North Korea fires short-range ballistic missile

Says South Korea military

REUTERS, *Seoul*

North Korea yesterday fired a short-range ballistic missile toward the sea east of the Korean Peninsula, South Korea's military said, marking the latest in a series of weapons tests this year.

Japan's government said Pyongyang launched what could be a ballistic missile.

The launch followed a series of tests this year, including short-range ballistic missiles, artillery rockets and other tactical weapons designed to bolster the isolated state's military capabilities.

The most recent confirmed weapons test, in late June, involved an upgraded 240-mm multiple-launch rocket system, tactical ballistic missiles and a 155-mm self-propelled howitzer, North Korean state media KCNA said.

The South Korean military said in a statement that it had heightened its alert for further firings, closely sharing information with the United States and Japan.



Opposition leader and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman and NCP Convener Nahid Islam, along with leaders and activists of the 11-party alliance, march back after holding a sit-in in front of the Secretariat in the capital yesterday. The alliance staged the protest demanding cuts in fuel, gas and electricity prices. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Saifuzzaman Chy owns 33 properties worth Tk 167cr in Vietnam

ACC probe finds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed and people and entities linked to him acquired at least 33 properties in Vietnam worth $13.5 million (Tk 164 crore), according to a public circular by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

According to the August 3 circular published in a national daily, a Dhaka court ordered the authorities to seize the properties located in Ho Chi Minh City. The bulk of the properties consists of 30 apartments in the Glory Heights tower at the Vinhomes Grand Park complex. Three additional one- and two-bedroom units in the Vista Verde project on Lotus Tower were bought between November and December 2015.

The circular identifies the holdings as part of a broader list of properties "acquired by Saifuzzaman and his related persons and entities" in countries under review in the ACC probe.

The findings are part of a wider investigation by the ACC, which has spent more than a year tracing the former land minister's assets across multiple continents.

On January 13 this year, a Dhaka court ordered the seizure of 330 houses, flats and apartments owned by Javed in eight countries over allegations that he acquired the assets through bribery and corruption. The seized assets were estimated at Tk 2,320.92 crore. The countries are the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the Philippines,

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Quader told BCL to beat students

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Saddam Hussain: "Why aren't you beating them? Why aren't you hitting them? Why are you letting them grow?"

According to the prosecution, the conversation took place after Saddam informed Quader that protesters were set to announce their next programme on the night of July 11, 2024, following the successful completion of that day's demonstrations.

Tamim told the tribunal that the audio had been forensically verified and that Quader's directive was followed by attacks carried out by armed Chhatra League activists on Dhaka University campus on July 15.

More than 300 unarmed protesters were injured after being beaten, hacked and shot, he said.

"When the injured students went to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment, they were attacked again inside the hospital," Tamim told the tribunal.

He argued that Quader's instruction constituted criminal incitement under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973.

The prosecution further submitted that then prime minister Sheikh Hasina had, on July 14, referred to the protesters as the "grandchildren of Razakars".

Quader, then road transport and bridges minister, later publicly declared that the Chhatra League alone was "enough" to suppress the movement and that the student wing would respond to those chanting the "Razakar" slogan.

Besides Quader, the other accused are Awami League Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim; former state minister for information and broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat; Jubo League Chairman Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash and its General Secretary Mainul Hossain Khan Nikhil; and BCL President Saddam Hussain and General Secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Enan.

During the hearing, Tamim also told the tribunal that the UN had declined to disclose the identities of eyewitnesses cited in its fact-finding report on the July 2024 uprising because Bangladesh's International Crimes (Tribunals) Act still allows the death penalty.

So the prosecution produced its own eyewitnesses.

According to Tamim, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights indicated that it would share the information only if the death penalty provision was removed from the ICT law.

Speaking to The Daily Star after the proceedings, Tamim said the UN generally does not disclose witnesses' identities for security reasons, but that the prosecution assumed the death penalty provision was the reason in this case.

At one stage of the hearing, the tribunal asked why former Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor ASM Maksud Kamal, who had spoken with then prime minister Sheikh Hasina during the uprising, had not been made an accused in the case.

