

IRAQ MASS GRAVE Bodies of 100 Kurdish women, kids found

AFP, Iraq

Iraqi authorities are working to exhume the remains of around 100 Kurdish women and children thought to have been killed in the 1980s under former Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein, three officials said.

The grave was discovered in Tal al-Shaikhia in the Muthanna province in southern Iraq, about 15-20 kilometres (10-12 miles) from the main road there, an AFP journalist said.

Specialised teams began exhuming the grave earlier this month after it was initially discovered in 2019, said Diaa Karim, the head of the Iraqi authority for mass graves, adding that it is the second such grave to be uncovered at the site.

"After removing the first layer of soil and the remains appearing clearly, it was discovered that they all belonged



to women and children dressed in Kurdish springtime clothes," Karim told AFP on Wednesday.

He added that they likely came from Kalar in the northern Sulaimaniyah province, part of what is now Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, estimating that there were "no less than 100" people buried in the grave.

Efforts to exhume all the bodies are ongoing, he said, adding that the numbers could change.

Following Iraq's deadly war with Iran in the 1980s, Saddam's government carried out the ruthless "Anfal Operation" between 1987 and 1988 in which it is thought to have killed around 180,000 Kurds.

Saddam was toppled in 2003 following a US-led invasion of Iraq and was hanged three years later, putting an end to Iraqi proceedings against him on charges of genocide over the Anfal campaign.

Karim said a large number of the victims found in the grave "were executed here with live shots to the head fired at short range".

He suggested some of them may have been "buried alive" as there was no evidence of bullets in their remains.



South Korea's ruling People Power Party lawmakers (bottom) argue with National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik during the plenary session for the impeachment vote of acting president Han Duck-soo at the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

US on possible nuclear testing under Trump

Warns Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia's point man for arms control yesterday cautioned Donald Trump's incoming administration against resuming nuclear testing, saying Moscow would keep its own options open amid what he said was Washington's "extremely hostile" stance.

The resumption of testing by the world's two biggest nuclear powers would usher in a new and precarious era nearly 80 years since the United States tested the first nuclear bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico in July 1945.

Russia, the United States and China are all undertaking major modernisations of their nuclear arsenals just as the arms control treaties of the Cold War era between the Soviet Union and the United States crumble.

In an explicit signal to Washington, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who oversees arms control, said Trump had taken a radical position on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) during his first term.

"The international situation is

extremely difficult at the moment, the American policy in its various aspects is extremely hostile to us today," Ryabkov was quoted as saying in an interview with Russia's Kommersant newspaper.

In 2023, Putin revoked Russia's ratification of CTBT, bringing his country into line with the United States

"So the options for us to act in the interests of ensuring security and the potential measures and actions we have to do this - and to send politically appropriate signals... does not rule anything out."

During Trump's first 2017-2021 term as president, his administration discussed whether or not to conduct the first US nuclear test since 1992, the Washington Post reported in 2020.

In 2023 President Vladimir Putin formally revoked Russia's ratification

of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), bringing his country into line with the United States.

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed by Russia in 1996 and ratified in 2000. The United States signed the treaty in 1996 but has not ratified it.

There are fears among some arms control experts that the United States is moving towards a return to testing as a way to develop new weapons and at the same time send a signal to rivals such as Russia and China.

Russia, with 5,580 warheads, and the United States, with 5,044, are by far the world's biggest nuclear powers, holding about 88 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, according to the Federation of American Scientists. China has about 500 warheads.

In the five decades between 1945 and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, over 2,000 nuclear tests were carried out, 1,032 of them by the United States and 715 of them by the Soviet Union, according to the United Nations. Post-Soviet Russia has not carried out a nuclear test. The Soviet Union last tested in 1990.

China sanctions US firms over Taiwan military support

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday slapped sanctions on seven US companies after Washington's approval last week of a \$571.3 million military aid package to Taiwan, which Beijing said infringed on its "sovereignty and territory".

Last Friday, US President Joe Biden authorised the drawdown of up to \$571.3 million for defence assistance to the self-ruled island, which China regards as its own territory.

Washington's actions "interfere in China's internal affairs, and undermine China's sovereignty and territorial integrity", the Chinese foreign ministry said as it announced the sanctions.

The statement also hit out at Washington's 2025 defence budget, which includes a security cooperation initiative with Taiwan, as well as calls for strengthened defence industrial cooperation with Taipei.

Beijing will freeze the China assets of US defence companies Insitu, Hudson Technologies, Saronic Technologies, Aerkomm and Oceaneering International, as well as Raytheon's Canada and Australia subsidiaries, the ministry said.

