

DRUG BOAT

New US strike kills four in Caribbean

AFP, Washington

US forces have struck another alleged drug trafficking boat in the Caribbean, upping the death toll in the contentious anti-narcotics campaign to 80, US media reports said Thursday.

Washington began carrying out such strikes -- which experts say amount to extrajudicial killings even if they target known traffickers -- in early September, taking aim at vessels in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific.

This week's reported strike took the toll to 80 deaths in 20 strikes in international waters.

The timing of the strike was not clear, with broadcaster CBS reporting the boat was destroyed on Monday and the New York Times reporting the strike took place on Wednesday, both citing an unnamed Pentagon official.



Workers clean up debris outside an apartment building damaged in an overnight Russian drone and missile strike in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday. President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russian forces used 430 drones and 18 missiles and Kyiv was responding with long-range strikes. It was one of the biggest attacks on the capital so far.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Modi's alliance wins Bihar assembly polls

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling coalition comfortably retained power in Bihar, one of India's poorest and most populous states, a vote count showed yesterday. The result gives him a boost after last year's disappointing national vote.

Winning Bihar is crucial because it is India's third-most populous state with nearly 130 million people and it sends the fifth-highest number of lawmakers to Parliament. Control of the eastern state strengthens any party's power in the Hindi heartland and often helps to shape national political narratives.

Modi's National Democratic Alliance coalition easily crossed the majority mark of 122 seats, with data from the Election Commission of India showing it was leading in more than 170 seats. TV channel NDTV said it was ahead in 209 seats, a potential gain of 87 seats from the last election.

"Bihar's mandate is clear!" Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party said on X. "The people have made it clear - now development is the identity. Not jungle raj, good governance is needed!" Political analysts have said one of the key factors in the Bihar election was Modi's September transfer of 75 billion rupees (\$853 million) to millions of women in the state under an employment programme.

Israeli army builds walls inside south Lebanon

Say UN peacekeepers; Beirut curbs money transfers to cut off Hezbollah funding following US pressure

AFP, Beirut

United Nations peacekeepers said yesterday that Israel's army has built walls in south Lebanon near the UN demarcated Blue Line, the de facto border, nearly a year after a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah.

In October, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon surveyed "a concrete T-wall erected by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) southwest of Yaroun. The survey confirmed that the wall crossed the Blue Line, rendering more than 4,000 square metres of Lebanese territory inaccessible to the Lebanese people," UNIFIL.



"In November, peacekeepers observed additional T-wall construction in the area. A survey confirmed that a section of wall southeast of Yaroun also crossed the Blue Line," it added, urging Israel to withdraw. Meanwhile, Lebanon announced

yesterday that money changers and transfer companies must comply with stricter rules as the country faces heavy US pressure to regulate its cash economy and cut off Hezbollah funding.

The move comes days after a visiting US official said his country was determined to cut off Tehran's funding to the group, and after the US Treasury said Iran's Revolutionary Guards had transferred over \$1 billion to Hezbollah this year, mainly via money exchange companies.

Lebanese authorities are seeking to disarm Hezbollah, which was badly weakened in a recent war with Israel.

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Pakistan top court meets after judges quit

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's top court called a meeting of all judges yesterday, after parliament passed a constitutional amendment this week that curbed its remit, prompting two judges to quit, saying the reform "stands as a grave assault on the constitution".

Under the amendment, which the political opposition says has undermined democracy, the Supreme Court will no longer hear constitutional cases. The changes also expand the powers of the country's army chief and extend his term.

In theory, the remaining Supreme Court judges can suspend the new law, but lawyers said that was unlikely. Before this week, the court had 24 judges.

Pakistan's government has waged a sweeping crackdown on dissent and its main opposition, which has included jailing former prime minister Imran Khan for over two years. Rights groups say the crackdown has been led by the powerful military and have routinely looked to the courts to safeguard democracy.

The administration of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the changes would improve governance and reward the army chief for the military's performance in conflict with India in May.

"Pakistan has today taken a constitutional path," Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif told parliament yesterday. "The judges used to do politics. They used to undermine parliament."

India puts new privacy rules into force

REUTERS, Bengaluru



India put new privacy rules into force yesterday that will make Meta, Google, OpenAI and other companies minimize collection of personal data and give people more control over their information.

