like Jason-1, Jason-2, and Jason-3,

which track sea levels from space.

Focusing on the Bay of Bengal and Bangladesh, they employed Sen's slope (a non-parametric method used to estimate the magnitude and direction of trends in time series data) to discern overall trends in sea-level rise over time.

"There are a number of meticulously crafted maps that will serve as invaluable tools for policymakers, helping them identify priority areas for both short- and long-term adaptation strategies and risk management along Bangladesh's coastline," Mohan Kumar Das, one of the authors of the study, told The Daily Star yesterday.

IMPACT

The impacts of sea-level rise were also assessed through a study titled "Impacts of Projected Sea Level Rise on Water, Agriculture and Infrastructure Sectors of the Coastal Region".

The study projected the sea-level rise along the coastal belt of Bangladesh for 2030, 2050, 2070, and 2100 and assessed its impact on sectors.

It found that sea level rise induced flooding will cover 12.34 percent to 17.95 percent of areas of the coastal zone by 2100.

The inundation will affect Bagerhat, Barguna, Barishal, Bhola, Chandpur, Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Feni, Gopalganj, Jashore, Jhalakathi, Khulna, Laxmipur, Narail, Noakhali, Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Satkhira, and Shariatpur, the study found.

"In almost all future scenarios, Jhalakathi, Pirojpur, and Barishal will be most inundated, as most of them are not polder-protected... These districts are affected by the sea-level rise as they do not have a comprehensive flood protection system. The areas flooded are mostly inner coastal areas that are not protected by polders. So, the flood protection for these areas should be considered as a priority."

Polders are areas of lowland that have been separated by dykes to prevent water covering an area.

The study found that salinity levels will rise further inland. "The higher the SLR, the higher the salinity ingress in the coastal areas. This will affect mostly the south-central region heavily and reduce these regions' agricultural productivity."

The study also found that sea-level rise induced flooding will cause a 5.8 to 9.1 percent loss in Aman crop production.

"Barishal, Patuakhali, Jhalakathi, and Pirojpur districts are identified as the most vulnerable and affected areas where most damages occur. Some coastal regions had been saved from flooding by the existence of polders and embankments."

The study predicted that annual rainfall in coastal regions would be five percent to 16 percent higher between 2050 and 2080.

The temperature may increase by 1.4 degrees Celsius to 2.7 degrees Celsius in the 2080s.

The study suggested establishing automated tidal and surge gates to regularly monitor sea-level rise.

Noted climate expert Ainun Nishat said that the sea-level rise resulting from global warming due to the melting of snow in the various mountains and from Antarctica, Greenland, and Iceland will be a major concern for Bangladesh.

Nishat, who reviewed the study "Impacts of Projected Sea Level Rise on Water, Agriculture and Infrastructure Sectors of the Coastal Region", said that in 60-70 years, low-lying deltaic areas of the southwestern region would face high salinity levels and may face higher levels of storm surges.

The districts in the central part of the country, like Gopalganj, Madaripur, Faridpur, Shariatpur, Pirojpur, and Jhalakathi, would need special protection against sea-level rise and increasing salinity.

"Already the water of Madhumati in Gopalganj is saline during the dry season."

He wore 16 pieces of clothes, hid 4.4kg gold!

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questioning, the officials suddenly noticed he was wearing an unusual number of clothes, which seemed suspicious considering the hot weather.

After he was asked to remove the additional layers of clothing, they were shocked to see at least 16 pieces — a pair of long pants, nine pairs of shorts, and six vests.

The officials spotted some gold dust upon scanning the garments and then decided to torch the clothing items, assured there was gold hidden inside them.

To their utter bewilderment, yellow hues started appearing and

depositing in the container as soon as the fabrics caught flames at the airport's Canopy-1.

Once the gold was collected, it was seen that he was actually carrying over four kilograms of gold.

Pradip Kumar Sarker, assistant director at the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate, said, "We found around 4.4kg gold from his clothes after burning them yesterday. In total, he was carrying around 4,492 grammes of gold worth around Tk 4.60 crore."

A case was filed with Airport Police Station in this regard.

In Bangladesh, the annual demand

for gold is between 20 and 40 tonnes.

At least 80 percent of the demand is met through smuggled gold, according to the commerce ministry.

National Board of Revenue data showed that people travelled to Bangladesh with at least 99,791kg gold from 2019 to 2022.

At least 52,195kg worth Tk 44,366 crore was brought in 2022 alone.

Customs officials said that individuals bringing gold to the country under the baggage rule have to pay less in taxes than the ones importing gold for business, which is why the smugglers are able to work around the system.

Bangladeshi students terrified in Kyrgyzstan

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mob violence against foreign students took place in Bishkek since Friday evening. Tensions boiled over on May 13 after videos of a fight between Kyrgyz students and medical students from Egypt were shared online.

"So far, a few hostels of medical universities in Bishkek and private residences of international students, including Pakistanis, have been attacked. The hostels are inhabited by students from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There have been reports of light injuries to a number of students from Pakistan," the embassy wrote on its Facebook page yesterday morning.

Kyrgyzstan authorities said adequate police personnel were

deployed, but they were mostly on the main streets.

"Mobs ransacked hostels, broke doors and windows, and mercilessly beat up international students, said Samia.