The sanctions, which kicked in yesterday, also prohibit the targeted companies from doing business with organisations and individuals inside China.

The US does not officially recognise Taiwan diplomatically but it is the self-ruled island's strategic ally and largest supplier of weapons.

MPs impeach acting S Korea president Han

REUTERS, Seoul

South Korea's parliament impeached acting president Han Duck-soo yesterday, less than two weeks after suspending president Yoon Suk Yeol's powers over his short-lived declaration of martial law, plunging the country deeper into political chaos.

The impeachment of Han, the acting president since Yoon was impeached on December 14 for declaring martial law on December 3, has pushed South Korea's once-vibrant democratic success story into uncharted territory.

Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok now assumes the role of acting president as the person next in line under the law.

He is set to speak to the military chief and consult the foreign minister and acting defence minister, a spokesperson said.

In a statement after the vote, Han said he was saddened by what the unfolding events meant for the next generation, but accepted the outcome.

"I respect parliament's decision and in order to avoid further chaos and uncertainty, I will suspend my duties in accordance with relevant laws," he said.

He added he would await the decision of the Constitutional Court to review the impeachment motion. The ruling People Power Party, which has objected to the opposition-led impeachment of Han, said it had filed a constitutional petition.



Work of ministries

FROM PAGE 12

recover digital documents and a significant portion of the burnt paper documents can be reproduced if necessary.

The fire ravaged four floors of a Secretariat building, destroying important files, documents, computers, furniture, and other materials from six divisions across five ministries. It also caused significant damage to walls and floors.

The fire was noticed around 1:52am on Thursday in two sections of the nine-storey Building-7 within the highly secured Secretariat complex.

It affected the Road Transport and Highways Division, two divisions under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development, and Cooperatives, the Posts and Telecommunications Division, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Nineteen firefighting units extinguished the blaze after 10 hours of intense effort. A firefighter setting up hose pipes was run over and killed by a truck in the early hours.

Yesterday morning, members of the eight-member investigation committee visited the affected building and later held a meeting.

"The investigation is ongoing. The committee will hold another meeting tomorrow (today)," Brigadier General Muhammad Zahid Kamal, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defence and member secretary of the committee, told The Daily Star.

He said they could not determine during the primary investigation whether it was an act of sabotage or an accident, expressing his unwillingness to comment further until the investigation is complete.

The meeting was attended by Senior Secretary of Home Affairs Ministry Osman Gani, the committee convener, along with other members, including Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam; Housing and Public Works Secretary Hamidur Rahman Khan; Professor Tanveer Manjur from Buet's civil engineering department; Brig Gen Mahbubur Rasse of the Bangladesh Army; Md Yasir Arafat Khan from Buet's chemical engineering department; and Yasir Arafat from the university's

electrical and electronic engineering department.

Two young advisers, Asif Mahmud and Nahid Islam, hold portfolios of two of the fire-affected ministries.

Formed on Thursday, the committee is tasked with identifying the source and cause of the fire, determining any personal or professional responsibility, and providing recommendations to prevent such incidents and improve overall security of the Secretariat.

The committee has been asked to submit a preliminary investigation report by December 30 and a complete report within the following 10 working days.

Khuda Baksh Chowdhury, special assistant to the Chief Adviser for Home Affairs, said in a notice last night that the decision to bar journalists and general people with temporary passes was "in the interest of enhancing the overall security of the Secretariat".

The notice said all types of temporary entry passes, except for those issued to government officials and employees, will remain suspended.

Holders of these passes can apply for a new temporary entry pass within the next 15 days. Applications can be made through a special cell set up at the Bangladesh Police Crime Command and Control Center.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sheikh Md Sajjat Ali also visited the damaged building yesterday, accompanied by members of the DMP Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit.

Also, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) continued its forensic investigation for a second day.

CID Inspector Prashanta Kumar Debnath said evidence collected from the site on Thursday was being supplemented with a broader search around Building 7.

The Fire Service and Civil Defence deployed an additional unit yesterday to prevent any further fire incidents.

An FSCD official involved in the firefighting effort said while some firefighting equipment is available in the Secretariat buildings, there is no system in place to use them during nighttime emergencies.

He added that a thorough assessment is needed to determine whether the existing equipment is sufficient.

3 killed in clash

FROM PAGE 12

the area.

The OC said Akhtar, who went into hiding following the fall of Awami League-led government on August 5, returned to his house on Thursday after hearing that it was looted and vandalised.

The clash ensued around dawn in Khasherhat area when supporters of Mostafizur intercepted Akhtar and his supporters near the Arial Khan bridge area.

