

GAZA OFFENSIVE

1m displaced Palestinians face extreme cold: UN

AGENCIES

Nearly one million displaced Palestinians in Gaza are at risk from extreme cold and rain this winter, the UN agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) has warned.

“Displaced people in Gaza need protection from the rain and cold. Only around 23 percent of this need has been met, leaving 945,000 people at risk of exposure this winter,” the UN agency said in a statement on Sunday. “Aid is urgently required to



address the overwhelming needs as the crisis deepens.”

The United Nations also renewed its call for a ceasefire in Gaza as Israeli airstrikes demolished homes and casualties increased.

The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday that at least 44,758 people have been killed in more than 14 months of Israeli offensive in the enclave.

“In Deir Al Balah and across Gaza, people search through the rubble of their destroyed homes, trying to salvage what little remains after an Israeli airstrike,” the UN’s agency for Palestinian refugees said in a post on X.

“As strikes continue, civilian casualties rise, and homes and vital infrastructure are reduced to ruins. The human cost of this war is unbearable. We need a ceasefire now.”

In a separate development, more than 4,000 amputations and 2,000 cases of spinal and brain injuries have been recorded in Gaza since the start of the Israeli offensive last year, a news agency reports.



Protesters attend a rally calling for the impeachment of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who declared martial law which was reversed hours later, in front of the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea yesterday. Yeol has been banned from leaving the country.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Israel bombs Syria chemical weapons sites

Aims to prevent rebel groups seizing advanced weaponry; Kremlin says Putin authorised Assad’s asylum

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Israel has struck suspected chemical weapons sites and long-range rockets in Syria in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of hostile actors, the foreign minister said yesterday.

Syrian rebels reached Damascus over the weekend and overthrew president Bashar Assad’s government following nearly 14 years of civil war, raising hopes for a more peaceful future but also concerns about a potential security vacuum in the country, which is still split among armed groups.

In a separate development, the Kremlin said Russia has granted political asylum to Assad, a decision it said was taken by President Vladimir Putin. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to

comment on Assad’s specific whereabouts and said Putin was not planning to meet with him, reports AP.

Kremlin also said that it was too early to say what the future would hold for Russia’s military bases in Syria, adding that it would be the subject of discussion with the new rulers in Damascus.

Israelis have welcomed the fall of Assad, who was a key ally of Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah group, while expressing concern over what comes next.

Israel says its forces temporarily seized a buffer zone inside Syria dating back to a 1974 agreement after Syrian troops withdrew in the chaos. The military published photos of Israeli commandos in the Syrian Mount Hermon area. Saar said the troop presence was strictly limited.

Meanwhile, Turkey-backed Syrian opposition groups took control of the northern Syrian town of Manbij from US-backed Syrian Kurdish forces (SDF), a Turkish security source said yesterday.

The SDF had been holding the town in recent days amid intense fighting with the Syrian National Army (SNA) and other Turkey-backed groups, reports Reuters.

President Joe Biden said later on Sunday that the sudden collapse of the Syrian government under Assad is a “fundamental act of justice” after decades of repression, but it was “a moment of risk and uncertainty” for the Middle East.

The outgoing Biden administration and President-elect Donald Trump were working to make sense of new threats and opportunities across the Middle East.

Taiwan military on high alert

China deploys 90 ships in likely drills

REUTERS, Taipei

Taiwan raised its alert level yesterday saying China has set up seven zones of reserved airspace and deployed naval fleets and coast guard boats in what a security source described as the first military drills across a broad swathe of the region’s waters.

A senior Taiwan security official told Reuters that China currently has nearly 90 navy and coast guard ships in waters near Taiwan, the southern Japanese islands and the East and South China Seas, of which around two-thirds were navy vessels.

Beijing’s defence ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

China, which claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, had been expected to launch another round of exercises in response to Taiwan President Lai Ching-te’s trip to the Pacific, which included stopovers in Hawaii and the U.S. territory of Guam, security sources had told Reuters.

India bolsters naval fleet with new Russia-built warship

AFP, Moscow

India’s defence minister watched the commissioning of his country’s latest naval vessel at a Russian shipyard yesterday, hailing it as a “significant milestone” in ties with a longstanding defence ally.

Indian defence minister Rajnath Singh took part in the commissioning ceremony of the country’s latest multi-role stealth guided missile frigate, INS Tushil, in the Baltic port of Kaliningrad. “The ship is a proud testament to India’s growing maritime strength and a significant milestone in long-standing bilateral relations with Russia,” Singh posted on X.

Tushil, or “Shield” in English, weighs 3,900 tonnes and carries “an impressive blend of Russian and Indian cutting edge technologies”, the defence ministry in New Delhi said last week.

It also said the ship would reach India in a “near-combat ready condition” since all Russian equipment on board had been already tested successfully.

New Delhi has walked a diplomatic tightrope since the beginning of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022.

An endless wait for justice

FROM PAGE 12

With the new interim government in place, there is an opportunity to revisit the case and ensure justice for the family.”

