

## US plan to take over Greenland 'serious': Putin

AFP, Murmansk

Russia considers US plans to annex Greenland "serious" and worries the West could use the Arctic as a springboard for future conflicts, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday.

US President Donald Trump has pushed to take control of the autonomous Danish island since taking office in January, saying Washington needs to have it for "international security".

"It is a deep mistake to think that this is some extravagant talk from the new American administration. It is nothing of the sort," Putin told an Arctic forum in the city of Murmansk.

"We are talking about serious plans on the American side with regard to Greenland. These plans have long-standing historical roots," he added.

He said that while Russia was not directly involved in the question of Greenland's ownership, Moscow was concerned that "Nato countries, in general, are increasingly designating the far north as a springboard for possible conflicts".



Pro-monarchist protesters run for cover as riot police fire tear gas shells to disperse the crowd during a demonstration in Kathmandu, Nepal, yesterday. The protesters were demanding the restoration of Nepal's monarchy, which was abolished in 2008, arguing that successive governments have failed to bring about significant changes. At least two people were killed in the violence, police said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Modi to kick off construction of India-Sri Lanka solar plant

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the construction of a long delayed solar power project during his upcoming visit to Sri Lanka, an official said yesterday.

Vikram Misri, the secretary of India's foreign ministry, said Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will witness a virtual groundbreaking ceremony for their joint-venture solar power project in the island's northeast on April 5.

The proposed 120 megawatt venture in the coastal district of Trincomalee has stalled for years, but New Delhi backed it as a joint project between the neighbouring nations.

"This, in many senses, is going to be a milestone in the bilateral partnership," Misri told reporters.

## Israeli actions in Gaza resemble 'atrocities crimes'

Warns UN aid agency; Palestinian sources claim Hamas, mediators in new talks to revive truce

AGENCIES

Israeli actions in Gaza, including strikes on populated areas in which civilians have been killed, "bear the hallmarks of atrocities, the United Nations' aid agency warned yesterday.

"There is a callous disregard for human life and dignity. The acts of war that we see bear the hallmarks of atrocity crimes," Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the OCHA aid agency, said in Geneva.

He also noted the resumption of rocket fire from Palestinian factions in Gaza, reports Reuters.

In more than a week of resumed Israeli strikes in Gaza, 855 people have been killed, according to the territory's health ministry.

Meanwhile, Palestinian sources close to Hamas told AFP that talks were underway

between the Palestinian group and mediators from Egypt and Qatar Thursday to revive a ceasefire and hostage release deal for Gaza.

"A meeting began this evening between the Egyptian delegation responsible for negotiations in Doha and a Hamas

### Talks are focusing on possibility of implementing a truce during Eid al-Fitr

delegation in an effort to solidify a ceasefire," said a source who requested anonymity because he was not authorised to speak publicly on the issue.

Mediators from Qatar were also involved in the discussions, the source added.

Talks are focusing on the possibility of implementing a truce during the Eid al-Fitr and Jewish Passover holidays, as well as ensuring the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, the source said.

"Mediators are engaging in intensive discussions with all parties to cement the ceasefire and move toward the second phase of the agreement," he added.

He said Hamas had expressed a willingness to respond "positively" to any proposal that halts the fighting.

Another Palestinian source close to Hamas said that despite the discussions, "no breakthrough" had been achieved so far. "A prisoner exchange and ceasefire agreement are possible, but their success depends on (Israel's) approval and its willingness not to obstruct the process," the source said.

## 'We're up against time to find stolen billions'

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Mansur said the UK is his starting point. He is now in talks with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and London law firms in a bid to trace and seize approximately \$25 billion laundered from Bangladesh.

"Many of these families have their assets... in London in particular, so we think we will find a lot of assets here," Mansur said.

"Our whole purpose is at least [to] create awareness that the UK is a favourite destination of stolen assets all over the world, and Bangladesh is one of those countries," he said.

A person of interest for Bangladesh is its former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed. Earlier, the Al Jazeera's Investigative Unit (I-Unit) unravelled that he owns more than \$500 million of real estate - primarily in London and Dubai.

Last year, in an undercover operation the I-Unit revealed that Javed's family had purchased over 360 luxury apartments in the UK,

most of which were in London.

The Anti-Corruption Commission in Bangladesh froze nearly 40 of his bank accounts and the court placed him under a travel ban, but the BB is seeking to freeze his overseas properties as soon as possible, in case they are sold off.

Javed claimed that he was the victim of a politically motivated "witch-hunt" against people associated with the previous regime and said that "his wealth was earned legitimately".

While the central bank is focused on freezing assets, Mansur also wants the authorities in the UK and elsewhere to investigate the lawyers, bankers and estate agents who helped move billions of dollars for the "oligarch families", said the report.

