



Rescuers place in a bag the body of a person found under debris of an apartment building which was hit during Russian drone strikes in Odesa, Ukraine, yesterday. Russian forces killed six people and wounded nearly two dozen others in separate attacks, Ukrainian officials said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Iran wants talks: Trump

Aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln arrives in ME

AGENCIES

A US naval strike force led by an aircraft carrier was in Middle Eastern waters yesterday as Iran vowed to hit back against any strike and President Donald Trump said he believed the Islamic republic still wanted talks.

Washington has not ruled out new military intervention against Tehran over its crackdown on protests, which according to rights groups saw thousands of people killed within days.

A strike group led by the USS Abraham Lincoln has now arrived in Middle Eastern waters, US Central Command said, without revealing its precise location, reports AFP.

Since Iran earlier this month launched the crackdown on protests accompanied by a blanket internet blackout, Trump has given mixed signals on intervention which some opponents of the clerical leadership see as the only way to bring about change.

"We have a big armada next to Iran. Bigger than Venezuela,"

Trump told the Axios news site, weeks after US military action resulted in the capture of the Latin American nation's president Nicolas Maduro.

But he added: "They want to make a deal. I know so. They called on numerous occasions. They want to talk."

Axios said Trump declined to discuss the options presented to him by his national security team, or which one he prefers. Analysts say

on Monday of a "comprehensive and regret-inducing response to any aggression". Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said: "The arrival of such a battleship is not going to affect Iran's determination and seriousness to defend the Iranian nation."

Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said on Monday that any attack on the group's backer Tehran would also be an attack on the group, and warned that any new war on Iran



would ignite the region. Meanwhile, a US-based rights group said yesterday it had confirmed the deaths of over 6,000 people in protests in Iran suppressed by security forces. NGOs tracking the toll have said their task has been impeded by an almost three-week internet shutdown.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said it had confirmed that 6,126 people had been killed, including 5,777 protesters, 86 minors, 214 members of the security forces and 49 bystanders.

Iran's foreign ministry warned

Iran's foreign ministry warned

Iran's foreign ministry warned

## Death toll from US monster storm rises to 30

Half a million without power

AFP, New York

More than half a million Americans woke up without power yesterday, as freezing temperatures gripped swathes of the country in a monster storm that has killed at least 30 people.

A frigid, life-threatening Arctic air mass could delay recovery as municipalities from New Mexico to Maine tried to dig out following the storm, which dropped a vicious cocktail of heavy snow and wind, along with freezing rain and sleet.

Forecasters warned that much of the northern half of the country will see temperatures that are "continuously below freezing through February 1," the National Weather Service said in an X post.

It added that "record low temperatures" hit southern states, which are unaccustomed to intense winter weather.

While skies began clearing in parts of the country, relentless snowfall in northeast meant parts of Connecticut saw over 22 inches of snow, with more than 16 inches recorded in Boston. The storm was linked to at least 30 deaths, according to a compilation of state government and local media reports.

## Govt trying to get Bhola gas as LNG

FROM PAGE 12

industrial areas under Titas Gas.

Additionally, two more gas fields – Bhola North and Ilisha – are idle, with a combined capacity of 60 mmcf.

Bangladesh has discovered 29.74 trillion cubic feet (TCF) of gas so far, of which only 8.66 TCF remains.

Bhola's gas is seen as a key source for new gas supplies as most onshore fields are declining and the import facilities are almost in fully utilising.

Proven reserves in Bhola's three fields total about 1.4 TCF, with further drilling expected to yield more. The Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company, the government company responsible for oil and gas exploration and production, plans to drill 19 additional wells in the fields to increase production.

Based on Bhola's reserves, several pipeline projects – including one via the Padma Bridge – and gas-fired power plants have been planned in the gas-hungry Khulna-Barishal region.

The largest, an 800-megawatt Rupsha plant, is near completion, but no updates exist on pipeline installation.

In May 2023, Intraco Refueling Station was awarded the task of supplying CNG from Bhola to Dhaka and nearby industrial areas. They planned to supply 5 mmcf since January 2024, gradually increasing to 25 mmcf by 2025.

However, Titas Gas officials said the company has yet to supply more than 1 mmcf.

At the public hearing, an Intraco representative said that they carried CNG

on an emergency basis without approval from the Department of Explosives.

The department has yet to grant approval, and the company was asked to halt supply from November 9 last year.

