

INTERNATIONAL

Talks on annexed Ukrainian land 'non-negotiable'

Warns Russia

AFP, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday ruled out any negotiation over the status of five Ukrainian regions it claims to have annexed despite not fully controlling four of them.

"The territories which have become subjects of the Russian Federation, which are inscribed in our country's constitution, are an inseparable part of our country. This is undeniable and non-negotiable," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He also said that restoring ruptured ties with the United States was a process and neither side expected quick or easy decisions.

"No one expects decisions to be easy and quick. But with the political will of the two countries, with the willingness to listen and hear each other, we will be able to get through this working process," Peskov said.

At a meeting of the FSB security agency, Russian President Vladimir Putin said initial Russia-US talks "give some hope" of resolving "problems" like the Ukraine conflict.

EU's top team in India to bolster ties

AFP, New Delhi

The EU's top team arrived in India on an "unprecedented" visit yesterday, aiming to broaden commercial and diplomatic ties and hedge against souring relations with the United States.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen and her college of commissioners were due to hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist government in New Delhi during the two-day trip.

"In this era of multiplying conflicts and intense geostrategic competition, Europe wants to strengthen its partnership with India, one of its most trusted friends," Von der Leyen said.

30 from pvt univs

FROM PAGE 12

They announced their decisions to step down from the posts of joint convener and joint member secretary, respectively, through separate Facebook posts.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Salahuddin and Mehedi said the new student organisation lacked inclusivity as stakeholders from Rajshahi University were not consulted before its launch.

They added that RU students expressed dissatisfaction with this political platform so they could align themselves with it.

INDEPENDENT BODY

Abu Baker Majumder, convener of the new student body, announced the full committee in front of the Madhur Canteen at the Dhaka University campus around 4:30pm yesterday.

Before unveiling the committee, Abu Baker shared the vision for the new student organisation, focusing on the need for change in student politics.

"We've discussed with students the ideal structure for a student organisation in a new Bangladesh. Students no longer want politics tied to major party affiliations. Our organisation will be independent of such practices, with leadership democratically elected and an age limit enforced," he

said.

The central committee has set the age limit to 28, allowing students to hold leadership roles for a maximum of seven years after enrolling.

Addressing an unexpected disruption during the inauguration, Abu Baker explained, "A group caused trouble, preventing the full committee announcement. We've resolved the issue and will ensure it doesn't recur."

He also announced the formation of a three-member probe committee to investigate the incident.

Abu Baker reaffirmed the organisation's commitment to the ideals of the July uprising and encouraged students to join various units within the organisation.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE

"Education, Unity, Liberation" is the motto of the new student organisation.

The central committee is as follows: Abu Baker Majumder, convener; Tawhid Mohammad Siam, senior joint convener; Zahid Ahsan, member secretary; Al Mashnum, senior joint member secretary; Tahmid Al Muddassir Chowdhury, chief organiser; and Ashrafia Khatur, spokesperson.

The organisation's 250 member DU unit will have Abdul Kader as convener; Limon Mahmud Hasan as senior joint

convener; Mohir Alam as member secretary; Al Amin Sarker as senior joint member secretary; Hasib Al Islam as chief organiser; and Rafia Rehnuma Hridi as spokesperson.

SCUFFLE MARS LAUNCH
Led by former leaders of the Students Against Discrimination (SAD), the new student body was officially launched on Wednesday amid protests by private university students for their exclusion despite their role in the July uprising. Both groups even engaged in scuffles, chases and counter-chases.

Later that night, after the blockade of Banglambazar, private university students, who have long been alleging their exclusion from all post-August 5 platforms and committees, demanded immediate dissolution of the committee prepared without their representation and threatened demonstrations across private universities if their demand is not met.

They also threatened to go for a programme called "Dhaka Blockade" on Friday,

the day a new political party is to be launched by members of SAD and the Jatiya Nagorik Committee.

According to private university students, they have decided not to enforce the "Dhaka Blockade" on Friday.

FROM PAGE 12
Myanmar has been in civil war since the military coup that ousted the democratic government in February 2021.

The National Unity Government, the shadow government formed by the political leaders, and dozens of other ethnic groups, have been fighting the junta since then.

The AA, which seeks autonomy in Rakhine, controls the entire 271-kilometre-long border with Bangladesh and more than a million Rohingyas fled that state to Bangladesh.

