

INTERNATIONAL

End China's
influence of
canal or face
US actionUS top diplomat
Rubio warns Panama

REUTERS, Panama City

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday warned Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino that Washington will "take measures necessary" if Panama does not immediately take steps to end what President Donald Trump sees as China's influence and control over the Panama Canal.

Mulino, after the talks with the top US diplomat in Panama City, signaled he would review agreements involving China and Chinese businesses, and announced further cooperation with the US on migration, but reiterated that his country's sovereignty over the world's second busiest waterway is not up for discussion.

Rubio delivered a message from Trump that China's presence



through a Hong Kong-based company operating two ports near the canal's entrances - was a threat to the waterway and a violation of the US-Panama treaty, US State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement.

"Secretary Rubio made clear that this status quo is unacceptable and that absent immediate changes, it would require the United States to take measures necessary to protect its rights under the Treaty," Bruce said.

Rubio did not spell out exactly what steps Panama must take or what US retaliation would look like.

Upon returning to office, Trump threatened to take control of the Panama Canal, built by the United States in the early 20th century and handed over to Panama in 1999, claiming the canal is being operated by Beijing.

He has refused to rule out use of military force over Panama, drawing criticism from Washington's Latin American friends and foes alike. On Sunday, Trump said that he did not think troops would be necessary, but that Panama had violated the agreement and the United States would take back the canal.



People march in support of immigrants in Houston, Texas, USA, on Sunday. Hundreds of Latinos in Texas protested against US President Donald Trump's push to deport migrants, urging him to 'leave the people alone.'

PHOTO: AFP

Ukraine strikes major oil,
gas facilities in RussiaUN warns Russian forces killing more captured Ukrainian troops
in recent months

AGENCIES

Ukraine struck energy facilities in southern Russia with dozens of drones launched yesterday, triggering fires at a major oil refinery and gas processing plant and disrupting flights from the Volga to the Caucasus Mountains, Russian and Ukrainian officials said.

Russia's defence ministry said that its air defence units intercepted and destroyed 70 Ukrainian drones over Russian territory overnight, including 25 over the Volgograd region, 27 over the Rostov region and seven over the Astrakhan region, reports Reuters.

"The air defence forces of the defence ministry repelled a massive attack by aircraft-type drones on the territory of the Volgograd region," Volgograd Governor Andrei Bocharov said.

Falling drone debris sparked several fires at an oil refinery, he said, though he did not say which refinery was on fire.

Since Russia sent thousands of troops into Ukraine in 2022, Kyiv has tried

to fight back against its much bigger neighbour by striking deep into Russia with drones and missiles, and even killing a senior military commander in Moscow.

In Moscow, a pro-Russian paramilitary leader from eastern Ukraine, Armen Sarkisyan, was killed yesterday when a bomb tore through parts of a luxury

A pro-Russian
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killed in a Moscow bomb
blast.

apartment block, state news agency TASS and other Russian media reported.

Meanwhile, the United Nations yesterday warned that Russian forces have been killing more captured Ukrainian soldiers over recent months, echoing growing allegations from officials in Kyiv, reports AFP.

Both Moscow and Kyiv have accused the

other of committing war crimes, including killing prisoners of war, since Russia invaded Ukraine nearly three years ago.

The United Nations monitoring mission in Ukraine said that since the end of August last year it had "recorded 79 such executions in 24 separate incidents" by Russian forces.

"These incidents did not occur in a vacuum. Public figures in the Russian Federation have explicitly called for inhumane treatment, and even execution, of captured Ukrainian military personnel," said Danielle Bell, head of the mission.

Russian forces advanced 430 square kilometres into Ukrainian territory in January and are headed towards the logistics hub of Pokrovsk, according to an AFP analysis of data from the US based Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

This marks a slight slowdown compared to previous months, after a record advance of 725 square kilometres in November and 476 square kilometres in December.

Enam Ahmed

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Chowdhury left behind his wife, a son, and a daughter.

Born on June 29, 1937, in Barokot village of Golapganj, Sylhet, Chowdhury had a distinguished career in civil service and international organisations.

He completed his schooling in Shillong and Mymensingh before earning a bachelor's degree in International Relations and a Master's in Law from Dhaka University, securing first place.

He was active in student politics and played a role in the Language Movement, for which he was expelled from Dhaka College in 1952.

He joined the Civil Service of Pakistan in 1960 and served as deputy commissioner of Khulna and Jashore before 1971. After independence, he held key positions, including the posts of joint secretary to the industries and commerce ministry and director general of the Export Promotion Bureau.

Between 1975 and 1981, he was the economic minister at Bangladesh's High Commission in London. He later worked as a UN official in Bangkok and served as secretary of the Economic Relations Division and shipping

ministry.

He was also elected president of the International Maritime Organization.

Chowdhury was a vice president of the Islamic Development Bank from 1993 to 1998. From 2001 to 2006, he served as chairman of the Privatization Commission under the BNP-led government, holding the rank of a state minister.

Enam Ahmed Chowdhury's father, Gias Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, was a commissioner in Dhaka.

He had four brothers and two sisters.

