

'Surrender'

Putin tells Ukraine troops; Zelensky denies troops surrounded in Kursk

AGENCIES

President Vladimir Putin has called for beleaguered Ukrainian troops in the Russian region of Kursk to "surrender" as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky accused the Russian leader of seeking to sabotage a ceasefire initiative.

US President Donald Trump urged Putin to spare the lives of the Ukrainian troops as he said his envoy had held "productive" talks with Russia's leader on a proposed 30-day ceasefire.

Russia has mounted a rapid counteroffensive in the western border region of Kursk over the past week, recapturing much of the territory Ukraine seized in a shock incursion last August.

Defeat in Kursk would be a major blow to Ukraine's plans to use its hold on the region as a bargaining chip in peace talks for the three-year-old war.

"We are sympathetic to President Trump's call," Putin said in remarks broadcast on Russian television.

"If they lay down their arms and surrender, they will be guaranteed life and dignified treatment," Putin said.

Trump said "thousands" of Ukrainian troops were "completely surrounded by the Russian military, and in a very bad and vulnerable position".

However, Zelensky yesterday denied his troops were encircled in Russia's Kursk region, where Moscow has regained swathes of land this week.

Zelensky has acknowledged that the situation in the Kursk area is "very difficult" for Ukraine, but contradicted Trump's comments.

"There is no encirclement of our troops," he said on social media, adding that: "Our troops continue to hold back Russian and North Korean groupings in the Kursk region."

Kyiv had hoped to use the Russian territories as a bargaining chip in any negotiations to end the more than three-year conflict.

The UK yesterday hosted a virtual summit on how to protect any



ceasefire in Ukraine, but Zelensky warned that Moscow was intent on "prolonging the war" and "ignoring diplomacy."

He also accused Moscow of amassing troops on the border with "an intention to attack our Sumy region" -- attacked by Moscow at the start of its 2022 invasion but since spared the worst of the fighting seen in other eastern regions.

Putin had this week not committed to an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine proposed by the US, instead putting forward conditions and raising "serious questions" about the idea.

The Kremlin has hailed its troops ousting Ukrainian forces from swathes of the Kursk region, with Moscow yesterday releasing images of a destroyed centre in Sudzha -- the main town occupied by Ukrainian forces for months.

The Russian defence ministry said troops took control over the villages of Zaoleshenka and Rubanshchina -- north and west of Sudzha.

Sudzha was home to around 6,000 people before fighting began and Ukraine had set up a military administration there after its shock August 2024 incursion.

The Russian defence ministry's footage showed heavily destroyed houses and shops, with rubble and broken glass on the streets, and some Russian flags flying.

The acting governor of the Kursk region, Alexander Khinstein, said Russia had evacuated 275 civilians from areas it had regained since Wednesday.

Russia had also deployed almost 200 firefighters to help put out a fire at an oil depot caused by a Ukraine drone strike in the southern Krasnodar region, authorities said.

The governor of the Krasnodar region Veniamin Kondratyev said in the early hours of Saturday that a petrol reserve station in the Black Sea city of Tuapse was "attacked by the Kyiv regime."

Elsewhere on the front, Zelensky claimed the situation around the eastern city of Pokrovsk -- which Russian troops have tried to capture for months -- had "stabilised."

Ukrainian officials also said the number of wounded from a Russian strike a day earlier on Zelensky's hometown Kryvyi Rih rose to 14.

Power, fertiliser subsidies to balloon

FROM PAGE 1
from raising power prices while also dealing with large arrears carried over from Sheikh Hasina's administration," said a finance ministry official informed with the proceedings.

At the end of last year, the power and fertiliser arrears hit Tk 49,128 crore, requiring the government to issue special bonds to clear the dues. The interim government has so

far cleared Tk 12,542 crore in arrears through special bonds.

The interim government that took over in August last year refrained from raising power prices due to high inflation, which has remained above 9 percent since March 2023.

The previous government had planned to adjust electricity prices three to four times a year as part of its strategy to reduce subsidies,

but eventually backed off amid concerns among the people and industry owners.

Officials of the current government have indicated that if inflation drops below 6.5 percent, they may begin gradual price adjustments to reduce the subsidy burden.

Additionally, the government is expanding the production-sharing contract framework to attract investment in oil and gas

exploration.

Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), said the government should find ways to make power production more cost-effective and remove the fuel tax to reduce the subsidy burden.

Power generation in Bangladesh is significantly costlier than in other countries in the region,

making subsidy reductions difficult without addressing inefficiencies in the sector, said Raihan, also a professor at Dhaka University's economics department.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said, "There were many reasons the subsidy rose. One of them is rising import costs and another is institutional inefficiency."

In the power sector, the government estimates that it can save as much as Tk 11,444 crore in the current fiscal year by reducing production costs by 10 percent.

Bangladesh aims to shift from oil-based to gas-based electricity generation, a move expected to cut production costs and reduce dependency on subsidies in the long run.

Aid to Rakhine via Bangladesh can help

FROM PAGE 1
humanitarian assistance to more than a million Rohingyas sheltered in Cox's Bazar. Most of them fled violence in Myanmar in 2017.

Not a single Rohingya volunteered to return to Rakhine since then. Amid recent escalation of conflicts between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army, nearly one lakh more Rohingyas arrived in Bangladesh.

The crisis has deepened with the WFP reducing monthly food aid from \$12.5 to \$6 starting next month as the USAID has drastically reduced the funding globally under the Trump administration.

Just on Saturday, WFP warned that more than one million people in Myanmar will be cut off from WFP's

lifesaving food assistance starting in April due to critical funding shortfalls.

The cuts will also impact almost 100,000 internally displaced people, including Rohingyas, in central Rakhine who will have no access to food without WFP assistance, reports AFP.

According to diplomatic sources, the UN has been seeking to send humanitarian aid to Rakhine through Bangladesh amid a fear of famine-like situation there as was reported by the UNDP in November last year.

The report titled "Rakhine: A Famine in the Making" said Rakhine is on the verge of an unprecedented disaster due to a combination of interlinked issues.

"Restrictions

goods entering Rakhine, both internationally and domestically, have led to a severe lack of income, hyperinflation, and significantly reduced domestic food production.

Essential services and a social safety net are almost non-existent, leaving an already vulnerable population at risk of collapse in the coming months," it read.

The report said Rakhine's economy has almost stopped functioning. Critical sectors such as trade, agriculture, and construction are at a standstill. Export-oriented, agro-based livelihoods are disappearing as markets become inaccessible due to blockades.

Predictions indicate that by

food production will only cover 20 percent of the needs. Combined with the near-total halt of trade, over 2 million people are at risk of starvation.

Against this backdrop, the UN, at the request of Bangladesh, is going to hold a high-level meeting on the Rohingya issue later this year, considering that the Rohingya had become a forgotten crisis.

Asked about the possibility of a humanitarian corridor through Bangladesh, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain said, "This is more of an operational matter which we will of course deal with the local [UN] offices."

About the role of the Arakan Army in Rakhine repatriation, Guterres said,

"We know that in the past, the relations between the

Rakhine and the Rohingya communities were not easy, and so, I think it's important to engage the Arakan Army in order for the full respect of the rights of the Rohingya population in Rakhine."

He added that sanctions are a possible instrument against Myanmar, but it is difficult to obtain a UN Security Council approval for sanctions in relation to Myanmar.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary in a Facebook post on March 13 said in light of the dire humanitarian situation in Rakhine State, Bangladesh will positively consider supporting UN-led humanitarian assistance to the state.

Asked about the matter, Prof Sk Tawfiq M Haque,

director at the South Asian



This photo taken yesterday shows an injured civilian being carried following aerial bombardments by Myanmar's military in Singu Township in central Myanmar's Mandalay Region. Myanmar has been gripped by civil war following a 2021 military coup, plunging it into what the United Nations describes as a "polycrisis" of mutually compounding conflict, poverty and instability.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli strikes kill 9 in northern Gaza

Journalists among dead; Hamas slams 'blatant violation' of ceasefire

AFP, Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said nine people including journalists were killed in Israeli strikes in the north yesterday, an attack Hamas denounced as a "blatant violation" of the fragile ceasefire.

"Nine martyrs have been transferred (to hospital), including several journalists and a number of workers from the Al-Khair Charitable Organisation, as a result of the occupation targeting a vehicle with a drone in the town of Beit Lahia, coinciding with artillery shelling on the same area," civil defence spokesman Mahmoud Bassal told AFP.

