

Iran 'main security challenge' in ME

Says France's Macron

AFP, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday said Iran was the main strategic and security challenge in the Middle East, citing the acceleration of its nuclear programme and support for Russia's war against Ukraine.

"Iran is the main strategic and security challenge for France, the Europeans, the entire region and beyond," Macron said in a speech to ambassadors, adding the issue would be a key subject of discussion with the new administration of US president-elect Donald Trump.

"The acceleration of the nuclear programme leads us nearly to the point of no return," Macron said.



Iran says it is enriching uranium for peaceful purposes and has stepped up the programme since US President-elect Donald Trump pulled Washington out of the 2015 deal during his first term of office and restored tough US sanctions on Tehran.

European powers France, Germany and Britain said last month Iran's actions had further hollowed out the deal and would heighten its stockpile of high-enriched uranium without a "credible civilian justification".

The head of the UN nuclear watchdog said in December that the Islamic Republic was "dramatically" accelerating enrichment close to the roughly 90 percent level that is bomb-grade.

The three European powers were co-signatories to the 2015 deal in which Iran agreed to curb enrichment, seen by the West as a disguised effort to develop nuclear-weapons capability, in return for a lifting of international sanctions.

French, German and British diplomats are set to hold a follow-up meeting with Iranian counterparts on January 13 after one last month held to discuss the possibility of serious negotiations in coming months to defuse tensions with Tehran with Trump due to return to the White House on January 20.



Pro-Yoon protesters attend a rally in support of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol near his official residence, in Seoul, South Korea yesterday. Impeached Yeol appeared set to evade arrest ahead of a last night deadline after anti-graft investigators asked for more time to enforce a warrant.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Fighting rages inside Russia's Kursk region

Moscow reports gains in Ukraine; Kyiv denies fall of Kurakhove

REUTERS

Russia said yesterday its forces had made important gains in eastern Ukraine while continuing to fend off a new Ukrainian offensive inside the Kursk region of western Russia, where a second day of fierce fighting was under way.

The Russian defence ministry said its forces had captured the town of Kurakhove, 32 km (20 miles) south of Pokrovsk, a Ukrainian logistics hub towards which Russian forces have been advancing for months.

The ministry said taking Kurakhove, which had held out for many weeks, would enable Moscow's forces to step up the pace of their advance in Ukraine's Donetsk region. It also said it had captured Dachenske, a settlement within five miles of Pokrovsk.

Ukrainian monitoring group DeepState, which tracks the front line using open sources, showed most of Kurakhove under Russian control. Ukraine's Khortytisia group of forces said Russian forces continued to attack Kurakhove but Ukrainian forces were working to identify and repel Russian assault groups on that part of the front.

Both sides are fighting to improve their battlefield positions before US President-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged to bring a quick end to the nearly three-year-



old war, takes office on January 20.

Ukraine's main achievement in the past five months of fighting has been to capture and hold on to a slice of territory inside Russia's Kursk region that could provide it with an important bargaining chip in possible peace talks.

Ukraine has not revealed details of the new offensive it launched in Kursk on Sunday, though a senior Ukrainian official has said Russia is "getting what it deserves".

Russian accounts said Moscow's forces had beaten back the initial Ukrainian assaults but further waves were expected.

"Of course, this is not the end. Now we are recording a concentration of enemy equipment in another direction and naturally we understand that

he (Ukraine) will try to strike in this direction. Right now I won't say where," said Major General Apti Alaudinov, commander of a Chechen unit fighting for Russia in Kursk.

Ukrainian and Western assessments suggest about 11,000 troops from Russian ally North Korea have been deployed in the Kursk region to support Moscow's forces. Russia has neither confirmed nor denied their presence.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday more than 1,000 North Korean troops had been killed or wounded. Reacting to the new Ukrainian offensive, the United States, Britain and the European Union have reaffirmed their support for Kyiv.

MAOIST ATTACK 8 Indian cops, driver killed in bomb blast

REUTERS, Bhubaneswar

At least eight policemen and a driver were killed in a bomb blast set off by Maoist rebels in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, police said yesterday.

The police vehicle in which the victims were travelling was hit by a blast in the Bijapur district of the state yesterday, a police statement said.

