

C ASIA MEETING Russia, Iran hail 'close' world views

AFP, Ashgabat

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian yesterday hailed their "close" views on world affairs, with the Russian leader saying ties with Tehran were a "priority" for Moscow.

The pair held a meeting in Turkmenistan, one of the world's most secretive states, amid soaring tensions in the Middle East, with Israeli air strikes on Lebanon's capital Beirut that it says are aimed at Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah.

Relations between Russia and Iran — both under Western sanctions — have strengthened massively since the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, with Tehran widely believed to be supplying Moscow with weapons.

"Relations with Iran are a priority for us, they are developing very successfully," Putin said.

"We are actively working together on the international arena, and our views of events in the world are often very close," he added.



People inspect the damage at the site of an Israeli strike, amid ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces, in Beirut, Lebanon yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

ISRAELI STRIKES Dozens hurt at Gaza school shelter

REUTERS, Cairo

Dozens of Palestinians have been wounded by Israeli quadcopter fire at a school sheltering displaced people in Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp, the Civil Defence said yesterday.

It said crews were transferring the wounded to a nearby hospital.

On Thursday, an Israeli airstrike on a school sheltering displaced people in central Gaza killed at least 28 people, including women and children, while three hospitals in the north were told to evacuate putting patients' lives at risk.

The strike happened in the city of Deir Al Balah, where a million people have taken shelter after fleeing fighting elsewhere after more than a year of offensive.

Medics said 54 other people were wounded at the school.

Stop Israel from bombing Iran's oil sites

Gulf states urge US; Tehran warns of severe fallout if Israel uses Gulf airspace

REUTERS, Dubai

Gulf states are lobbying Washington to stop Israel from attacking Iran's oil sites because they are concerned their own oil facilities could come under fire from Tehran's proxies if the conflict escalates, three Gulf sources told Reuters.

As part of their attempts to avoid being caught in the crossfire, Gulf states including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are also refusing to let Israel fly over their airspace for any attack on Iran and have conveyed this to Washington, the three sources close to government circles said. Israel has promised Iran will

pay for its missile attack last week while Tehran has said any retaliation would be met with vast destruction, raising fears of a wider war in the region that could suck in the United States.

The moves by the Gulf states come after a diplomatic push by non-Arab Shia Iran to persuade its Sunni Gulf neighbours to use their influence with Washington amid rising concerns Israel could target Iran's oil production facilities.

During meetings this week, Iran warned Saudi Arabia it could not guarantee the safety of the Gulf kingdom's oil facilities if Israel were given any assistance in carrying out an attack, a senior Iranian official

and an Iranian diplomat told Reuters.

Ali Shihabi, a Saudi analyst, said: "The Iranians have stated: 'If the Gulf states open up their airspace to Israel, that would be an act of war'. But (KSA) won't allow anybody to use their airspace."

The diplomat said Tehran had sent a clear message to Riyadh that its allies in countries such as Iraq or Yemen might respond if there was any regional support for Israel against Iran.

A potential Israeli strike was the focus of talks on Wednesday between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Iranian FM Abbas Arqchi, Gulf and Iranian sources said.

ASEAN MEET US, its allies clash with Russia, China

AFP, Vientiane

The US and its allies yesterday clashed with Russia and China at an Asean meet in Laos dominated by disputes on maritime claims and Ukraine.

The East Asia Summit came on the heels of meetings of Asean bloc, where Philippines has led the charge in criticising Beijing's actions in the disputed South China Sea.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, meeting Asean leaders before the full summit, reiterated calls for freedom of navigation in the bustling waterway.

Gunmen kill 21 coal miners in Pakistan

Burn down all 10 mines

REUTERS, Quetta

Unidentified gunmen attacked a cluster of small private coal mines in southwestern Pakistan early yesterday, shooting some miners as they slept and lining up others before opening fire, killing 21 in the restive region, police said.

The attack by 40 armed men days before Pakistan hosts a summit of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization grouping is the worst in weeks in the mineral-rich province of Balochistan bordering Afghanistan and Iran.

"The armed terrorists remained for around 1-1/2 hours in the mining area," regional police official Asif Shafi told Reuters. "They fired rockets and hurled grenades at the mines and miners' quarters."

The attackers burnt down all 10 mines, along with the equipment and machinery within.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack on the mines of the Junaid Coal Co in the Duki area, which injured six. Among the dead were four Afghan nationals and another four were injured.

Businesses and shops were shut in Duki as hundreds of people gathered along with the bodies of the dead in a protest to demand the arrest of the attackers, police said.

Noel Tata takes the reins at charity arm of Tata group

REUTERS, New Delhi

The half-brother of Ratan Tata was appointed yesterday as the head of the powerful and influential philanthropic arm of India's Tata group, giving him indirect control of the \$165 billion conglomerate.

