

ATLANTIC WATERS UK tracked 3 Russian subs in alleged covert op

AFP, London

Britain said yesterday it had tracked and "seen off" three Russian submarines on an alleged month-long "covert operation" in Atlantic waters "north of the UK" near vital undersea cables and pipelines.

Disclosing details of the joint mission with Norway and other unspecified allies, British Defence Secretary John Healey said there was no evidence the Russian vessels had damaged the subsea infrastructure.

"I deployed our armed forces to track and to deter any malign activity by these vessels," Healey told a Downing Street news conference.

"Our armed forces left them in no doubt that they were being monitored, that their movements were not covert, as (Russian) President (Vladimir) Putin planned and that their attempted secret operation had been exposed."



Residents clear debris from a house destroyed by a Russian air strike on the outskirts of Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

2 sentenced to hang, 3 get life

FROM PAGE 1

University, Rangpur (BRUR), was killed on July 16, 2024, near his campus during the quota reform movement.

A video showing him being shot by police while standing with his arms outstretched in defiance went viral, turning him into an icon of resistance and a symbol for the movement. His killing is widely seen as a turning point that galvanised the mass uprising, which culminated in the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5, 2024.

This is the fourth judgment in cases filed on charges of crimes against humanity committed during the uprising, with two each delivered by ICT-1 and ICT-2.

Speaking at a press briefing at their Rangpur home following the verdict, Sayed's mother Monowara Begum said the family was not satisfied.

"My heart is not at peace, and my soul is not calm," she said, adding they would have been satisfied if more of the accused had received harsher punishment, particularly the death sentence.

His father Mokbul Hossain said, "We cry every day; every moment passes in pain. Today's [yesterday's] verdict has only intensified that pain."

Sayed's brother Abu Hossain and Romjan Ali, who were present in the courtroom, also expressed dissatisfaction as some high-ranking officials with command responsibility for the killing and the BRUR BCL president Pomel Barua were not given the death sentence.

Two were sentenced to the gallows for directly shooting Abu Sayed: former assistant sub-inspector of police Amir Hossain and constable Sujat Chandra Roy.

Those sentenced to life imprisonment are Md Arifuzzaman, former assistant commissioner (Kotwali zone) of Rangpur Metropolitan Police (RMP); Rabiul Islam, former officer-in-charge of Tajhat Police Station; and

sub-inspector Bibhuti Bhusan Roy, who was in charge of the university's police outpost. They were also given an additional 10 years' rigorous imprisonment on other counts.

Former BRUR vice-chancellor Md Hasibur Rashid and former RMP commissioner Md Moniruzzaman were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on charges of command responsibility.

The university's associate professors Mashiur Rahman and Asaduzzaman Mondol, and BCL leader Pomel Barua were also given 10 years' imprisonment after being found guilty under the International Crimes Tribunal Act, 1973.

Eight others who received five-year jail terms are BRUR proctor Shariful Islam; former assistant registrar Rafiul Hasan Russell; former RMP deputy commissioner Md Abu Maruf Hossain and additional DC Md Shah Nur Alam Patwari; Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad's local president Dr Sarwar Hossain Chandan; BRUR BCL's joint general secretaries Imran Chowdhury alias Akash and Masudul Hasan alias Masud; and former BRUR office assistant Mahabubar Rahman alias Babu.

Twelve were sentenced to three years in jail. They are Hafizur Rahman alias Tufan; former BRUR assistant registrar Moniruzzaman Palash; BRUR BCL's general secretary Mahafuzur Rahman Shamim; vice-presidents Fazle Rabbi and Akhtar Hossain; organising secretaries Sezan Ahmed and Dhananjay Kumar alias Tagor; office secretaries Babul Hossain and Sezan Ahmed; former BRUR MLSS (Member of Lower Subordinate Staff) Mohammad Nurunnabi Mondol and AKM Amir Hossain Amur; and security guard Nur Alam Mia.

Meanwhile, Anwar Parvez Apel, a contractual employee at the proctor's office, was sentenced to the period he had already been in custody. The tribunal ordered his immediate release if he is not arrested in any other case.

The tribunal found all accused guilty on different counts of crimes against humanity, including command responsibility, aiding, abetting, and facilitating.

Six of the 30 arrested accused were present in the dock during the judgment: former ASI Amir; former constable Sujat; former proctor Shariful; former assistant registrar Rafiul; contractual employee Anwar; and BCL leader Imran. The rest remain absconding.

Following the verdict, Sujat was seen weeping with his head bowed. A few of the convicts made aggressive gestures while being escorted out of the courtroom.

Amir shouted, "I do not accept this verdict. I've been framed. I'm a government job holder. I only followed the command."