His eldest brother late Faruq Ahmed Chowdhury was a former foreign secretary.

Another brother, former career diplomat Itekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury, served as the foreign affairs adviser to the military-backed caretaker government of 2007-08. His other brother was former ambassador Masum Ahmed Chowdhury, who died in 2012.

Among his sisters, Nasim Hai is the widow of martyred freedom fighter Col Syed Abdul Hai. His youngest sister, Nina Ahmed, married Fakhruddin Ahmed, former chief adviser to the 2007-08 caretaker government.

Distributors

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manipulate the market.

At the briefing, held at the Foreign Service Academy, the CA's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder said no element of communal violence was found in the killings of 23 minority people, mentioned in a recent report of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad, an organisation working for the rights of the religious minorities.

He said the interim government took the claim of the Parishad very seriously, and the Chief Adviser's Office sent the list of the victims to the respective police stations, asking them to find out the real reasons and motives, and what legal action was taken.

He said the Police

Headquarters provided details about each incident, stating that they were informed of the preliminary reasons behind 22 out of 23 killing incidents and that proper legal action was taken.

However, Azad said, no details about one incident were found.

Seven of the deaths were related to theft and robbery, four to personal and family disputes, three to crimes like rape, excessive drinking of alcohol and quarrel, two related to accidents, two to business enmity, one related to a clash, one related to a land dispute, and one suicide, he added.

Senior Assistant Press Secretary Foyez Ahammad and Assistant Press Secretary Suchismita Tithi were also present at the briefing.

Language Movement

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On February 21, 1952, despite the imposition of Section 144, a draconian measure aimed at suppressing demonstrations, students from Edward College flooded the streets, demanding Bangla as the state language.

Their cries, "Rashtrabhasa Bangla Chai!" reverberated through the town. The police attempted to quash the march, but the determined students broke through barricades and proceeded to the Collectorate building. Several protesters were arrested near Bani Cinema Hall.

That evening, devastating news arrived from Dhaka - students had been shot and killed for the same cause. People from all walks of life poured onto the streets in protest.

The following day, on February 22, a public meeting was held at Edward College to condemn the killings and demand exemplary punishment for the perpetrators.

EARLY DAYS

The district's involvement in the struggle for the recognition of Bangla began even before 1952.

In February 1948, when Dhirendranath Dutta, a member of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, proposed Bangla as a working language at one of its sessions, only to be met with staunch opposition from Khwaja Nazimuddin, chief minister of East Bengal, students in Pabna burst into protests, as did their peers in Dhaka.

According to Dr Abdul Alim's book "Pabna e Bhasha Andolon", under the leadership of Dewan Lutfar Rahman, the convener of the local Sangram Parishad, and active participation from progressive student leaders and political activists, the movement gained traction.

Despite attempts by the deputy commissioner to pacify the demonstrators through negotiations, the students remained unwavering. The imposition of Section 144 failed to quell the uprising.



Pabna Shaheed Minar

Authorities, sensing the rising momentum, attempted to prevent the protests by arresting key figures like Amjad Hossain and Rawshan Chowdhury on March 10.

However, the people of Pabna retaliated with a spontaneous strike on March 11, and thousands of students, led by Abdul Matin and Md Sultan, student leaders from Dhaka, took to the streets, raising their voices for Bangla.

EDWARD COLLEGE

As per Ahmed Raliq's book "Bhasha Andolon: Teknaf to Tetulia", by 1952, Pabna had become a significant force in the movement. Edward College played a central role in organising protests and rallies, with Abdul Momin Talukder leading the local All-Party State Language Action Committee alongside Azizul Haque.

A defining moment came on February 17, when Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, a towering political figure, addressed a mass gathering at Edward College.

His speech motivated the students, urging them to stand firm in their demand for their mother tongue.

As February 21 approached, the city was draped in posters proclaiming the call for Bangla as the state language.

On the night of February 20, an emergency meeting at Edward College resolved to defy Section 144.

According to the book "Pabna e Bhasha Andolon", the following day, a hartal (general strike) ensued, with thousands marching in defiance of state restrictions, leading to confrontations with police and arrests.

The fight for Bangla was not restricted to Pabna town alone; it spread to nearby areas like Sirajganj (now a separate district), Chatmohar, and Ishwardi.

Capacity

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This disproportionately large share directed towards capacity payments raises concerns about the influence of vested interest groups within the sector.

Powerful business entities and political elites are benefitting from these contracts, often secured under non-competitive arrangements, the report said.

"Such practices not only burden public finances but also limit resources available for investing in sustainable energy solutions and infrastructure improvements."

Quoting the data of capacity payments released in the parliament in 2023, the report said 82 independent power plants and 32 rental power plants have received more than Tk 1 lakh crore in capacity charges over the previous 14 years. Of the amount, the top 10 plants had received one-third of the payments.

"Giving tenders to the same few companies over and over again has made the country dependent on them to the extent that the country has to accept their technical failures even during spans of high demand."

The problems and challenges in the power and energy sector include poor regulatory quality; lack of institutional capacity; and lack of strategies to address the PDB's growing revenue shortfall in the Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan 2023.