Tata Trusts said Noel Tata, 67, will be its new chairman after the death this week of Ratan Tata, one of India's best-known corporate titans.

The decision followed "many old-timers" in the group wanting him to lead the venture, said one Tata executive, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The parent company, Tata Sons, oversees 30 firms across consumer goods, hotels, automobiles and airlines and has become a global juggernaut over the years, with brands such as Jaguar Land Rover and Tetley Tea in its stable.

It owns Tata Consultancy Services, Taj Hotels and Air India and counts Starbucks and Airbus as partners in India.



LPG importers demand

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Subsequently, the CPA on Wednesday formed an investigation committee comprising members of Bangladesh Customs, Coast Guard and Mercantile Marine Office, said Md Mostasim Billah, assistant harbour master of the CPA, one of the four members of the probe body.

Talking to The Daily Star, Energy Adviser Fouzul Kabir Khan said he instructed the energy division to investigate the issue.

Seeking anonymity, an LPG importer said the unscrupulous suppliers have been generating illicit profits as the prices of products sourced from sanctioned countries are much lower than the rate Bangladesh follows.

"Many countries have been importing Iran's LPG or other fuels officially. But as a signatory of some international rules, we cannot buy products from sanctioned countries. If the government allows it then it should be open for all," said another top LPG operator on the condition of anonymity.

Such illegal import of LPG has

been going on for the last couple of months, they said.

If the authorities take the initiative to check the Certificate of Origin directly, it will be easier to get the real picture, said another LPG importer.

According to the National Board of Revenue, Gaz GMS contains a total of 33,000 tonnes of LPG ingredients under nine packages while MT Captain Nikolas contains 42,925 tonnes under 13 packages. The supplying companies are Octane Energy Group FZCO and Atlantis Gas DMCC respectively.

Of the nine Gaz GMS packages, five belong to Meghna Fresh LPG, three to JMI Industrial Gas and one to BM Energy (BD).

Of the 13 packages that were brought by Captain Nikolas packages, six belong to Jamuna Spacetech Joint Venture, three to Unitek LP Gas, two to TMS and one each to BM Energy and Energypac Power Generation.

The Daily Star contacted the officials of the eight companies and most of them wished not to make any comment.

"We usually import LPG from

another supplier. But this time we chose the company [Atlantis]. We checked their previous records. But we don't have the ability to check the origin of the product because normally suppliers handle those issues," said a top official of Unitek LP Gas.

LOAB President Azam J Chowdhury said the organisation has a resolution as an operating practice that no one should buy LPG from sanctioned countries. "We all have signed it but some of us import such items by hiding information," he said.

"Just like Bangladesh can't import products from Russia, it can't do so from Iran," said Mohammad Tamim, professor of petroleum and mineral resources engineering department of BUET.

Iran was the most sanctioned country in the world until it was surpassed by Russia, following Russia's invasion of neighbouring Ukraine in February 2023.

"If the private entities import such products at their own risks, and if they don't use the proper banking channel, both of them might face trouble individually," he said.

Bangladesh likely to keep power deal with Adani

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without strong evidence of wrongdoing, the source added. While an exit may not be possible, the only feasible option could be a mutual agreement to reduce the tariff, the second source said.

Asked for comment on the remarks, Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, the power and energy adviser, said, "The committee is currently reviewing the matter, and it would be premature to comment."

The Adani power costs Bangladesh about 12 taka (\$0.1008) a unit, an official of the Bangladesh Power Development Board said, citing the latest audit report for financial year 2023-24.

That is 27 percent higher than the rate of India's other private producers and as much as 63 percent more than Indian state-owned plants, he added.

Under the deal, Bangladesh has been sourcing electricity since April 2023 from Adani, along with about

1,160 MW from other Indian plants.

Adani has had "no indication" that Bangladesh is reviewing the agreement, a spokesperson in India said.

"We continue to supply power to Bangladesh despite mounting dues, which are of significant concern and are rendering plant operations unsustainable," the spokesperson said.

Dhaka is struggling to clear dues of \$800 million to Adani Power, among more than \$1 billion owed to Indian power companies, because of difficulty in accessing dollars to make payment.

"We are in constant dialogue with senior officials of the Bangladesh Power Development Board and the government, who have assured us our dues will be cleared soon," the Adani spokesperson added.

Adani Power was confident Dhaka would fulfil its commitments, just as the company had met its contract

terms, the spokesperson added, but did not respond to a query on why its rates exceeded those of other suppliers.

Nevertheless, domestic critics, including the BNP, say pricing concerns make a review of the deal necessary.

"The deal with Adani has raised serious concerns about overpricing from the start, and it's a positive step that the government is now reviewing it," said Zainul Abidin Faroque, a senior leader of the party. "I hope they make the right decision."

The interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus took power in Bangladesh in August after deadly protests prompted then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign and flee to neighbouring India.

It has since scrapped projects such as a floating LNG terminal planned by domestic conglomerate Summit Group, with officials saying more cancellations are possible.

Tigers play for pride in Riyadh's swansong

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the Tigers lost the second T20I by 86 runs and also conceded the series 2-0 after losing the opener by seven wickets in Gwalior.

It was Mahmudullah, as he has done many times in his career, who saved Bangladesh from even more embarrassment in the second game. His 39-ball 41-run knock, even though was not what the match demanded during a chase of a mammoth 222-run target, helped Bangladesh avoid the utter humiliation of getting bundled out.

UN reaffirms support for govt's reform

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secretary thanked DiCarlo for the reaffirmation of support, according to a message received from Bangladesh's Permanent Mission to the UN yesterday.

During the meeting, they also discussed Bangladesh's contribution to UN peace architecture.

On UN peace operations, the foreign secretary requested the UN to increase representation of Bangladeshi nationals at the senior policy making levels.

On the Rohingya issue, Jashim Uddin underlined "global attention and action" to solve the crisis. He expressed concerns at

After the debilitating defeats in the first two matches, chances of a quick turnaround seem very slim, but if the Tigers can pull it off, that would be a grand sendoff for one of their best ever in the format.

The 38-year-old has the most number of T20I appearances (140) for Bangladesh and has also led the side in 43 T20Is, more than anyone else. He is the second highest run scorer in the format with 2436 runs, 115 runs fewer than Shakib Al Hasan, who also announced his retirement from T20Is in this tour before the Kanpur Test.

"We need to acknowledge that they have forged a path for young cricketers to follow... Bangladesh are fortunate to have players of that calibre to play for that length of time," Bangladesh fielding coach Nic Pothas said of Mahmudullah and Shakib yesterday.

Although Mahmudullah's career strike rate of 117.51 does not look that impressive and his approach in the format has been questioned many times, the all-rounder has undoubtedly done enough to leave a lasting imprint in Bangladesh's T20I history.

the current conflict situation in Myanmar, which is leading to fresh influx of Rohingyas into Bangladesh.

Recalling Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus' proposal to convene an international conference on the Rohingya crisis, the foreign secretary requested the UN support in this regard.

DiCarlo appreciated the ongoing cooperation between the interim government of Bangladesh and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

She offered further cooperation to advance the reform initiatives in key areas.

Agriculture takes a hit from floods

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floods destroyed Aman crops on his 4 hectares of land. He also lost fish worth Tk 200,000 in his 40-decimal pond.

The damage to the Aman paddy is irreparable this season as the time for fresh cultivation is over, lamented Sultan Mahmud, another farmer.

Mohammad Nuruzzaman, deputy director of DAE in Netrakona, said Aman crops worth Tk 313 crore on 24,667 hectares were damaged by the flash floods, especially in Kalmakanda, Durgapur, Purbodhala, Barhatta and Sadar upazilas.

Nearly 76,000 farmers were affected in the district, where vegetables on 177 hectares were also damaged, said the official.

Some 900 farmers lost fish worth Tk 8 crore in 1,500 ponds in the district, said Md Nazrul Islam, deputy director of Mymensingh divisional fisheries department.

Jalal Uddin, a fish farm owner in Barhatta, said the water level increased so fast that they did not get any time to protect their fish enclosures.

Anwar Hossain of Kalmakanda upazila said he faced a loss of Tk 25 lakh as the fish in his three ponds were washed away.

Sukalpa Das, deputy director of DAE in Sherpur, said Aman crops on 33,000 hectares of land were destroyed by the floods. This accounts for 33 percent of the total cultivated fields in the district. The damage affected some 150,000 farmers in the district.

The floods washed away the fish in 7,366 ponds of around 4,500 farmers in Sherpur, especially in Nalitabari and Jhenaihati upazilas, said Pranab Kumar Karmakar, the district fisheries officer.

Primarily, the loss was estimated at Tk 70 crore, said the official.

Monoranjan Dhar, director of Mymensingh divisional livestock department, said this sector faced a loss of Tk 12.41 crore in Mymensingh, Sherpur and Netrakona.

Many poultry farms were flooded and deaths of poultry birds were reported in Mymensingh and Netrakona. Around 800-acre grazing fields in the districts were also flooded, said the official.

The floods affected over 200,000 people in Mymensingh, around 86,000 in Netrakona, and 150,000 in Sherpur. Some 55,000 indigenous families have also been affected by the floods in Sherpur and Mymensingh.

The Mymensingh district administration has so far allocated 63 tonnes of rice, Tk 700,000 cash, including Tk 300,000 for child food in Dhobaura, Haluaghat and Phulpur, said Azim Uddin, additional deputy commissioner of the district.