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Russia's President Vladimir Putin and North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un pose for a photo during a signing ceremony following bilateral talks in Pyongyang, North Korea, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Russia, N Korea sign mutual defence pact

Putin says the deal will protect both countries from aggression; Kim hails new ties as 'alliance'

REUTERS, Seoul

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday signed a deal with North Korea's Kim Jong Un that included a mutual defence pledge, one of Russia's most significant moves in Asia for years that Kim said amounted to an "alliance".

Putin's pledge overhauls Russia's entire post-Soviet policy on North Korea just as the United States and its Asian allies try to gauge how far Russia could deepen support for the only country to have tested a nuclear weapon this century.

On his first visit to Pyongyang since July 2000, Putin explicitly linked Russia's deepening of ties with North Korea to the West's growing support for Ukraine and said Moscow could develop military and technical cooperation with Pyongyang.

After talks, they signed a "comprehensive strategic partnership" pact, which Putin said included a mutual defence clause in the case of aggression against either country.

"The comprehensive partnership agreement signed today provides, among other things, for mutual assistance in the event of aggression against one of the parties to this agreement," Putin said.

He said Western deliveries of advanced, long-range weaponry including F-16 fighters to Ukraine for strikes against Russia breached major agreements.

"In connection with this, Russia does not exclude for itself the development of military-technical cooperation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Putin said.

Kim praised Russia for making what he cast as an enormously significant strategic move to support North Korea, which was founded in 1948 with the Soviet Union's backing.

Putin's courting of Kim, which has included gifts of limousines and a tour of Russia's new space launch centre, has alarmed the United States and its Asian allies.

Putin was greeted by cheering crowds lining the streets of Pyongyang along with children waving Russian flags and a military salute. Kim, 40, greeted Putin at the airport.

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4 arrested over double murder in Bogura

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Law enforcers arrested four people in Bogura town yesterday over the murder of two men two days ago.

The arrestees are Kabir Ahmed Mithu, 60, general secretary of Bogura Motor Workers' Union, Azbeen Rifat, 19, a Chhatra League activist, Naim Hossain, 28, and Sheikh Sourav, 26.

They are among the 13 named accused in the murder case filed with Bogura Sadar Police Station by Hena Begum, mother of Noman Ahmed Sharif, one of the deceased.

Noman and Rumman Ahmed were hacked to death in Bogura town's Chakarpara area around 12:30am on Tuesday.

The two were killed following an altercation over a trivial matter, said police.

Hena Begum also accused 15 unnamed people of the murder.

Hossain, a friend of the deceased, sustained bullet wounds in the incident. He

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EPIC Group to get \$100m loan from IFC

The company will spend funds on expansion in Bangladesh, new manufacturing facility in India

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

International Finance Corporation (IFC) will provide EPIC Group with a \$100 million debt financing package to support its expansion in Bangladesh and the construction of a new manufacturing unit in India.

The package includes a \$70 million sustainability-linked loan and a \$30 million green loan.

Additionally, EPIC Group will use the proceeds to upgrade its washing and wastewater treatment plant and to invest in technology and equipment that will reduce energy and water use in Bangladesh, IFC said in a statement on Monday.

IFC's funding, which includes its first green loan with sustainability-linked features in the manufacturing sector, is expected to help EPIC Group create over 10,500 direct jobs and 17,000 indirect jobs in the two countries.

The loan is structured with three ambitious corporate sustainability performance targets, including reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensity, decreasing freshwater intensity, and increasing the representation of women in junior and middle management.

"Partnering with IFC is a significant step for EPIC Group in pursuit of a more sustainable and innovative textile manufacturing industry," said Ranjan Mahtani, executive chairman of EPIC Group.

