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People attend a "No Kings" protest against US President Donald Trump's policies, in Times Square in New York City yesterday. Large demonstrations are expected to hit the streets yesterday from New York to San Francisco to vent their anger over Trump's hardline policies.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Just a wasteland'

UN aid chief foresees 'massive job' ahead on tour of ruined Gaza; strike on bus kills 9; ICC rejects Israeli bid to withdraw arrest warrants against Netanyahu

AFP, Jerusalem

The United Nations' aid chief took stock of the monumental task of restoring basic necessities in the devastated Gaza Strip yesterday, as Israel and Hamas exchanged more human remains.

In a short convoy of white UN jeeps, relief coordinator Tom Fletcher and his team wound their way through the twisted rubble of shattered homes to inspect a wastewater treatment plant in Sheikh Radwan, north of Gaza City.

"I drove through here seven to eight months ago when most of these buildings were still standing and, to see the devastation, this is a vast part of the city, just a wasteland, and it's absolutely devastating to see," he told AFP.

The densely packed cities of the Gaza Strip, home to more than two million Palestinians, have been reduced to ruins by two years of bombardment and intense fighting between Hamas and the Israeli army.

Just over a week since US President Donald Trump helped broker a truce, the main border crossing to Egypt has yet to be reopened, but hundreds of trucks roll in daily via Israeli checkpoints and aid is being distributed.

Hamas has returned the final 20 surviving hostages it was holding and has begun to hand over the remains of another 28 who died.

On Friday night, it turned over a body identified by Israel as Eliyahu Margalit, 75, who died in the October 7, 2023 attack that ignited the war in Gaza.

Yesterday, in line with the terms of the ceasefire deal, Israel returned the bodies of 15 more Palestinians to Gaza, the health ministry in the Hamas run territory said.

Surveying the damaged pumping equipment and a grim lake of sewage at the Sheikh Radwan wastewater plant, Fletcher said the task ahead for the UN and aid agencies was a "massive, massive job".

The British diplomat said he had met residents returning to destroyed homes trying to dig latrines in the ruins.



released by the UN humanitarian office, on Thursday some 950 trucks carrying aid and commercial supplies crossed into Gaza from Israel.

Relief agencies have called for the Rafah border crossing from Egypt to be reopened to speed the flow of food, fuel and medicines, and Turkey has a team of rescue specialists waiting at the border to help find bodies in the rubble.

Some violent incidents have taken place despite the ceasefire. Gaza's civil defence agency, which operates under Hamas

authority, said Saturday that it had recovered the bodies of nine Palestinians from the Shabab family after Israeli troops opened fire on a bus.

The military said it had fired on a vehicle that approached the so-called "yellow line", to which its forces withdrew under the terms of the ceasefire.

Under the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, negotiated by Trump and regional mediators, the Palestinian group has

returned all 20 surviving hostages and the remains of 10 out of 28 deceased ones.

Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court Friday rejected Israel's bid to appeal against arrest warrants for its Israeli PM Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Gallant over the Gaza war.

In a ruling that made headlines around the world, the ICC in November found "reasonable grounds" to believe Netanyahu and Gallant bore "criminal responsibility" for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Zelensky leaves White House empty-handed

Gets no missiles; Trump pushes for peace

REUTERS, Washington



done, and I think President Putin wants it done. Now all they have to do is get along a little bit," Trump told reporters.

Zelensky, however, noted how difficult it has been to try to secure a ceasefire. "We want this. Putin doesn't want it," he said.

The Ukrainian leader was frank, telling Trump that Ukraine has thousands of drones ready for an offensive against Russian targets, but needs American missiles.

"We don't have Tomahawks, that's why we need Tomahawks," he said.

Trump responded: "We'd much rather have them not need Tomahawks."

Later, Trump reiterated that he wants the United States to hold onto its weaponry. "We want Tomahawks also. We don't want to be giving away things that we need to protect our country," he said.

After the meeting, which Zelensky described as productive, he told reporters he did not want to talk about long-range missiles, saying the US did not want escalation, and that he was "realistic" about his chance of getting them.

The Ukrainian president, who spoke by phone with European leaders after the meeting, said he was counting on Trump to pressure Putin "to stop this war."

Climate debt storm threatens financial stability

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Least Developed Country (LDC) category in November 2026, is navigating a challenging economic phase marked by low revenue collection, liquidity crises in its banking sector, and a depreciating exchange rate.