The rules, akin to the goals of the EU's GDPR privacy law, come as countries are scrambling to safeguard personal data with the rising adoption of AI.

Companies will only be able to collect data that is necessary for a specified purpose under the rules, which will enforce India's stringent 2023 Digital Personal Data Protection law.

Firms will also have to give Indian users a clear explanation for the collection.

Govt shelves several key

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Out of more than a hundred recommendations by the commission, 33 were selected by the health ministry for immediate implementation. Of them, 23 were supposed to be implemented by the Health Services Division (HSD), and the rest by the Medical Education and Family Welfare Division.

The HSD even categorised the 23 recommendations into short- (six months), mid- (one to two years) and long-term (more than two years) actions.

The health ministry regularly updated the Cabinet Division on the implementation status of the selected recommendations, said a ministry official, seeking anonymity.

"More than a month ago, the Cabinet Division struck off 15 recommendations from the list, keeping 18 for regular updates."

In the ministry's progress report, some of the dropped recommendations were marked as "sensitive", which might have led to their exclusion, the official said.

When asked, Health Secretary Saidur Rahman said the Cabinet Division is now seeking updates on the progress of 18 recommendations from the Health Sector Reform Commission and one from the Public Administration Reform Commission.

Regarding the omission of the 15 recommendations, he said in a written reply, "These are big issues which are not easily implementable. They will take a long time."

THE EXCLUDED RECOMMENDATIONS

Several of the dropped recommendations were considered vital for bringing positive changes to the health sector, said experts and officials.

They include the formation of a health commission to develop a health policy; the establishment of Bangladesh Health Service and the promulgation of an ordinance to create a separate secretariat for it; and the creation of a separate public service commission for recruitment and promotion of doctors.

Suggestions for forming a medical police unit to ensure security at hospitals and clinics, and introducing a five-day academic week for medical colleges were also dropped.

Another recommendation was excluded the

introduction of a service centre to swiftly deal with licensing and other administrative matters involving private medical hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres.

The suggestion to introduce a time-befitting pay scale for health workers in the private sector was omitted from the list as well.

SLOW OR NO PROGRESS

The implementation of several of the 18 recommendations, retained by the Cabinet Division for regular updates, has seen little progress over the past seven months, said health ministry officials.

For instance, the reform commission had recommended the enactment of at least nine laws and amendments to more than half a dozen existing ones related to the health sector.

But the health ministry has so far prepared two drafts -- the Health Service Workers and Institutions Protection Ordinance 2025, and the Patient Protection and Remedy Ordinance 2025, according to the ministry's update report.

It further said the government has been able to partially implement the recommendation to offer primary healthcare free of cost or at subsidised rates.

No steps have been taken yet to implement the commission's recommendation for making primary healthcare a constitutional obligation.

However, there has been some progress in executing the commission's suggestion to keep pharmacies open round the clock at public hospitals and primary healthcare centres. A hundred posts for pharmacists have been created and the process of their appointments is underway, according to the report.

Directives have been issued to all public hospitals to curb the practice of prescribing unnecessary medicines or tests and to stop the use of pharmaceutical companies' prescription pads, the report mentioned.

The health ministry is now conducting "further scrutiny" of at least five recommendations, including the formation of a search committee to recommend appointments to top posts in the proposed health service; the enactment of a health information safety act; and the drawing up of a list of essential diagnostics.

LDA terms order 'unconstitutional'

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charter, everyone must remain prepared and vigilant so that no one can create divisions in unity.

In a separate statement, Bazlur Rashid Firoz, general secretary of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, said the order issued in the name of the president has created serious constitutional complications.

On the other hand, Revolutionary Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Huq welcomed the idea of holding the referendum on the same day as the national election.

However, it expressed concern over whether an interim government has the authority to issue any constitutional order, according to a statement.

The statement noted that such an order issued in the name of the president lies beyond the mandate and jurisdiction of an interim government.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President ASM Abdur Rab said that any renewed political crisis over the implementation of the July National Charter could push the state into disaster.

"At this critical juncture for the nation, political divisions, antagonism, and rivalries must be avoided," he said in a statement sent to media.

For the sake of national security and stability, a balance of constitutional, political, and social safeguards must be established through dialogue and understanding," the JSD president added.