The health ministry in the Hamas run Palestinian territory reported that "nine martyrs and several injured, including critical cases, have arrived at the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza Strip, due to the ongoing Israeli aggression".

In a statement, the Israeli military said it struck "two terrorists... operating a drone that posed a threat to IDF troops in the area of Beit Lahia".

"Later, a number of additional terrorists collected the drone operating equipment and entered a vehicle. The IDF struck the terrorists," it added.

After the strikes, Hamas accused Israel of violating the Gaza truce deal.

"The occupation (Israel) has committed a horrific massacre in the northern Gaza Strip by targeting a group of journalists and humanitarian workers, in a blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said in a statement.



The director of Hamas affiliated media in Gaza, Ismail Thawabteh, told AFP that local photo journalists were killed while "using a drone to capture images of a Ramadan dining table in Beit Lahia".

He said they were "directly targeted by the occupation in two air strikes, despite their work being clear".

Israel has carried out near-daily air strikes in Gaza since early March, often targeting what the military said were militants planting explosive devices.

The truce in Israel's war with Hamas, in effect since January 19, has largely held despite the attacks and with no agreement yet on extending the ceasefire.

The first phase of the truce ended on March 1, but both Israel and Hamas have refrained from returning to all-out war.

Hamas yesterday said that "the ball is in Israel's court" after offering to release an Israeli-US hostage and return the bodies of four others as part of Gaza truce talks.

Canada will never be part of US: PM

AFP, Ottawa

Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney on Friday launched his term in office with a whole-hearted rejection of US President Donald Trump's repeated threats to annex his northern neighbor.

Shortly after he was sworn in as Canada's 24th prime minister, replacing Justin Trudeau who has been in office since 2015, Carney said confronting Trump's tariffs would be a top priority.

Canada "will never, ever, in any way, shape or form, be part of the United States," he added, while voicing hope his government could one-day work together with Washington to advance both countries' interests.

Officials said they were looking to set up a call between Trump and Carney in the coming days.

Ottawa has been rattled by collapsing cross-border relations since Trump returned to power in January, launching a trade war and demanding that Canada surrender its independence to become the 51st US state.

Ottawa has retaliated against Trump's tariffs, while Canadian public opinion has been outraged as the US president insists the border separating the countries should be erased.

Carney has characterized the Trump administration as the greatest challenge Canada has faced in a generation, and US tariffs on Canadian goods unjustified. He became prime minister after overwhelmingly winning a Liberal Party vote to replace Trudeau as leader.

US expels 'Trump-hater' S African ambassador

AFP, Washington

The US decision to expel South Africa's ambassador was "regrettable," the office of the South African president said yesterday, after Washington's top diplomat accused the envoy of hating America and President Donald Trump.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that South Africa's ambassador, Ibrahim Rasool, was "no longer welcome" in the United States.

Rasool is "a race-baiting politician who hates America and hates @POTUS," Rubio posted on X, referring to Trump by his White House X account handle.

"We have nothing to discuss with him and so he is considered PERSONA NON GRATA."

The expulsion of the ambassador -- a very rare move by the United States -- is the latest development in rising tensions between Washington and Pretoria. Trump in February froze US aid to South Africa, citing a law in the country that he alleges allows land to be seized from white farmers.

Ph.D. Degree Awarded



Mohammad Abdul Aziz has been awarded Ph.D. degree from the University of Dhaka. The Syndicate meeting held in 25.02.2025 decided to award this degree to Mr Aziz. The title of his thesis was "Budgetary Process and Control in Bangladesh Police". He joined in this program at 24.12.2018 bearing registration number 15/2018-2019 under the supervision of Dr. Riazur Rahman Chowdhury, Professor of Accounting & Information

Systems department. He belongs to 24th BCS (Police) batch. He is working at Police Headquarters as Assistant Inspector General (AIG) now Additional DIG of Bangladesh Police. He has the experience of working at United Nations Peace Keeping Missions for two times as Police Advisor and formed police unit at Darfur, Sudan. Besides, he did post-graduation on Business and Financial Economics from the University of Greenwich at London in the United Kingdom. His wife Amina Afroz Jamil is a banker and they have one daughter Areeba Adreeta, and son Areeq Ahyam. He hailed from the village Fulbaria under sadar upazila of Brahmanbaria district.