This is the latest in a series of sporadic attacks on security forces in the state. It follows frequent gun battles between the forces and the rebels in which several rebels have been killed in recent months.

Chhattisgarh and its neighbouring states in central and eastern India have been affected by a decades-long insurgency by Maoist rebels.

The rebels subscribe to a form of communism propagated by late Chinese leader Mao Zedong, and have waged a guerrilla-style offensive against the government. Maoists say they are fighting to give poor Indian farmers and landless labourers more control over their land and a greater claim to its minerals currently exploited by major mining companies.

Cyberattacks on Taiwan gov't double in 2024

AFP, Taipei

Chinese hackers were involved in most of the cyberattacks against Taiwan last year, which doubled to a daily average of 2.4 million, Taiwanese security officials said.

China regards Taiwan as part of its territory and for years has been ramping up military, diplomatic and political pressure on the island to accept its claims of sovereignty.

Taiwan says cyberattacks have also increased as Beijing uses a range of "greyzone" methods to harass the island — tactics that fall short of an act of war.

Most of the daily attacks received by Taiwan's Government Service Network were attributed to China's "cyber force", the National Security Bureau said in a report on Sunday.

Defence, telecommunications and transport were among the top targets, with many of the cyberattacks "effectively detected and blocked", it said.

"The growing numbers of attacks pinpoint the increasingly severe nature of China's hacking activities," the report said.

"Its techniques have become increasingly sophisticated and covered a wide range of targets, such as government agencies, critical infrastructure and high-tech manufacturing industry."

Chinese hackers carried out Distributed Denial of Service attacks on Taiwan's transport and financial sectors when Beijing held military drills near the island, "intending to intensify the harassment effect and military intimidation", the bureau said.

FLOODED COAL MINE

Around 18 Indian labourers feared trapped in Assam

NDTV ONLINE

Around 18 Indian labourers are feared trapped after water entered a "rat hole" mine in Assam yesterday. The 300-foot deep coal mine is located in Umrangso, a remote industrial town in Dima Hasao district.

Water has reached about 100 feet of the illegal quarry, sources said. Police and rescue teams have reached the spot and using two motor pumps to pump out the water.

Teams of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have left for the area that is close to the Meghalaya border.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said the state has requested the Army's assistance in the ongoing rescue operation.

"Rat hole" mining is a hazardous technique where narrow tunnels are manually dug by workers. These tunnels lead to deep pits from which coal is mined. They also harm the environment because the acidic water and heavy metals discharged from the mines are toxic to water sources used for agriculture and human consumption.

In 2018, 15 miners were trapped in an illegal coal mine in the East Jaintia Hills district in Meghalaya after water from a nearby river gushed into it. Only two bodies were the National Disaster Response Force had seen, the then commandant, SK Sastri, had said.

In 2019, Meghalaya was fined Rs 100 crore by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) for failing to curb illegal coal mining in the state. The NGT had found that most of the 24,000 mines in the state were illegal.



ICT issues arrest warrants for Hasina, 10 others

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is also an accused in the case, before it on February 12.

He is in prison in another case filed over crimes against humanity.

Last year, the ICT issued arrest warrant against Hasina in cases filed for her alleged involvement in crimes against humanity and genocide during the July-August uprising.

Hasina has been staying in India since she fled the country on August 5.

Briefing journalists after yesterday's court proceedings, Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam said thousands of people have been subjected to enforced disappearances over the past 15 years of Awami League rule and most of them never returned.

He added that many were kept in secret detention centres, popularly known as "Aynaghar".

"Some returned, but they were later shown arrested in cases. Some were killed, while others were released from 'Aynaghar' after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5."

"These acts are crimes against humanity as defined under the International Crimes Tribunal," he added.

The chief prosecutor claimed that members of law enforcement and intelligence agencies carried out the crimes on the instructions of Hasina.

Meanwhile, some families of enforced disappearance victims came to the International Crimes Tribunal yesterday and spoke to the media.

"We have been waiting for this moment for a long time. Today [yesterday] the ICT issued arrest warrants against those responsible for the enforced disappearances that took place between 2009 and before August 5, 2024," said Sanjida Islam Tuli, the coordinator of Mayer Daak, a platform for family members of the victims of enforced disappearances.