Estimating that it may take up to five years to regain control of the funds, Mansur said the progress has been slow as authorities grapple with the scale and complexity of the task.

However, he said that the UK

government is helping.

He is considering to offer plea bargains to those who helped move money offshore in return for evidence against the kingpins, or even some form of amnesty scheme to bring the missing money back to Bangladesh, said the report.

Another key issue is that the complex task of tracking billions of dollars across multiple jurisdictions has been made harder following the change of government in the US.

A team of investigators from the US, who were due to start work in Bangladesh this year, was called off after President Donald Trump froze funding to the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in the early days of his new term.

"They were supposed to be in Dhaka in full force, but it had to be cancelled... a number of our experts... had been funded by USAID, but it was stopped," Mansur says.

"That's unfortunate for us, but that's the way it is."

## Election is your duty, not reforms

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Khasru said the struggle to restore democracy is not over yet. It will only be fulfilled when ownership is returned to the people.

He emphasised that the only way to restore this ownership is by forming a government elected by the people.

He warned that people will not accept any conspiracies to manipulate the electoral process.

He said, "I see signs of Hasina's rhetoric in statements like 'we are

doing this work, we are doing that work; we will implement reforms, we are creating an environment for investment in Bangladesh,' and so on.

"I have heard these stories from Hasina - 'I am developing Bangladesh; what do you need votes for, what do you need elections for? I am working for you; I am doing this work, that work.' By saying all this, Hasina has taken away the voting rights and all the rights of the people. "It seems that narrative is emerging

again, suggesting that we are doing this and that; if we leave, politicians will not carry out these tasks, and they must be completed fully...!"

"Sorry, this is not your responsibility. It will be the responsibility of those whom the people of Bangladesh elect. Don't forget that your duty is to hold a fair election," he said.

The BNP leader said, "Restore democracy. Restore voting rights. Announce the dates for elections quickly."

## Israel hits building in Beirut's south suburbs

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stronghold known as Dahiyeh, were pounded last year by Israeli strikes that killed many of the group's top leaders, including its powerful chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in a September air attack.

A US brokered truce in November put an end to the fighting and mandated that southern Lebanon be free of Hezbollah fighters and weapons, that Lebanese troops deploy to the area and that Israeli ground troops withdraw from the zone.

But the truce has been shaken over the last week by two cases of outgoing fire from southern Lebanon - several rockets fired on March 22 and another set fired yesterday morning.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the Lebanese government bore direct responsibility for the attack and said that as long as there was no peace in Galilee "there will be no peace in Beirut either."

Hezbollah denied links to either attack. No other group has claimed responsibility.

But Israel's statement confirming its raid on Dahiyeh said that the yesterday morning's rocket fire "constitutes a blatant violation of the understandings between Israel and Lebanon and a direct threat to the citizens of the State of Israel."

It added that the Lebanese state bears responsibility for upholding the agreement.

Israel also bombarded Hezbollah targets in south Lebanon yesterday after intercepting the incoming rocket fire, the Israeli military said.

Israel has vowed a strong response to any threats to its security, prompting fears that last year's conflict - which displaced more than 1.3 million people in Lebanon and destroyed much of the country's south - could resume.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, in Paris to meet his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron, said in a written statement from France that the onus was on the international community to "put an end to these attacks and force Israel to abide by the agreement, just as Lebanon is committed to it."

## Dhaka-Beijing ties ready for next stage

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local partners. He also said Bangladesh could learn from China and build a better health care system to benefit the people.

Stating that the past 50 years of Bangladesh-China ties were exciting, the chief adviser said the next 50 years would be "more exciting".

Yunus said he was looking forward to broadening bilateral cooperation and discussing ways to make it happen.

"We share things together and make a journey together to achieve the things we collectively felt very strongly about," he said.

## India weighs

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Bangladesh announced that it had requested India for a bilateral meeting between Yunus and Modi on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC summit. Yunus, who took office in August last year, has yet to meet Modi bilaterally.

Asked about the future of BIMSTEC, given the current strained ties between Bangladesh and India and the fact that Dhaka is set to assume BIMSTEC's chairmanship from Thailand at the Bangkok Summit, Mazumdar said New Delhi had no objections to advancing the BIMSTEC agenda.

"All seven member countries are committed to BIMSTEC, and we are very optimistic about its future. We do not foresee any issues in moving forward with the BIMSTEC agenda," he said.

When asked about discussions between Yunus and Chinese leaders in Beijing and Bangladesh's welcoming of Chinese participation in the Teesta project, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri declined to comment.

"I don't have many comments on that. As for a particular project, I am unsure if this is a new initiative. I will provide an update later. In any case, this is not the subject of today's briefing, and I would prefer not to comment on the internal affairs of another country," Misri.