Meanwhile, AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Monju and General Secretary Asaduzzaman Fuad, in another statement, said the party supports the chief adviser's proposals in the greater interest of the nation.

They believe this is a relatively acceptable solution.

The leaders expressed hope that BNP, Jamaat, and all political parties will avoid division, participate in the election in a free, fair, and festive environment, and guide the country toward a stable democratic path.

Country sees more arson attacks

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Around 9:00pm, a crude bomb exploded in front of the Mohakhali kitchen market, said Rasel Sarwar, OC of Banani Police Station. No casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested five leaders and activists of the AL and its affiliated bodies in the past 24 hours for allegedly attempting sabotage and preparing for flash rallies.

The AL, whose activities are now banned, announced the "lockdown" after the International Crimes Tribunal-1 set Thursday for fixing the date for delivering the verdict in a case against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina on charges of crimes against humanity. Later, the tribunal set November 17 as the verdict date.

Apart from police and army, 12 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh are patrolling the capital to strengthen security and maintain law and order, said Shariful Islam, the BGB public relations officer.

In Manikganj, unidentified miscreants set fire to a parked school bus early yesterday, seriously injuring the driver, Tabez Khan, 45, who was asleep inside. The incident occurred around 3:00am in the Folsatia area of Shibalaya upazila, said Sub-Inspector Suman Chakraborty.

Tabez was first taken to the Sadar hospital and later referred to Dhaka's National Burn and Plastic Surgery

Institute for advanced treatment.

Shibalaya Police Station OC SM Aman Ullah said investigators are looking into whether the attack was an act of sabotage.

In Barguna, a parked bus of Swarna Paribahan was set on fire around midnight in the Bandhghat area in Amtali upazila. Police later arrested five activists of various AL associate bodies for their alleged involvement, said Amir Hossain Serniabad, an officer of Amtali Police Station.

The arrestees are Ataur Rahman Russell, 29; Parvez Khan, 28; Tanmoy Gazi, 33; Kawshar Ahmed Rony, 33; and Saghir Mallik, 23.

In Gazipur, unidentified miscreants set fire to a parked bus in Baktarpur of Kaliakair upazila around 3:00am. No one was injured, though part of the bus was damaged, said Habibur Rahman Ukil, inspector of Kaliakair Police Station. A case has been filed against unnamed individuals.

Monir Hossain, a staff member of Itihas Paribahan, said four persons arrived on two motorcycles around midnight, boarded the bus, set the seats on fire and fled. Locals managed to douse the flames before firefighters reached the spot.

In Kishoreganj, miscreants set fire to a boat moored at a river ghāt in Nikli upazila, burning it to ashes and partially damaging another boat. The incident occurred early yesterday under the Kamalpur Bridge

near Moharkona. Police are trying to identify those involved.

In Khulna, police recovered four bomb-like objects in Terokhada upazila yesterday morning after three explosions near the house of a local union parishad member triggered panic among residents, reports UNB.

Mehedi Hasan, OC of Terokhada Police Station, said the blasts occurred around 3:30am at the entrance of UP member Bellal Molla's house in Parhajigram Katasia Bazar area of Madhupur Union.

US pushes UN Council to adopt

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force for Gaza, and does not mention the "Board of Peace" that the US has proposed as a transitional administration for Gaza.

Meanwhile, Indonesia has trained up to 20,000 troops to take on health and construction-related tasks during a planned peacekeeping operation in the war-torn enclave of Gaza, the defence minister said yesterday.

The world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia is among the countries with which the United States has discussed plans for a multinational stabilisation force in Gaza, which include Azerbaijan, Egypt and Qatar.

In Gaza, Nasser Hospital authority in the southern city of Khan Yunis said it received the bodies of 15 Palestinians yesterday as part of the US-brokered ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, reports AFP.

In a separate development, more than 150 Palestinians, who were kept on a plane for 12 hours by South African border police, were finally allowed to disembark Thursday evening, authorities said.

The plane carrying 153 Palestinians landed shortly after 8 am (0600 GMT) on Thursday at OR Tambo International Airport, according to border police.

The passengers were not allowed to leave the aircraft as they "did not have the customary departure stamps in their passports", the police said, adding that none had "expressed an intention to apply for asylum".