Two others shouted the slogan "Joy Bangla".

The prosecution submitted the formal charges on June 30 last year, a week after the investigation agency filed its report. On August 5 of the same year, the tribunal framed charges against all 30 accused, detailing their alleged roles in the shooting of unarmed Abu Sayed.

The trial began on August 27 with Sayed's father's deposition. In total, 25 prosecution witnesses testified in the case.

At a media briefing following the verdict, Chief Prosecutor Aminul Islam said the punishments were not sufficient for some of the accused. "We had expected higher sentences for those responsible for command responsibilities."

He said after reviewing the full judgment, they will have the opportunity to appeal, especially against the lower sentences.

Azizur Rahman Dulu, the lawyer for the two convicts sentenced to death, said they will carefully review the full judgment once they receive a copy and, after a thorough analysis, they will file an appeal to the Appellate Division to secure acquittals for his clients.

Talks uncertain amid shaky truce

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Bagher Ghalibaf warned Tehran sees Lebanon as an "inseparable part of the ceasefire", and President Masoud Pezeshkian said Israel's strikes rendered "meaningless" talks with US envoys on Friday or Saturday.

And there was no sign Iran was lifting its near-total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which has caused the worst disruption to global energy supplies in history.

In a defiant statement, Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei yesterday said that Iran was not seeking war but would not forfeit its rights.

The statement attributed to Khamenei was read on state TV. He has not been seen in public since he took over from his father, who was killed on the first day of the war.

Khamenei said Iran will seek retribution for attacks against it and "will take management of the Straits of Hormuz into a new phase." He also vowed to avenge the deaths of his father Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Iran's "martyrs".

In the first 24 hours of the ceasefire, just a single oil products tanker and five dry bulk carriers sailed through a strait that typically accommodated 140 ships a day before the war, accounting for around a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flows.

Netanyahu, whose government rebuffed a historic offer for direct talks with Lebanon last month, said in a statement that he had given instructions to start peace talks as soon as possible, which would also include disarming Iran-aligned militant group Hezbollah.

However, only a couple of hours later, he released another message, saying "there is no ceasefire in Lebanon".

"We continue to strike Hezbollah with force, and we will not stop until we restore your security," in a message published by the prime minister's office.

Netanyahu reiterated Israel's objectives - to disarm Hezbollah and "to secure a historic and sustainable peace agreement between Israel and Lebanon".

This message comes after US President Donald Trump told US media

that Netanyahu had told him Israel would be "scaling back" attacks in Lebanon as peace talks play out.

Both Israel and the US insist that Lebanon is not covered by the ceasefire. Pakistan and Iran say Lebanon was included in it.

Amid fears that the fragile truce could break down in the Gulf, there were international calls for the ceasefire to encompass Lebanon.

"Israeli actions are putting the US-Iran ceasefire under severe strain. The Iran truce should extend to Lebanon," the European Union's top diplomat Kaja Kallas said.

France's foreign minister Jean-Noel Barrot condemned the strikes as "unacceptable", while his British counterpart Yvette Cooper called for the ceasefire to include Lebanon.

UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said Israel's attacks on Lebanon were "deeply damaging" and Britain wants to "see Lebanon included in the ceasefire".

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "contempt for life and international law is intolerable." He also called for Lebanon to be included in the ceasefire.

Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said he summoned the Israeli ambassador to protest the attacks, adding: "We want to avoid there being a second Gaza."

UN Secretary General António Guterres also "unequivocally" condemned the strikes.

The Lebanese prime minister's office yesterday said it would be "a national day of mourning for the martyrs and wounded of the Israeli attacks that targeted hundreds of innocent, defenceless civilians".

UN rights chief Volker Turk called the scale of killing in Lebanon "horrific", after strikes across the capital Beirut that came without warning triggered horror and panic.

US Vice President JD Vance backed Israel in saying Lebanon was excluded from the truce. He was due to lead talks with Tehran in Pakistan.

"If Iran wants to let this negotiation fall apart... over Lebanon, which has

nothing to do with them, and which the United States never once said was part of the ceasefire, that's ultimately their choice," he said.

Separately, the head of Iran's nuclear energy agency, Mohammad Eslami, dismissed Washington's suggestions that the truce deal would halt Tehran's nuclear programme.

"The claims and demands of our enemies to restrict Iran's enrichment programme are merely wishes that will be buried," he said.

The bellicose rhetoric came ahead of high-stakes talks in Pakistan expected on Friday or Saturday.

Iran yesterday announced alternative routes for ships travelling through the strait, citing the risk of sea mines.

The EU yesterday said that freedom of navigation in the strait must be ensured with "no payment or toll whatsoever", after Iran suggested it could charge for letting ships through.