Formed in 1997, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation comprises Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal, and Bhutan.

While Myanmar joined in 1998, Nepal and Bhutan became members in 2004.

## Tk 17,000cr project falls short on road safety

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from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the project's financier.

At that time, the project cost was estimated at Tk 20,300 crore, according to the meeting minutes shared by Project Director Fazlul at the stakeholders' meeting.

However, to reduce costs, 22 overpasses and 27 underpasses were removed from the original design, making the road riskier. The move would also prevent traffic from reaching the expected speed.

The loan ceiling set by the ADB was one of the reasons for the removal of the overpasses and underpasses, Fazlul told this correspondent yesterday.

He informed the meeting that a consultancy firm had been hired to assess the impact of removing the overpasses and underpasses, along with related safety issues, and it recently submitted the road safety audit report.

While it was expected that the divided carriageway and service lanes would reduce head-on collisions, the safety auditors identified several factors contributing to road accidents.

According to the audit report, at-grade U-turns, roundabouts at major intersections, U-turns for both fast and slow-moving vehicles on the main carriageway, and the absence of adequate pedestrian facilities will make the highway more accident-prone.

There are many elements, including 88 educational institutions, 204 industries, 51 marketplaces, 28 intersections, 652 branch roads, 10 hospitals and 28 filling stations, which made the highway more vulnerable to accidents, Fazlul said.

Considering all these aspects, the consultants recommended building 11 overpasses, 17 all-vehicular underpasses, 29 light vehicular underpasses, 78 pedestrian underpasses, 12 cattle underpasses, among other infrastructure, he said.

If the amount for the additional infrastructure is added to the existing cost of Tk 16,918.58 crore, the project cost will increase to Tk 20,418.58 crore.

DEADLINE

In the last four years, the project authorities hired contractors for all

## Number of UK children living in poverty highest in 20 yrs

AFP, London

The number of children living in poverty in the UK reached a new record, according to data published Thursday, as the government faces a storm of criticism over plans to cut welfare payments.

Almost 4.5 million children were living in low-income households in the year ending March 2024, according to the Department of Work and Pensions - the highest number since records began in 2002-2003.

The figure rose from a previous record of 4.33 million in March 2023 to 4.45 million last year.

A household is considered to be in relative poverty if it lies below 60 percent of the median income, or below £337 (\$435) per week.

The record figures come after Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government announced cuts to disability welfare payments among other spending cuts.

According to the government's own estimates, changes to the welfare system risk plunging 50,000 more children into poverty in the next five years.

Meanwhile, 21 percent of the population, or 14.25 million people, were in poverty as per the data, down slightly from the previous year.

## Arctic sea ice hits lowest peak in satellite record Says US agency

AFP, Washington

This year's Arctic sea ice peak is the lowest in the 47-year satellite record, according to data released by the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) on Thursday, as the planet continues to swelter under the mounting effects of human-driven climate change.

Arctic sea ice forms and expands during the dark, frigid northern winter, reaching its seasonal high point in March. But in recent years, less new ice has formed, and the accumulation of multi-year ice has steadily declined.

The maximum sea ice level for 2025 was likely reached on March 22, measuring 14.33 million square kilometers (5.53 million square miles) - below the previous low of 14.41 million square kilometers set in 2017.

"This new record low is yet another indicator of how Arctic sea ice has fundamentally changed from earlier decades," said NSIDC senior research scientist Walt Meier in a statement.

13 packages, but it has seen only 13 percent progress.

When asked about the reasons behind the delay in implementation, Project Director Fazlul blamed the unavailability of land as the primary cause.

The Roads and Highways Department is implementing a separate project to acquire 1,034 acres of land, of which 829.83 acres are for the highway expansion. The department, however, missed the deadline for this land acquisition twice.

So far, the project authority has received only 12 percent of the required land, sources said.

Asked if adding new infrastructure to the highway expansion project would further delay it, Fazlul said they would need around three more years to implement the project under its current plan due to the delay in acquiring land.

However, he added, if the government approved the new plan as quickly as possible, the construction of the new infrastructure could also be completed within the extended timeline.

'LESSONS NOT LEARN'T'

A project official said when the underpasses and overpasses were dropped from the plan, it was acknowledged that these would ultimately need to be constructed at the intersections to prevent traffic congestion and ensure road safety in the future.

"We now have to spend approximately Tk 21 crore on consultancy services for value engineering in road safety, which could have been significantly minimised if the consultant's recommendations during the feasibility study stage had been incorporated into the Development Project Proposal," he said, requesting anonymity.

He also said more overpasses and underpasses had to be added during the implementation of the SASEC-1 and SASEC-2 projects to expand the highway from Gazipur to Rangpur via Tangail, resulting in an extension of the deadline and rise in cost.

"We should have learnt lessons from the past," he added.