"Mind you, this is our border and we have to protect, make it secure and make sure that we work in collaboration with whoever is on the other side. We reached out to them at a certain level," Rahman said.

Before that, he held a meeting with Julie Bishop, the UN secretary general's special envoy on Myanmar, over drafting a statement for the UN secretary general to the AA.

The statement communicated that the AA has to respect international human rights principles and abide by international laws.

At the seminar, Rahman also said, "A new neighbour is emerging and Bangladesh wants to be friendly with

them and not dominate them. This is our only land border outside of our border with India. It is also in our national interest to reach out to them. We can begin the process of building trust, building confidence and lay the basis of long-time friendly relations."

He said he made it very clear that Bangladesh does not have any pipeline through Rakhine or any transit projects through Rakhine.

Abdul Hafiz, special assistant to the chief adviser on defence and national solidarity development, said diplomacy, backed by strategic deterrence based on a national consensus, is critical to protecting national interests.

He underscored Bangladesh's priority of ensuring safe, dignified and voluntary Rohingya repatriation.

Keynote speaker Ambassador Md Sufiur Rahman, a senior research fellow at SIPG, provided an analytical overview of the shifting political landscape in Rakhine.

He highlighted that 750,000 people have been displaced from Rakhine and that poverty in Rakhine has ascended to alarming levels.

He believes Bangladesh can play a pivotal stabilising role by providing

humanitarian support and strengthening economic ties between Chittagong and Rakhine.

"Economic linkages can serve as a pathway to broader cooperation and peacebuilding," he said, while suggesting leveraging this to create a peaceful border and a friendly neighbour.

Sh Tawfiq M Haque, director of SIPG, urged a pragmatic policy toward the AA by recognising the fast-evolving situation in Rakhine and stopping the slow and silent influx of Rohingya refugees since October 2023.

Bangladesh should balance security concerns with economic and diplomatic goals, he added.

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Most victims abused by husbands

FROM PAGE 12
face IPV.

Among divisions, Barishal and Khulna have the highest IPV rates at 81.5 percent, while Sylhet reports the lowest at 72.1 percent. In Dhaka, the IPV rate is 72.9 percent, in Chattogram 78.5 percent, in Mymensingh 75.1 percent, in Rajshahi 74.5 percent, and in Rangpur 74.1 percent.

The study further showed that the most prevalent forms of IPV were controlling behaviour and emotional violence, highlighting psychological abuse as a critical concern.

This landmark national survey – the third of its kind, following studies in 2011 and 2015 – offers comprehensive and up-to-date insights into the scale and impact

of violence against women in Bangladesh, BBS officials said.

The findings are based on UN standard measures widely used for global monitoring of violence against women.

Despite the high prevalence of IPV, the survey found that 64 percent of victims never shared their experiences with anyone. Only 7.4 percent seek legal action, while 93.6 percent do not.

This silence stems from factors such as a desire to protect family reputation, concerns for their children's well-being, and the perception that such violence is "normal."

The survey also highlighted significant disparities in vulnerability with women in disaster-prone

areas at higher risk of IPV – both in their lifetime and in the past 12 months.

BBS Director General Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, who chaired the event, said, "The survey is vital to understanding violence against women in the country. With previous surveys in 2011 and 2015, this third iteration in 2024 reaffirms Bangladesh's leadership in South Asia on this critical issue."

"This household-based survey interviewed 27,476 women across urban, rural, disaster-prone, and slum areas, incorporating qualitative data for the first time. By capturing the experiences of women aged 15 and above, from both intimate partners and non-

partners, the survey provides invaluable insights to shape policies and interventions to end violence against women."

Aleya Akter, secretary of BBS's statistics and informatics division, highlighted the survey's role in strengthening gender statistics.

The 2024 Violence Against Women Survey provides essential data to track SDG-5, including key VAW indicators for Bangladesh's Voluntary National Review at the UN High-Level Political Forum in July 2025. This data will guide national efforts to enhance response and drive action to end violence against women."

Women and Children Affairs Adviser Sharmin

S Murshid stressed the importance of quality data in policy-making.

"This survey is crucial for developing evidence-based strategies to eradicate violence against women and build a gender-equitable, discrimination-free society."

UNFPA representative Masaki Watabe praised the strong collaboration between BBS and the women and children affairs ministry.

"This report is more than just statistics – it is a vital tool for developing evidence-based strategies to combat violence against women. While some progress has been made, we must intensify efforts and invest more in ensuring that every woman and girl in Bangladesh can live free from violence."