"We expect a fair trial and that the perpetrators will be held accountable. The families of the victims want to know what happened to

their loved ones."

Former army officer Hasinur Rahman, a victim of enforced disappearance, said they hope the accused will be punished for their crimes. "These heinous acts were done under orders from Sheikh Hasina."

Mir Masum Ali, uncle of Ahmad Bin Quasem Arman, another victim of enforced disappearance, said he heard that Arman was picked up from in front of his two children by plainclothes men.

"He had been missing for eight years, and I had to stay out of the country for 15 years," he said, adding that Arman returned home after August 5.

Arman was picked up from his DOHS house in the capital's Mirpur on August 9, 2016, claimed his family.

His father Mir Quasem Ali, a member of the Jamaat-e-Islami's Central Executive Council, was hanged in September 2016 for crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

Trader rescued 52 hours after abduction

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the other four, he said.

Lawyer Anuradha Roy Banik, Shibu's niece, told The Daily Star Shibu's wife received a call from an unknown number on Saturday afternoon, and the caller demanded a ransom of Tk 1 crore.

They sent Tk 96,000 to kidnappers via mobile financial services on Sunday and informed police of the matter.

Through mobile tracking, a team of police

and Rab members raided Boro Dalimar village in Kachua area and rescued Shibu, said SP Zahid, adding the kidnappers fled sensing the presence of law enforcers.

Police later held the five from different places and showed them arrested in an abduction case filed with Bauphal Police Station.

Atiqul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Bauphal Police Station, said Shibu was taken to Bauphal

Health Complex for a medical check-up and later handed over to his family.

Around 10:15pm on Friday, a group of masked abductors looted over Tk 5 lakh from Shibu's shop, tied up two of his employees, and abducted him using a trawler.

Meanwhile, Officer-in-Charge Salauddin of Bauphal river police outpost was withdrawn yesterday for his failure to take immediate action, the SP added.

Probe body may seek

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"It is not enough to say that the BDR killings were carried out by locals and foreigners... it is not enough to say that India is involved; evidence must be presented in support of it," he stressed, adding that all evidence, regardless of how major or minor they are, will be taken into account.

Assuring that the commission will maintain neutrality during

this investigation, the commission chief said, "In the last 16 years, much of the evidence related to the BDR killings has been destroyed. Whatever we'll do now will be transparent."

He also said that the commission will try to complete the investigation within three months, and they do not intend to extend the deadline. "Extension will be requested, only if necessary."

"Let's assume that the then government was involved, some conspirators from India were involved, and some Bangladeshi politicians were involved—I understand all of that. But if the army had gone there that day, would there have been a massacre? No, there wouldn't have been."

"I don't think this was a mutiny... it was a conspiracy to murder the officers."

Govt to allocate

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The July Uprising Directorate under the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs has been tasked with managing the entire process, Nahid added.

At a press conference at Rail Bhaban, Nahid, who is also the posts, telecommunications, and information technology adviser, said the new directorate dedicated to the July uprising will be set up in February, BSS reported.

Meanwhile, another adviser, Mahfuj Alam, said on his Facebook page that the government's current priority is to ensure justice for the July massacre through appropriate legal cases and fair investigation.

The process include: preparing a list of July uprising martyrs and injured individuals, providing treatment, and offering financial assistance as well as long-term rehabilitation to the injured and the families of the martyrs.

Mahfuj also highlighted other political priorities, including uniting the forces

of resistance against fascist systems and advocating for a new political framework.

The adviser said the government aims to uphold national interests in all areas, prioritising the people, life, nature, and environment over big corporations and foreign interests.

It will prioritise building consensus among political parties on national issues such as security, stability, and foreign relations, Mahfuj added.

WAR-TORN SUDAN Over 30m in need of aid: UN

AFP, Port Sudan

More than 30 million people, over half of them children, are in need of aid in Sudan after twenty months of war, the United Nations said yesterday.

The UN has launched a \$4.2 billion call for funds, targeting 20.9 million people across Sudan from a total of 30.4 million people it said are in need in what it called "an unprecedented humanitarian crisis".