The war has also strained US ties with Nato, with Trump threatening to quit the alliance if it doesn't join its effort to open Hormuz.

Three European diplomats yesterday told Reuters that Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte has briefed some capitals that Trump wants concrete commitments within the next few days for help securing the strait.

Rutte met with Trump in Washington on Wednesday, amid tensions within the alliance over the Iran war.

Meanwhile, an Israeli court yesterday said corruption trial against Netanyahu's will resume on Sunday, hours after Israel lifted a state of emergency imposed over its war with Iran.

Netanyahu, the first sitting Israeli prime minister to be charged with a crime, denies charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust brought in 2019 after years of investigations. His trial, which began in 2020 and could lead to jail terms, has been repeatedly delayed due to his official commitments, with no end date in sight.

Israel is due to hold elections in October, and Netanyahu's coalition, the most right-wing in Israel's history, is likely to lose.

Next year's budget may cross Tk 9,00,000cr

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It also expects both public and private investment to gradually recover under an elected government.

Meanwhile, the government has begun piloting the several electoral commitments, with full scale implementation planned next fiscal year. The flagship Family Card programme alone is expected to cost Tk 13,000 crore in its first year, targeting 40 lakh families.

The other promised initiatives will also require large sums, though the finance ministry plans to manage rising demands by consolidating existing social safety net schemes.

The Ninth Pay Commission estimated that an additional Tk 106,000 crore would be required annually to fully implement the new pay structure.

The government is now planning a phased rollout of the Pay Commission's recommendations, officials said. However, a phased implementation would still demand a substantial outlay. A committee led by the cabinet secretary will draw up proposals on implementation.

Judiciary, NHRC reforms rolled back

FROM PAGE 1

the National Human Rights Commission (Repeal and Reinstatement) Bill on April 6 and yesterday sought the House's consideration.

Although the constitution requires a law for appointing judges, no such law existed before the 2025 ordinance; the executive previously selected candidates, with the president giving final approval.

The 2025 ordinance had established a Supreme Judicial Appointment Council, led by the chief justice, to recommend candidates for the Appellate and High Court divisions.

Another ordinance provided for an independent Supreme Court Secretariat with budgetary discretion and authority over the transfer, promotion, and discipline of lower court judges.

Similarly, the 2025 NHRC Ordinance had overhauled the top human rights custodian, unshackling it from a 15-year bar on probing members of the security forces, and granting it autonomy over budgets and appointments.

The repeals followed recommendations from a 13-member parliamentary committee, chaired by BNP MP Zainul Abedin, which reviewed 133 ordinances issued by the interim government.

A report analysing the ordinances, which was given to the lawmakers for perusal, recommended repealing the 2025 ordinance to dissolve the current NHRC.

It also recommended attaching the NHRC to the Legislative and Parliamentary Affairs Division and increasing government representatives in the selection committee tasked with appointing commissioners.

The report noted that the cabinet secretary is the sole bureaucrat in the committee and suggested adding two more bureaucrats instead of civil society representatives.

It also proposed making government permission mandatory for investigating or arresting members of disciplined forces or government officials.

The committee further argued that the 2025 Supreme Court ordinances gave the chief justice excessive powers that could "hinder coordination with the government's operations".

It said that appointments and transfers are recommended by the government and accepted by the Supreme Court, to maintain "checks and balances" and ensure that nobody falls victim to a senior judge's "unfair decision".

Regarding the Supreme Court Judges Appointment Ordinance, 2025, the report said that judicial appointments will be made as per the "subjective satisfaction of the Chief Justice" and concluded that the ordinance "conflicts with the constitution and so there is no chance of passing this in parliament."

DEBATE AT JS
Before walking out, opposition MPs sparred with law minister Asaduzzaman, noting that he was the interim government's attorney general when the ordinances were passed.

NCP MP Akhtar Hossen objected to repealing the judges' appointment ordinance, alleging that "partisan" appointments in the past led to the

2025 CRACKDOWN

Freed Nepal ex-PM Oli issues defiant message

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's ex-prime minister KP Sharma Oli offered a defiant message yesterday after he was released from custody following questioning over his alleged role in a deadly 2025 crackdown on protesters.



Oli and former interior minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested on March 28, a day after Prime Minister Balendra Shah took office following the first elections since the September uprising brought down Oli's government.

Lekhak was also released from custody yesterday, police said. Neither man has been formally charged, and both deny responsibility for the violence.

"Although the government filed a criminal case with prejudice and vindictiveness and illegally detained me... I have finally been released after not having enough grounds and evidence to prosecute," 74-year-old Oli said in a statement posted on social media.