She said the female students were being harassed but the main target of the mobs appear to be the male students.

Jerit Islam, a Bangladeshi students' representative in Bishkek, told The Daily Star last night that the situation was scary.

"Mobs started attacking on Friday night. Police have been deployed and the authorities are saying that everything is under control. However, there are still reports of attacks," he said.

He said the Bangladesh embassy

in Uzbekistan contacted the Kyrgyz foreign ministry.

"They are all asking the students to stay indoors and not to talk to the neighbours and not to open the windows or doors even if someone calls from outside," Jerit said.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh embassy in Uzbekistan in a press statement said they are in contact with the Bangladeshi students and the Kyrgyz foreign ministry.

The Kyrgyz authorities concerned said the situation is under control of law enforcement agencies, said Nazmul Alam, minister at the Bangladesh embassy in Uzbekistan.

The embassy advised the students to stay indoors and get in touch with it for any issues at the emergency number (+998930009780).

ICB Islamic Bank struggling to pay back depositors

FROM PAGE 1

on Friday.

About 15 other depositors at the same Moulvibazar branch had the same experience, he said.

"Two days later, I was able to withdraw only Tk 20,000 from the branch."

Depositors are also flocking to Dhaka's Paltan and Karwan Bazar branches to withdraw money, only to be sent back empty-handed.

Zakir Hossain has a Tk 2,00,000 deposit with the bank's Naya Paltan branch. On Thursday, he failed to encash a cheque due to liquidity crisis.

"The branch manager assured me that I would be able to withdraw the money.... But I think the bank's vault is empty," he said.

After facing a severe liquidity crisis, the lender on January 31 requested Bangladesh Bank to provide it with Tk 50 crore in collateral-free liquidity support.

The plea was turned down two weeks later as the bank already has Tk 425 crore in liabilities with the central bank.

The Off site Supervision Department of the BB requested the Banking Regulation and Policy Department to take corrective measures against the bank as it is practically out of operation due to the liquidity crunch.

"The bank is now in a systemic risk due to its frozen deposits, capital shortfall, high defaulted loans and liquidity crisis," said a BB official.

The situation is so dire that the bank has no securities against

which it could borrow money from other Islamic banks and the central bank, and is paying its employees in phases, The Daily Star has learnt from BB officials familiar with the developments.

"We are aware of the current situation of the bank," Md Mezbaul Haque, executive director and spokesperson of Bangladesh Bank, told this newspaper on Friday.

He said a large portion of the bank's fund is stuck with some leasing companies, which caused the liquidity crisis.

"We asked the Malaysian shareholder of the bank to inject fresh funds," he added.

Some legal complexities related to its previous owning company (Orion Group) also mean that there are some ambiguities over the current ownership of the bank, the BB spokesperson said.

Currently, a case related to its ownership is pending before a court.

"We will ensure that the depositors get their money back, but currently the bank is facing a sudden crisis," Mezbaul said.

About rejecting ICB's plea for liquidity support, he said the bank has no quality securities, which is why the BB did not entertain the request.

At the end of 2023, the bank faced a capital shortfall of Tk 1,823 crore and 87 percent of its total loans of Tk 790.4 crore turned bad, according to BB data.

Presently, the bank has 350 employees in 33 branches, ICB officials say.

According to a number of ICB

14-year-old schoolgirl raped in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, PABNA

A 14-year-old schoolgirl was raped by a local youth at a village in Sujanagar upazila of Pabna on Friday night, according to a police complaint.

Md Jalal Uddin, officer-in-charge of the police station, said the victim's family filed a case against five people with Sujanagar Police Station yesterday.

The prime accused is Berek Mondol, 25, of Vatpara village. Four more persons were also accused of abetting the crime.

The eighth-grader was sent to Pabna General Hospital for medical attention.

Quoting the case statement, the OC said the five accused including Berek kidnapped the girl when she went out of the house Friday night.

Berek, along with his associates, took her to a nearby secluded place and raped her there, the OC said quoting the case statement.

Hearing her screams, locals rushed to the spot and rescued her. The accused fled the scene afterwards.

Police are conducting drives to arrest the culprits.

'Swechchhasebak League' men stab BCL activist dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Chhatra League activist was stabbed to death, allegedly by Swechchhasebak League men, after a road march programme in front of parliament on Manik Mia Avenue yesterday evening.

The victim is Mehedi Hasan, 18, a resident of Nururchela area of Badda. He recently passed SSC exam from Solmaid High School in Bhatara.

Swechchhasebak League organised the road march on the occasion of Sheikh Hasina's homecoming day from the Institute of Engineers Bangladesh to Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhandmondi Road 32 this afternoon.

After the rally ended, party activists were returning on foot and vehicles.

Md Chayan, Mehedi's uncle, said when a group was trying to cross the road in front of the parliament, some pick-ups carrying Swechchhasebak League men were not letting them pass.

Soon a clash broke out between the groups over this.

Mehedi was stabbed in his chest by two men who were on a pick-up, he claimed.

He was taken to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead around 6:00pm.

Sajib Dey, inspector (investigation) of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station, said there was a clash between two groups after a programme of Swechchhasebak League in front of the parliament.

A person was killed and several were injured in the incident. Police are trying to identify and arrest the accused, he added.