In response, Tamim said formal charges were being prepared against Kamal, eminent educationist Muhammad Zafar Iqbal and several other teachers in a separate case for crimes against humanity.

After the hearing, he told journalists that the investigation against the teachers was in its final stage.

Dhaka awaits Delhi's response to talks proposal

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declined to comment when approached.

Bangladesh and India share 54 transboundary rivers but have signed only one water-sharing treaty -- the Ganges Water Treaty, which expires on December 11, 30 years after it was signed.

As the treaty contains no automatic renewal clause, the upcoming negotiations carry added significance, especially given that relations between the two countries have become more strained since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in August 2024.

Even so, the JRC's regular protocol meetings have continued as scheduled in 2025 and 2026.

At a JRC meeting in New Delhi in September 2025, Bangladesh expressed its preference for a longer-term treaty to ensure a more predictable flow of water after the current agreement expires, according to a previous The Daily Star report.

After the current government took office in February, a joint JRC technical team held meetings and inspected the Hardinge Bridge point in Bangladesh and the Farakka point in India, with the process continuing through May.

With upstream flow in the Ganges declining over the years, Bangladesh has been considering a barrage to store monsoon water and release it into tributaries during the dry season. The government has since taken up the Tk 34,497 crore Padma Barrage (1st Phase) project to restore major river systems.

Experts say the barrage would help curb salinity intrusion and strengthen irrigation and ecological sustainability across large parts of the country.

Sharif Jamil, coordinator of Waterkeepers Bangladesh, a nongovernmental organisation working to safeguard water bodies, said the government should make serious, coordinated efforts to renew the Ganges Treaty -- not only by focusing on the volume of water at Farakka but also by pushing for equitable sharing across the shared river system.

"I don't see any sign of in-depth analysis or coordinated government efforts to ensure the necessary flow of fresh water to the Ganges downstream," he added.

The Ganges is critical to Bangladesh. About 37 percent of the country's land area -- spanning 26 districts and 163 upazilas across four divisions -- depends on the river, known in Bangladesh as the Padma.

Dhaka and New Delhi will now need to hold fresh talks to shape a new arrangement for the decades ahead.

The Daily Star failed to get comments from Water Resources Minister Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee yesterday despite repeated attempts.

> **"Failure to reach a new arrangement before the [Ganges] treaty expires could erode mutual confidence and further complicate bilateral ties."**
>
> India's Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, 15th Action Taken Report

However, speaking to the newspaper in June, he said technical teams from both countries were working to renew the treaty and remained in constant communication, while expert teams were incorporating new conditions, including additional guarantee clauses.

A separate water-sharing arrangement for the Teesta River was finalised by Bangladesh and India in 2011 but was never signed after then West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee opposed it.

India's Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs has also flagged concerns over the absence of formal negotiations with Bangladesh, warning that further delay could strain bilateral ties.

The parliamentary committee, chaired by senior Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, said in its 15th Action Taken Report, tabled in parliament on July 30, that time is running out to renew or renegotiate one of the most consequential agreements governing transboundary river management between the two countries, according to several Indian media reports.

The panel noted that the Ganges treaty is more than a technical water-sharing arrangement: it affects the livelihoods, irrigation, agriculture and drinking water needs of millions on both sides of the border, while also carrying significant political sensitivity in Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal and Bihar.

The committee cautioned that failing to reach a new arrangement before the treaty expires could erode mutual confidence as both countries seek to reinvigorate their strategic partnership under Bangladesh's new government and further complicate broader diplomatic ties if the uncertainty persists.

The 30-year treaty, signed by then prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart, HD Deve Gowda, on December 12, 1996, established a framework for sharing Ganges water during the January-May dry season, when river flow drops sharply.

Under its terms, Bangladesh receives a share of the water during the dry season each year, based on a formula linked to available flow and an average distribution plan calculated over 10-day periods.

If the flow is 70,000 cusecs or less, the treaty divides it equally between the two countries. Between 70,000 and 75,000, Bangladesh receives 35,000, with the remainder going to India. At 75,000 cusecs or above, India receives 40,000, and any surplus goes to Bangladesh.