The arrests came after an inquiry commission recommended prosecuting Oli - a four-time prime minister - and other officials for failing to stop security forces from opening fire on demonstrators.

A senior finance ministry official, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star that the revised salary structure will not take effect this fiscal year.

For subsidies, the revised budget earmarked Tk 88,000 crore, but concerned ministries are now seeking additional allocations following the US-Israel war on Iran. As a result, subsidy spending could surpass Tk 100,000 crore.

The government has formed a committee to review the current Annual Development Programme.

Many projects launched by the previous governments will be scrapped, while new ones aligned with the ruling party's election manifesto will be added.

The ADP size is expected to be set at around Tk 300,000 crore, according to finance ministry officials.

The government will need to allocate additional funds due to its electoral commitments and rising fuel prices, leaving very little room to cut revenue expenditure, said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

"In this circumstance, major

initiatives must be taken to boost revenue."

He stressed the urgency for reforms, particularly modernising the tax system, expanding digitalisation, curbing tax evasion and widening the scope of direct taxes without overburdening ordinary citizens.

On the development side, he urged reprioritisation of spending, including scrapping long-stalled "zombie projects" and exercising caution in approving new ones.

Mustafizur also warned that the budget deficit must be kept within 4 to 5 percent to avoid unsustainable debt pressure, noting that interest payments on domestic and foreign loans have already surpassed education as the largest item in the revenue budget.

Reducing reliance on borrowing, using foreign aid more efficiently, and making the ADP realistic are now critical, he said.

"While cutting expenditure will be difficult, failure to increase revenue flows risks pushing the budget deficit beyond control, and that is the government's biggest challenge."

without accountability, and invited the opposition to join a special committee for constitutional amendments to define criteria for judicial appointments.

He explained that he had defended the ordinance as attorney general because "the state's lawyer follows government instructions".

Responding to Hasnat's objection, he retorted, "These speeches are much more 'juicy' and relevant for street rallies like Paltan Maidan, the Press Club, or Muktagong. I think he [Hasnat] has read everything except the bill itself."

"If any law is made with such a malafide intent that it will prevent the BNP from functioning upon coming to power, such a biased law will be ineffective from the start," he said.

He maintained that the government was not scrapping the 2025 provisions but seeking time for broader consultations, alleging that the ordinance had been enacted without adequate stakeholder input.

He claimed that the commission will not be accountable to the government or anyone, because the 2009 law too gives it supremacy.

31 BILLS PASSED

In total, the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday passed 31 bills to ratify or repeal ordinances issued by the interim government, including the Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Bill, which expands the coverage of the Labour Act, particularly by extending freedom of association and collective bargaining rights to include workers who were previously excluded from these rights.

The bills also included National Sports Council (Amendment) Bill; Bangabandhu Sports Welfare Foundation (Amendment) Bill; Sheikh Hasina National Youth Development Institute (Amendment) Bill; Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (Amendment) Bill; Public Procurement (Amendment) Bill; Overseas Employment and Migration (Amendment) Bill; Local Government (Union Parishad) (Amendment) Bill; and Legal Aid Services (Amendment) Bill.

Among the others are Jatiya Muktijhodha Council (Amendment) Bill; Land Use Control and Agricultural Land Protection Bill; Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Bill; Bangladesh Gas (Amendment) Bill; Human Organ Transplantation Bill; Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation (Amendment) Bill; Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Bill; Forest and Tree Conservation (Amendment) Bill; Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre (Amendment) Bill; Bangabandhu Science and Technology Fellowship Trust (Amendment) Bill; Zila Parishad (Amendment) Bill; Local Government (Municipalities) (Amendment) Bill; Local Government (City Corporation) (Amendment) Bill; Upazila Parishad (Amendment) Bill; Rajdhani Unnayan Karatapakha Bill; Personal Data Protection Bill; Bangladesh House Building Finance Corporation (Amendment) Bill; Negotiable Instruments (Amendment) Bill; and Bangladesh Building Regulatory Authority Bill.

The 2009 law effectively turned the commission into a government-controlled body through a selection committee dominated by ruling party figures, he said. Even BNP leader and IGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir had once described the NHRC as a "Commission to Suppress the Opposition", he added.

"Under the 2009 act, prior government permission is required to conduct investigations against these forces. Every member of this parliament knows how transparent an investigation into human rights violations will be if government permission is required to investigate the government itself," the NCP MP said.

The law is also related to the Enforced Disappearance Ordinance and the July Mass Uprising Indemnity Ordinance, he said, adding that by letting the Human Rights Commission ordinance lapse, the other two ordinances will "effectively be made ornamental".

The law minister acknowledged the opposition's concerns about judicial independence but defended the move.