A woman pleads for help to a member of the M23 movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo's eastern city of Bukavu yesterday. Crowds fled, and 11 people were killed as gunfire and explosions rang out at a mass rally held by rebel leader Corneille Nangaa in the city, residents said.

PHOTO: AFP

Start talks for next phase of Gaza truce

Hamas calls on Israel after prisoner exchange

AFP, Gaza City

among them women and minors, in staggered releases.

The Palestinian Prisoners Club advocacy group said Israel had freed 596 prisoners in exchange for the bodies yesterday.

It said 46 prisoners were yet to be released to complete the swap – "all women and minors from Gaza" who were arrested after the war began.

Negotiations for a second phase of the deal, which is meant to lead to a permanent end to the war, have yet to begin.

"We have cut off the path before the enemy's false justifications, and it has no choice but to start negotiations for the second phase," Hamas said on Telegram.

Bangladesh nosedives to 100th spot

FROM PAGE 12

political participation, and political culture. Based on these, countries are classified as full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes, or authoritarian regimes.

This year, Norway ranked highest (9.81), while Afghanistan was the lowest (0.25). Nine of the top ten democracies are in Europe, with New Zealand being the only exception at second place.

Among the worst performers were Pakistan, South Korea, Kuwait, Georgia, Qatar, Romania, and Guinea-Bissau.

The report states that during Bangladesh's January 2024 general election, the then ruling party allegedly suppressed

dissent, curtailed media freedoms, and manipulated results, intimidating opposition candidates.

Despite election rigging, grassroots movements – especially youth-led initiatives – emerged as forces for change, reflecting growing disillusionment with mainstream political parties.

However, the protests that ousted Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 also exposed sectarian tensions, with violent attacks on minorities in the aftermath.

According to EIU, the interim government faces pressure to hold elections but is prioritising reforms to restore democratic institutions, which could delay elections beyond 2025.

Of the 7,873 injured, 35 percent were in Dhaka division, 17 percent in Chattogram division, 16 percent in Rangpur division, and 11 percent in Sylhet division.

Fifty-eight percent of the injured had to bear their treatment costs at private hospitals, 32 percent were treated at government hospitals, and only 10 percent were treated for free at private facilities.

Most victims refrained from seeking legal recourse.

Family members of only 300 of the deceased victims had filed cases. Many of those who had not filed cases said they were afraid or they were threatened not to do it.

From August 6 to 31, attacks on properties skyrocketed. Arson accounted for 333 cases, vandalism and looting 300 cases, attacks on minority properties 223 cases, and attacks on temples and shrines 20 cases.

The study found that 65 percent or 573 of alleged perpetrators were police

DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2025
FALGUN 15, 1431 BS
The Daily Star

7

Grant NHRC power

FROM PAGE 12

are sub judge."

She also said courts should be allowed to refer cases to the NHRC for a perspective on human rights violations related to the case.

Mahdi Amin, adviser to BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, said there needs to be provisions for reparations in instances where false cases have been filed.

"My party has been the largest collective victim of human rights abuses. Over 60 lakh activists faced false cases. There are countries with entire populations lower than that number."

He stressed the need to ratify international conventions on human rights.

Pallab Chakma, executive director of Kapaeng Foundation, said the law needs to specify a time for the government to respond to the NHRC's summons for reports, to ensure the commission can hold the government accountable.

Speakers also said the definition of "human rights" should include the rights to privacy, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Meanwhile, Zakaria added that the NHRC needs to have financial autonomy. "The government needs to ensure that a fixed percentage of the national budget goes to the

commission, or they should be given multi-year block funding. They should also be allowed to take external grants as long as it does not hamper the independence of the NHRC."

Dr Sharif Bhuian, deputy head of chambers at Dr Kamal Hossain and Associates, spoke about the need for the NHRC to be an autonomous institution by ensuring that the commission's recruitment is done independently.

At present, many members serve the commission on a voluntary basis, which means these are not their "real jobs," he said.

Zahid Hussain, human rights officer of the United Nations in Bangladesh, said the commission should have people who can act as a pressure group to address abuses by those close to power.

Kailash Robidas, a representative of the Dalit community, asked for a specific task force within the commission to deal with discrimination based on work and descent.

Dr Mohammad Mohiuddin, additional secretary of the law ministry's Legislative and Parliamentary Division, chaired the programme held at the Judicial Administration Training Institute.