However, the former chairman of the National Human Rights Commission Dr Mizanur Rahman, said, “When I visited the site, the unnaturally clean and orderly state of the area where the body was found raised serious questions. The issue is clear – critical evidence has been destroyed.

“When evidence is tampered with or erased, proving a crime becomes extraordinarily difficult. The court relies on evidence to deliver justice, and without it, the process is severely undermined.”

Tonu’s father said, “The case wasn’t filed the way I wanted. My daughter went to Sergeant Jahid’s house for tuition [on the day of the incident], but they listed unidentified persons instead.”

Intellectually challenged Samia’s father had to consider settling the case out of court for Tk 200,000 due to his financial struggles.

“But they [the perpetrators] offered only Tk 50,000, so I refused,” he said, highlighting how low-income families often have to compromise on justice.

Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF) took up Samia’s case, but systemic barriers made progress difficult.

“The first hurdle was obtaining the forensic report, which requires persistent lobbying to obtain, delaying the process,” said WDDF founder Ashrafun Nahar Mishiti.

“The court environment was not accommodating to Samia’s disability and failed to meet her needs. The interrogation was offensive and traumatising.... The stress caused her to lose consciousness at one point.”

A sign language interpreter from a local school for the disabled was appointed by the court.

“The interpreter wasn’t familiar with Samia’s communication style. An interpreter who understands her, like a family member, should have been provided”, Mishiti added

Former public prosecutor Naresh Mukherjee said, “The next court

date is February 6. After the defence presents their arguments, the case may proceed to a verdict, but the accused has requested to present witnesses. If [the request is] granted, the verdict may be delayed.”

Meanwhile, the accused continues to threaten the family, warning he will go to jail only after harming or killing them.

“My only son could be stabbed any time – he [the accused] always carries a knife,” the father said.

Even cases with quick verdicts under close monitoring of rights organisations’ fail to ensure proper justice or improvements to victims’ lives.

The Crime Victims Compensation Act, which recommended a district fund for victims of violent crimes, including rape, was proposed in 2006. However, it remains unaddressed since its submission in 2007, leaving survivors without state support.

After the Noakhali gang rape case received widespread media coverage, many falsely assumed the victim had received significant financial aid from the government or NGOs.

“In reality, I survive on Tk 5,000 a month from some women’s rights activists in Dhaka,” said Nasima.

“I had to pull my son out of college because I couldn’t afford it. The former deputy commissioner had promised me cattle or a shop, but nothing ever came of it. The new deputy commissioner doesn’t even let me meet him.”

Nasima lives in a house provided by the local MP, but recent floods have taken that away too.

“My home was submerged.... All my goats and chickens died. I had to take shelter at my sister’s house and came back to find I had nothing left.”

Additionally, she can no longer earn a living through her previous work.

“Ever since they [the rapists] injured my head, I can’t even thread a needle, let alone stitch quilts like I used to.”

The three cases are reflective of the harsh reality survivors and families of survivors or victims (who were murdered after rape) must confront, with the legal system and societal prejudice that perpetuate an endless wait for justice.

37pc want to skip classes

FROM PAGE 12

Among those surveyed, 36.5 percent of respondents said primary students became inattentive to studies and 28.6 percent said experienced mental harm.

The survey further found that political and social instability caused various mental changes among children.

Around 45.8 percent respondents said children experienced mental instability, 19.2 percent stated that children became inattentive to education, 15.3 percent said they noticed unruly behaviour, 13.8 percent mentioned that children were addicted to devices, 6.9 percent said children remained fearful, 23.2 percent mentioned that children were panicked, and 19.7 percent stated that a sense of insecurity prevailed among children.

To improve the mental health of children, CAMPE has recommended that parents adopt a friendly approach towards students, keep them away from mobile addiction, and encourage their participation in local sports and cultural practices.

The event was chaired by CAMPE Executive Director Rasheda K Choudhury. In her closing remarks, she said, “To ensure their education, children need to maintain their mental health. Therefore, we will present the proposals received from the event to the government so that the government can take the necessary measures.”

She also highlighted the importance of working together with the government and stakeholders to maintain the mental health of children.

Speaking as the chief guest at the event, Bidhan Ranjan Roy Podder, adviser to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, said, “If we cannot bring social changes, it will not be possible to improve the mental health of children by only counselling. The government is doing the necessary work.”

Mentioning that “10 beautiful schools” will be inaugurated this month, the adviser said, “We are also working on beautification of other schools as well. These will help maintain the mental health of children.”

Ex-minister, allies took out Tk 2,000cr

FROM PAGE 12

charge of the bank’s executive committee. This allowed Saifuzzaman to act as the de facto chairman of UCB and direct its operations for personal gain, according to the letter.

One such instance of interference involved providing loans to Adnan Imam’s companies Genex Infosys, Genex Infrastructure, A&P Venture and AWR Developments without proper scrutiny or adherence to the bank’s lending policies.