The paper said over the past 10 years, the ratio of foreign debt to exports increased from 59 percent in the fiscal year (FY) 2011-12 to nearly 117 percent in FY23.

"This indicates that the growth of exports has been lower than that of external loans, especially in recent years, which increases the risk of an overwhelming debt burden for the country."

The primary catalyst for immediate debt distress, the report suggests, is the financial weight of climate change.

Economic losses from climate-induced natural disasters surged nearly tenfold, from roughly Tk 18,425 crore between 2009 and 2014 to a staggering Tk 1,79,200 crore in the 2015 and 2020 period.

The combined losses

and damage from all the disasters between 2009 and 2020 stood at around Tk 2,00,000 crore, said the report, citing an estimate by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Floods accounted for over half of the losses.

This fragile environment has already triggered alarm among global credit agencies: Moody's, S&P Global, and Fitch Ratings have all downgraded Bangladesh, citing "heightened external vulnerability and liquidity risks", and a growing susceptibility to economic shocks.

The report said that Bangladesh's external debt surpassed \$100 billion by the end of 2023, nearly double the level recorded a decade earlier.

The government's fiscal space has narrowed sharply. Public investment remains essential to sustain growth and build climate resilience, it added.

The report warns that a growing share of new borrowing is occurring under less concessional terms, exposing Bangladesh to higher refinancing costs.

At the programme, Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of CPD, said Bangladesh faces two intertwined challenges: the immediate impacts of climate events such as floods and cyclones, and the broader, long-term costs of climate change, including adaptation and mitigation measures.

"It is crucial to understand the marginal cost of debt sustainability (the cost of raising one additional dollar of debt) attributable to climate factors, especially as the financial landscape evolves."

He said the current allocation for climate-related spending -- around 4-5 percent of the development budget -- is meagre in relation to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

However, he said, "We need to see not only what is allocated but how effectively those funds are being utilised."

Sobhan called for a clearer breakdown of domestic versus external funding for climate issues and added that grant financing should be prioritised for non-income-generating climate

projects.

He warned that global developments, including shifts in international aid priorities and commercial financing patterns, could influence Bangladesh's climate finance landscape.

Referring to the so-called "Trump variable", Sobhan said any change in the US administration's stance on climate issues could have cascading effects on funding availability worldwide.

He pointed to emerging financing opportunities in Asia, including loans and aid from new sources such as China, suggesting that Bangladesh should explore these avenues to supplement traditional funding mechanisms.

The report emphasised the need for better data on the economic impacts of climate change, incorporating loss and damage considerations into debt sustainability analyses, and seeking support from the Loss and Damage Fund established to support developing countries vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.



Demonstrators hold placards during a march on Oxford Street, in central London yesterday. UK government last month announced plans for the digital ID in a bid to curb illegal migration, but the move faces strong opposition in a country that has long resisted identity cards. A petition against the move has collected more than 2,899,412 signatures.

PHOTO: AFP

AFGHAN-PAK BORDER CLASHES

Rivals meet for talks in Qatar

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and Afghan officials were due to meet in Qatar yesterday, a day after Islamabad launched air strikes that killed at least 10 people in Afghanistan and broke a ceasefire that had brought two days of calm to the border.

The strikes targeted what Pakistan security sources said was a militant group linked to the Pakistani Taliban in the Afghan border areas, following an attack that killed Pakistani paramilitary troops in North Waziristan, a district in Pakistan's northwest.

Before the truce, nearly a week long cross-border clashes killed dozens of troops and civilians on both sides.

"The talks will focus on immediate measures to end cross-border terrorism against Pakistan and restore peace and stability along the Pak-Afghan border," Pakistan's foreign ministry said.

The Afghan Taliban's defence ministry said a team led by minister Mohammad Yaqoob also reached the Qatari capital.

Security issues are at the heart of the tensions, with Pakistan accusing Afghanistan of sheltering militant groups led by the TTP -- a claim Kabul denies.

Pakistan's army chief General Asim Munir said that "proxies have sanctuaries in Afghanistan" and were "using Afghan soil to perpetrate heinous attacks inside Pakistan".

Defence minister Asif went further, accusing Kabul of acting as "a proxy of India" and "plotting" against Pakistan.

In response, Afghan deputy interior minister Mullah Mohammad Nabi Omari said: "We neither brought the TTP here, nor supported them, nor did they come during our time."