During the clash, a crude bomb blast left Akhtar dead on the spot.

Maruf was severely injured in the clash and taken to a hospital in Shariatpur where he died. Sirajul died on way to Dhaka for better treatment.

The bodies were sent to Madaripur Hospital for autopsy.

A local in Khasherhat wishing anonymity said Mostafizur was a supporter of BNP but joined Awami League after it formed the government. After the fall of Awami League government on August 5, Mostafizur became active again in BNP politics.

This newspaper could not immediately reach Mostafizur for comments.

BNP activist

FROM PAGE 12

7:00pm yesterday.

According to witnesses, Kabir was attacked soon after he left the mosque.

As he was heading home, some five to six masked assailants on a CNG-run autorickshaw waylaid his path and opened fire on him.

Shot in the head, Kabir fell to the ground. The assailants then hacked Kabir with sharp weapons and confirmed his death, before fleeing the scene.

Mohammad Ibrahim, additional superintendent of police (crime and operations) in Noakhali, said the police are trying to arrest those involved and determine the motive behind the murder.

No bar for Khaleda

FROM PAGE 12

be remembered as great heroes.

This revolution was driven by the spirit of the Liberation War and the determination to build a Bangladesh free from discrimination.

"Efforts are being made to undermine the achievements of this revolution, but no conspirator will succeed."

Chairman of Debate for Democracy Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiron said former chief justice Khairul Haque had annulled the caretaker government process with the malicious intention of keeping

the previous fascist Awami League government in power indefinitely.

"The fallen Awami League government deprived the people of their right to vote. The Awami League has completely destroyed the electoral process through fraudulent, one-sided, and midnight elections," he said.

In the last three elections, the Election Commission, administration, police, returning officers, and polling officers and others were guilty of fraud, he added.

"All those who committed these electoral crimes must be brought to justice."

Kiron made 10 recommendations to ensure future elections are fair and acceptable.

These include taking initiatives to bring to justice all those involved in electoral crimes, including members of the Election Commission; implementing strict legal provisions to prevent corrupt individuals from participating in elections; repealing all laws that may hinder the media from freely reporting on elections; and ensuring that the EC is independent.

Bring her back to me!" she wailed as the body of her daughter arrived home.

The death sparked outrage among locals. They demand justice and exemplary punishment for the perpetrators.

Narail Sadar Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Saiful Islam told the reporters that the legal process was underway.

The accused could not be contacted.

[Our correspondent from Bagerhat contributed to this report]

UP member 'gang-raped, poisoned'

FROM PAGE 12

keep the footage a secret, he added.

When Basana threatened to file complaints, the perpetrators forced her to ingest poison before letting her go, he said.

She then returned home, but didn't tell anyone what had happened before it was too late, he added.

She fell sick rapidly and was admitted to Jashore General Hospital on December 25.

She told her family members what happened while being admitted there. Tragically, she

died of her injuries on Thursday night.

Moktar Molla's wife Shahida and daughter-in-law Sonia corroborated the account given by Basana.

"After Basana came to our house, they [the accused] took her to a room. She wanted to leave, but they forced her to stay. They locked the door and drove us out of our house," Shahida told reporters.

The victim's mother, Sundari Haldar, aged 80, was inconsolable, mourning the loss of her only daughter. "Where is my daughter?

Azerbaijan hints

FROM PAGE 12

"It is necessary to find out from what kind of weapon," he added, citing reports from survivors of hearing "three explosions" as the plane was over Grozny.

Azerbaijan Airlines said it had suspended flights to 10 Russian airports, saying preliminary results suggested the crash of Baku-Grozny flight J2-8243 was "due to physical and technical external interference".

The head of Russia's civil aviation agency, Dmitry Yadrov, said in an earlier statement that "the situation on this day and at these hours in

the area of Grozny airport was very complex".

"Ukrainian attack drones at this time were making terrorist attacks on civilian infrastructure in the cities of Grozny and Vladikavkaz," Yadrov said, referring to a nearby city.

He said the Azeri pilot made "two attempts to land the plane in Grozny that were unsuccessful" in "thick fog".

"The pilot was offered other airports. He took the decision to go to Aktau airport," he added.

The Kremlin earlier yesterday declined to comment on the deadly crash.

"Until the conclusions of the

investigation, we do not consider we have the right to make any comments and we will not do so," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Some aviation and military experts have pointed to signs of shrapnel damage on the plane wreckage as evidence it was hit by air defence systems.

An Azerbaijan pro-government website, Caliber, and several other media have cited unnamed Azerbaijani officials as saying they believed a Russian missile fired from a Pantsir-S1 air defence system caused the crash.