The government's monopoly market structure in power procurement, transmission and distribution systems; the lack of transparency and accountability; and the pricing and subsidy policies are the other problems and challenges for the sector.

Subsequently, the task force suggested that the interim government prepare a short-term strategy consisting of revising the master plan, adjusting the energy prices and subsidies, leveraging regional energy trade, ensuring transparency in the international contracts, eradicating tax mismatches for renewable energy adoption, strengthening the capacity of the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority.

The task force also emphasised ensuring uninterrupted energy supplies to export-oriented and export-supporting firms as the critical first step to maintaining operational efficiency and reducing production costs.

It may hinder independent

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criticised for suppressing freedom of expression. These laws were passed to replace a controversial section of the ICT Act.

Although framed as a more moderate alternative, the CSA retained several controversial provisions of the ICT Act and DSA. These include criminalising certain forms of free speech, granting arbitrary powers to law enforcement for arrest, search, and seizure, and empowering authorities to block or filter content with minimal oversight.

Now section 8 of the draft ordinance grants broad and unchecked authority to the executive to block or filter information it finds objectionable, said Article 19.

The establishment of a National Cybersecurity Council is proposed as per sections 12 and 13 of chapter IV.

This body would wield expansive and unchecked powers to develop inter-institutional policies, enact regulations, and effectively control 'cybersecurity infrastructural development', Article 19 mentioned in the statement.

The council would also oversee a national cybersecurity agency to be created under the same ordinance.

Referring to section 8 of the draft,

No radiotherapy at lone cancer hospital

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functional two years ago.

A year ago, two cobalt machines - teletherapy machines used for treating localised solid tumours, such as cancers of the skin, tongue, larynx, brain, breast, or uterine cervix - broke down.

Since then, the two remaining LINACs were used beyond their capacities for approximately 220-230 patients every day, until they recently became nonfunctional.

One of the machines malfunctioned during a therapy session on December 21 last year.

The other stopped working the following day, halting all radiotherapy services at the state-run facility.

The hospital has been unable to provide radiotherapy services, forcing around 220-230 cancer patients to return home without the therapy every day, said NCRH Director Jahangir Kabir.

However, NCRH bought two brand-

the rights body said the ordinance further grants significant authority to the director general of the cybersecurity agency. The director general could request the removal or blocking of any information deemed to pose "cybersecurity risks".

"Without judicial oversight, such powers carry a high risk of misuse," the rights group said.

The council will be chaired by the head of state and backed by a high-ranking contingent of government officials, including the ICT minister and director generals of various intelligence and defence agencies.

"This concentration and centralisation of authority raises serious concerns about accountability and the potential for government overreach with limited checks and balances," observed Article 19.

Section 26 criminalises the publication of information, in any form, that intends to spread hate. This provision is inconsistent with international standards on freedom of expression, as it seeks to protect religious values or feelings rather than an individual's right to freedom of religion, according to Article 19.

new machines.

"We hope that one new machine will start its operation today, and within the first week of March, we will start operating another new machine."

If four more machines can be made operational, NCRH will be able to provide therapy to an additional 600 cancer patients daily, Kabir said.

Noted cancer epidemiologist Md Habibullah Talukder Ruskin considered the shutdown of radiotherapy machines and their prolonged inoperability as a sign of extreme irresponsibility.

"Who will take responsibility for the patients who have been deprived of treatment for so long, those who had to pay more for radiotherapy in private facilities, or perhaps even those who may have died without us knowing?"

The radiotherapy machines at the NCRH were purchased between 2006 and 2008 and those typically have a lifespan of 10 years.

This means their validity expired

Seven journos

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Rezaul Haque, additional superintendent of police (Sadar circle), said no complaint was filed as of 10:30pm.

In another incident, two reporters were assaulted near the deputy commissioner's office in Shariatpur.

Sohag Khan Sujon, Shariatpur correspondent for daily Samakal, was attacked with a hammer, while Bidhan Majumdar of private television News24BD was beaten up as he tried to save him.

The victims accused Nuruzzamal Sheikh, Shariatpur correspondent of Daily Janata, and his associates of carrying out the attack, said a report of the daily Prothom Alo.

Sujan said he lodged a complaint with the police.

In Kurigram, Sujon Mahmud, Char Rajibpur correspondent of Daily Kholo Kagoj, was assaulted allegedly by BNP men last night.

Sujan alleged that he was attacked by 30-35 men, including BNP activists, for publishing a report on irregularities of a local BNP leader.

No radiotherapy at lone cancer hospital

around 2016-17, he said.

"Those responsible for this dire state of cancer treatment should be identified and held accountable. Why have these machines remained out of order for so long, even as we approach 2025? The country has wasted millions of taka in various ways."

Instead of buying machines separately, all six should have been purchased at once, Ruskin said.

"It's very unfortunate that the machines in this hospital were purchased 10 years ago. Since last July, there has been no project director for the initiative to establish eight cancer hospitals across the country," said Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for health affairs.

Among the 38 different cancers prevalent in the country, lung cancer (11.4 percent) causes the most deaths, followed by laryngeal cancer (8.5 percent) and stomach cancer (5.7 percent), according to the BSMMU study.