Under the direction of individuals like Saifuzzaman and Alamgir Kabir (Apu), the bank’s management bypassed critical internal controls and approved the loans without adequate collateral or necessary assessments, it said.

The irregularities also extended to a controversial share purchase involving Genex Infosys in late 2021.

UCB approved the purchase of 6,083,626 locked-in shares of Genex Infosys at inflated prices from two shareholders closely related to Adnan Imam.

The transaction bypassed the normal due diligence procedures and was even discussed as a “miscellaneous agenda” in the board meetings without being formally listed.

The shares, which had been

purchased at Tk 172.50 each, rapidly lost value, causing the bank to incur significant financial losses.

Within a year, the value of the shares plummeted to Tk 37.9 per share, resulting in a loss of Tk 78.25 crore.

Moreover, Imam’s influence extended beyond this single transaction. He is believed to have manipulated the loan approval process, exerting undue pressure on bank officials to expedite and approve loans that benefited him and his affiliates.

An investigation led by Zahir, who assumed the role of chairman on August 29, found evidence that indicated the actions were part of a broader pattern of fraudulent activities orchestrated by Saifuzzaman, Imam and other individuals in positions of power within the bank.

The letter also highlighted the role of Alamgir Kabir, a close relative of Saifuzzaman, who played a pivotal role in facilitating the approval of the loans.

Kabir’s rapid promotion within the bank despite a lack of merit is believed to have been part of a strategy to place him in a position where he could manipulate loan approvals and circumvent the bank’s internal controls.

His actions, according to the letter, contributed significantly to the bank’s exposure to risky loans, many of which have now defaulted.

Given the scale of the alleged financial mismanagement and the involvement of high-profile figures in the scandal, the new UCB management has called for a thorough investigation into the actions of the former board members, including Saifuzzaman, Imam, Kabir and others.

ACC Director General Md Akhtar Hossain and Zahir could not be reached for comment.

Ashikur Rahman Habibe Rabbi, head of corporate and regulatory affairs at Genex Infosys, said the allegations raised in the letter are baseless.

“Requesting a loan from a bank is a fundamental right of any organisation, and the onus for approving loans rests entirely with the bank. Genex cannot be held responsible for the management of that approval process. It seems that unwarranted accusations are being directed at Genex.”

The loans obtained by Genex were approved in full compliance with the bank’s regulatory framework.

The acquisition of Genex shares by UCB was conducted with all necessary approvals from the Bangladesh

Securities and Exchange Commission and adhered to all regulatory and board protocols, Rabbi said.

“These transactions were conducted on an arm’s length basis, and Genex has honoured all dividend payments to its shareholders. The choice by UCB to purchase and later sell the shares during a market downturn was solely their decision, and Genex cannot be held liable for that.”

One out

FROM PAGE 12

accounting, sociology, and finance and banking have lower unemployment rates.

Around 36 percent of NU graduates are employed as teachers, while 43.13 percent aspire for government jobs.

The study also pointed out several challenges, most prominently low student attendance, poor quality of education, lack of incentives and training for teachers, and education programmes in misalignment with job market demands.

SM Zulfiqar Ali recommended ensuring quality teaching and learning, introducing teachers’ feedback and market-based learning facilities, alongside the inclusion of co-curricular and soft-skill activities at NU-affiliated colleges to improve education quality.

Accused makes confessional

FROM PAGE 12

filed with Kotwali Police Station.

During the clash, Saiful was beaten and hacked to death outside the court premises.

Kotwali police later registered three cases in connection with assault on police, vandalism, and obstructing police personnel in discharging their duties during clashes between police, lawyers, and followers of Chinmoy.

Following the murder, Saiful’s father, Jamal Uddin, filed a murder case naming 31 individuals. Saiful’s brother also lodged another case accusing 115 people.

So far, a total of six cases have been lodged with police and courts in connection with murder and clashes.

Police have arrested 40 people. Ten suspects, mostly cleaners by profession, were also held in the murder case, said police.

World cautious

FROM PAGE 1

Sham (HTS), a former al-Qaeda affiliate, was a generational turning point for the Middle East.

It ends a war that killed hundreds of thousands, caused one of the biggest refugee crises of modern times and left cities bombed to rubble, countryside depopulated and the economy hollowed out by global sanctions. Millions of refugees could finally go home from camps across Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Meanwhile, international diplomats reacted cautiously yesterday to the prospect of the HTS group taking control in Syria after the fall of President Bashar al-Assad.

HTS has its roots in the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda and is proscribed

as a “terrorist” organisation by Western governments, including the European Union.

Although HTS and its leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani have promised to protect minorities and respect people’s rights, Europe is not ready to trust them just yet.

Assad’s fall also wipes out one of the main bastions from which Iran and Russia wielded regional power. Turkey, long aligned with Assad’s foes, emerges strengthened.

The Arab world faces the task of reintegrating one of the Middle East’s pivotal states, while containing a brand of militant Sunni Islam that has in the past metastasised into the sectarian violence of Islamic State.