"We have invested Tk 250-300 crore. And operations were halted for four months amid protests from locals demanding that gas is not carried outside from there. Yet we had to pay staff," the Intraco representative said.

Intraco had proposed a CNG price of Tk 52, but the government fixed it at Tk 47.50.

"LNG processing would require at least Tk 2,000 crore investment. I don't think it would be feasible for any company," he said.

Md Jamal Uddin Miah, director of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said industrial sectors like theirs cannot operate at such prices.

"We received gas at Tk 12 per unit, then it rose to Tk 17, and now it stands at Tk 32. Staying operational is becoming very difficult," he said.

As many as 300 factories have already shut down, with another 300 at risk.

"This will negatively impact foreign exchange earnings, employment and tax revenue. Our competitors – especially neighbouring countries – are far ahead. Gas prices must consider industrial competitiveness," he added.

A representative from the Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) opposed supplying gas from Bhola in either CNG or LNG format.

Instead, he suggested building a gas-fired power plant on the island and

transmitting electricity to the mainland.

Using one cubic metre of gas, it is possible to generate 4 to 5 units of electricity, said Syed Zulfikar Ali, additional director (Finance) of the Bangladesh Power Development Board.

Transmitting that electricity to Dhaka would cost only Tk 1.24 per unit and no additional investment would be required as a transmission line already exists here.

By contrast, transporting gas from Bhola in LNG format has been proposed at a cost of Tk 29.90 per cubic metre, he said.

Transporting the proposed 30 million cubic meters of LNG would cost around Tk 930 crore per year and Tk 9,300 crore over a 10-year contract.

Instead of spending such a large amount, a 200MW plant could be built at a cost equivalent to just two years of gas transportation expenses.

"The plant would require about 45 mmcf of gas. If that much gas could be balanced through Dhaka's supply network, it would help ease both the capital's gas shortage and the power deficit," he added.

While the Bhola-Barishal pipeline construction is technically challenging due to long river crossings, it remains a priority, said BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed. Since a pipeline already exists on the Padma Bridge, it could be utilised.

"If Bhola's gas production rises to 350-380 mmcf, pipeline transmission will be unavoidable. We will formally recommend it as a national priority," he said.

Written submissions on the issue will be accepted until February 2, with a decision to follow.

## Only 'yes' can bring change

FROM PAGE 2

Asif Saleh noted that while voters are told only four issues will be placed before them, in reality they will be casting a single "yes" or "no" vote on 84 reform proposals: 47 constitutional and 37 to be implemented through general laws or executive orders.

He said a single "yes" vote would approve several major constitutional changes at

once, including election governance, the structure of constitutional institutions, a mandatory 30-point pledge for future governments, and the creation of a new upper chamber, decisions with long-term consequences.

"To bundle all of these into a single question is to deprive voters of the opportunity to express their actual preferences," he said, adding that the process robs

people of freedom of choice.

He also said voters were not being informed about the cost, feasibility or effectiveness of the proposed reforms.

"It is being said that the key to the country is in your hands. But do you really know which lock you are going to open with which key?" he asked.

The Daily Star could not reach Asif Saleh despite several attempts.

## 144 breaches, Tk 9.05

FROM PAGE 2

Anwarul also said all complaints regarding the lack of a level-playing field have been forwarded to the concerned returning officers and the electoral inquiry committee, who will

take action in accordance with the law.

Asked whether the EC has been able to overcome public distrust, the election commissioner said, "We believe that trust or distrust ultimately

belongs to the people...

Political parties are taking part, and election campaigns are being conducted in a festive atmosphere in the field. These are expressions of confidence."

## EU, India agree to 'mother of all' trade deals

FROM PAGE 12

benefit from so-called "first mover advantage".

Europe's key agricultural, automotive and service sectors stand to gain. But sensitive agricultural sectors, such as beef, rice and sugar whose inclusion in an earlier deal struck with South American bloc Mercosur sparked farmers' anger in Europe, were left out of the agreement.

New Delhi sees the European bloc as an important source of much-needed technology and investment to rapidly upscale its infrastructure and create millions of new jobs.

It also includes a security partnership, providing "new opportunities" for defence companies, Modi said.

"We are not only making our economies stronger – we are also delivering security for our people in an increasingly insecure world," von der Leyen said, speaking alongside Modi after exchanging agreements.

"By combining these strengths, we reduce strategic dependencies, at a time when trade is increasingly weaponised," she added.