"This collaboration not only allows us to expand our operations in Bangladesh and India but also reinforces our commitment to reducing our environmental footprint

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Israel may have violated laws of war in Gaza

Says UN rights office; 24 more Palestinians killed as Israeli forces bombard western Rafah



- » UN rights office calls for investigations into attacks
- » Lawlessness in Gaza impedes aid via Kerem Shalom crossing: UN
- » Tensions soar on Israel-Lebanon border
- » Gaza death toll rises to 37,396

AGENCIES

Israeli forces may have repeatedly violated the laws of war and failed to distinguish between civilians and fighters in the Gaza conflict, the UN human rights office said yesterday.

Separately, the head of a UN inquiry accused the Israeli military of carrying out an "extermination" of Palestinians.

In a report on six deadly Israeli attacks, the UN human rights office (OHCHR) said Israeli forces

"may have systematically violated the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack".

"The requirement to select means and methods of warfare that avoid or at the very least minimise to every extent civilian harm appears to have been consistently violated in Israel's bombing campaign," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said.

Israel's permanent mission to the United Nations in Geneva characterised the analysis as "factually, legally, and methodologically flawed".

"Since the OHCHR has, at best, a partial factual picture, any attempt to reach legal conclusions is inherently flawed," it said.

Meanwhile, Israeli air strikes and clashes between troops and Hamas fighters rocked Gaza yesterday, as Israel's army warned it had readied an "offensive" against the Lebanese Hezbollah movement on the country's northern front.

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Nvidia eclipses Microsoft as most valuable company

REUTERS

Nvidia became the world's most valuable company on Tuesday, dethroning tech heavyweight Microsoft as its high-end processors play a central role in a scramble to dominate artificial intelligence technology.

Shares of the chipmaker climbed 3.5 percent to \$135.58, lifting its market capitalisation to \$3.335 trillion, just days after overtaking iPhone maker Apple to become the second most valuable company.

Microsoft's stock market value was \$3.317 trillion as its shares dipped 0.45 percent. Apple's stock slipped over 1 percent, leaving its value at \$3.286 trillion.

Nvidia's stunning surge in market value over the past year has become emblematic of a Wall Street frenzy driven by optimism about emerging AI technology.

While Nvidia's rally has lifted the S&P 500 and

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Impactful Sakib needs to carry on

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was an easy presumption to put Bangladesh's bowling as their main weapon ahead of the T20 World Cup, especially since the batters have provided very little to be excited about in recent times.

But, very few could have predicted Tanzim Hasan Sakib to be the Tigers' lead pacer in this tournament – he is currently occupying the joint-second spot in the top wicket-takers' list alongside New Zealand's Trent Boult, Windies' Akeal Hosein, and South Africa's Anrich Nortje with nine wickets in four games.

However, what sets Sakib apart from the rest is the impact he has had with the new ball – the 21-year-old has been the most impactful bowler in the tournament so far, with a bowling impact of 251.54

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South Africa opener Quinton de Kock plays a shot on the leg side during their Twenty20 World Cup Super Eight match against USA at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda yesterday. De Kock's 40-ball 74 helped the Proteas post 194 for four and eventually win the match by 18 runs.

PHOTO: AFP

Reptile fossil shines new light on early marine evolution

CNN ONLINE

Scientists have discovered a 246 million-year-old marine reptile fossil, the oldest of its kind to be found in the Southern Hemisphere, shining a new light on the early evolution of marine mammals.

The greatest mass extinction event in the fossil record – known as "The Great Dying" – occurred some 252 million years ago, wiping out some 95 percent of species on land and sea.

What followed was the emergence of new creatures that evolved from those that survived, including reptiles that evolved from living on land to living at sea.

Sauropterygians were ancient aquatic reptiles that existed for around 180 million years during the Mesozoic era, 251 to 66 million years ago.

Nothosaurs were a type of Sauropterygian that lived on Earth during the Triassic period, the first period of the age of dinosaurs, 251 million to 200 million years ago.

However, their early evolution had only been known from fossils found in the Northern Hemisphere, according to the study published in the journal Current Biology Monday.