Bilateral trade in goods reached 120 billion euros (\$139 billion) in 2024, an increase of nearly 90 percent over the past decade, according to EU figures, with a further 60 billion euros (\$69 billion) in trade in services.

Under the agreement, India is expected to ease market access, and European firms will get privileged

access to the Indian financial services and maritime transport market, the bloc said.

Tariffs on cars will be gradually lowered from a top rate of 110 percent to as low as 10 percent – with a quota of 250,000 vehicles – while duties on wines progressively go down from 150 percent to as low as 20 percent.

Currently at 50 percent, tariffs on processed foods – including pasta and chocolate – will be eliminated, according to the EU.

Von der Leyen said she expected exports to India to double, and that the EU would "gain the highest level of access ever granted to a trade partner in the traditionally protected Indian market".

## Dhaka, Beijing sign

FROM PAGE 12

and assemble various types of Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) UAVs and Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) UAVs.

In addition, the BAF will produce its own UAVs, which will play a significant role not only in military operations but also in humanitarian assistance and disaster management, the statement added.

As a result of this agreement, capacity will be expanded to achieve full self-reliance in domestic UAV production, which will help meet national and international demand, it said.

"At the same time, it will make a significant contribution to national technological advancement by developing a skilled aerospace workforce through specialised training, knowledge exchange, and capacity building."

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen; Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lt Gen SM Kamrul Hasan; Secretary of the Chief Adviser's Office Saifulah Panna; Secretary of the Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division Hafiz Ahmed Chowdhury; senior officers of BAF; and representatives of CETC International and other officials and guests were present.

## Trial ends, wait for verdict begins

FROM PAGE 12

prosecution and defence.

During the hearings, the prosecution pressed for the maximum penalty for all 30 accused, terming the killing a crime against humanity committed in the context of the mass uprising. The defence, meanwhile, sought acquittal, challenging both the evidence and the allegations against their clients.

Of the 30 accused, six are in custody while the rest – including former Begum Rokeya University vice-chancellor Hasibur Rashid and former Rangpur Metropolitan Police commissioner Md Moniruzzaman – remain absconding.

Those in jail are former university proctor Shariful Islam, assistant registrar Rafiul Hasan Rasel, staffer

Anwar Parvez, assistant sub-inspector Amir Hossain, constable Sujan Chandra Roy, banned Chhatra League leader Imran Chowdhury Akash, and two others. They were present in the dock yesterday.

On August 5, last year, the tribunal framed charges against all 30, detailing their alleged roles in aiding, inciting, or directly carrying out the shooting that killed Sayed, who was unarmed at the time.

The same year, the prosecution had submitted the formal charge on June 30, following the investigation agency's probe report filed on June 24.

On August 27 last year, the trial began with the deposition of Sayed's father, Mokbul Hossain, marking the third case over crimes against humanity

## Submit probe report

FROM PAGE 12

The Daily Star filed the case on December 22 last year with Tejgaon Police Station against 350-400 unidentified people under the Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the Special Powers Act, and the Cyber Security Ordinance, over the attack on its head office in Dhaka's Tejgaon area.

According to the case statement, the estimated loss from the attack stands at around Tk 40 crore, subject to revision following further assessment.

Court records show that 11 individuals were arrested in the case by December 26 last year. All of them are currently in jail.

## 'Some' US feds to leave city

FROM PAGE 12

agreed the present situation can't continue."

Another sign of a thaw was confirmation from a senior Trump administration official that Gregory Bovino, a top US Border Patrol official who has been a lightning rod for criticism from Democrats and civil liberties activists, will be leaving Minnesota along with some of the agents deployed with him.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Trump's designated border czar,

Tom Homan, would replace Bovino in the Midwestern state, at the helm of what the Trump administration has dubbed Operation Metro Surge.

Trump himself said earlier that Homan was being sent to Minnesota, adding that Homan had "not been involved" in the crackdown, but "knows and likes many of the people there."

Later on Monday, a different person familiar with the matter said Bovino had been stripped of his specially created title of "commander at large" of the Border Patrol and would return to his former job as a

chief patrol agent along California's El Centro sector of the US-Mexico border, reports Reuters.

The source said Bovino would then soon retire. Another source confirmed Bovino would return to the El Centro sector but gave no further details.

The White House was scrambling as video of the latest shooting went viral, prompting street protests, criticism from former presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama and, increasingly, from within Trump's Republican Party.