The treaty contains no minimum guarantee clause. Instead, it relies on diplomatic negotiations to address any shortfall.

Exports to Russia more than halve in 4 years

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international trade nowadays as multilateral organisations and rules have become largely ineffective.

"It is mostly developing countries that are bearing the consequences through higher fuel prices, disruptions in commodity imports and financial restrictions."

EXPORTS TAKE A HIT

Bangladesh's exports to Russia have plunged from $638 million in 2021-22 fiscal year to $257 million in 2025-26, while imports have risen from $474 million to $1.59 billion over the same period, according to Export Promotion Bureau data.

"Bangladesh imports mostly wheat and fertiliser from Russia. Even there we face payment problems. We also cannot import military equipment, while our garment exporters are struggling to receive payments," a foreign ministry official said.

Businesses say the biggest obstacle is no longer demand for Bangladeshi products but the inability to receive export proceeds.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said at least eight garment exporters have been unable to recover payments for shipments made since early 2024.

"More than $4.6 million remains unpaid," he told The Daily Star, adding that garment exports to Russia have virtually come to a standstill.

After sanctions were imposed in 2022, Russian buyers initially paid exporters in Chinese yuan through Chinese banks. About two years ago, however, those banks stopped processing the transactions following US warnings and returned the funds to Russia.

Exporters later used a Thai bank to settle some payments in US dollars, but more than $4 million still remains outstanding, Hatem said.

The industry also lost a $10 million export order after a Polish retailer cancelled a plan under which Bangladeshi garments would be shipped to Poland before being transported overland to Russia.

A commerce ministry official said Bangladesh is trying to boost exports and create jobs at a time when the economy has already been strained by global conflicts, higher energy prices and recent political changes.

"Russia remains a market with huge potential, but payment settlement has become the biggest obstacle," he said.

REMITTANCES BLOCKED

Officials estimate that around 10,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers in Russia are unable to send their earnings home through formal banking channels because of the sanctions.

During Khalilur's Moscow visit, the two countries also discussed a proposal to recruit up to 1 lakh Bangladeshi workers over the next year. Officials said such an initiative would require a bilateral agreement, but the payment issue must be settled first.

"Unless migrant workers can send remittances through official channels, the foreign currency does not enter Bangladesh Bank's reserves," said a Bangladeshi diplomat in Moscow.

ROOPPUR REPAYMENTS STALLED

The sanctions have also complicated Bangladesh's repayment of the Russian loan for the $12.65 billion Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, of which Russia financed $11.38 billion.

> **"Bangladesh is having to pay the price of a Western sanctions regime that doesn't take the economic needs of the developing world into consideration,"**
>
> **MICHAEL KUGELMAN,** resident senior fellow for South Asia at the Atlantic Council

The original agreement required repayments in US dollars, but that became impossible after major Russian banks were removed from the SWIFT international payment system following the Ukraine war.

Diplomatic sources said Russia has repeatedly sought repayments, including proposals to accept rouble-denominated payments. Bangladesh also explored routing payments through Chinese banks, but those efforts were unsuccessful.

Before 2022, Bangladesh had paid about $1 billion in interest and advance repayments. Since then, nearly another $1 billion has accumulated in an escrow account at Bangladesh Bank because it cannot legally be transferred to Russia.

Russia has also proposed settling the loan in Indian rupees, but the proposal remains at a preliminary stage, Bangladesh Bank spokesperson Arief Hossain Khan said.

"This is primarily a diplomatic issue, not a financial one. Bangladesh is regularly depositing the due repayments into the escrow account."

Payments to Russian personnel working on the Rooppur project have not been affected since their salaries and allowances are paid through a local bank account, he said.

SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES

Since 2022, the two countries have explored several payment mechanisms, but none has proved fully effective. Officials now see the proposed opening of a Sber Bank branch in Bangladesh as a possible long-term solution.

During his Moscow visit, Khalilur met Sber Bank First Deputy Chairman Alexander Vedyakhin to discuss mechanisms for facilitating trade, investment and financial settlements.

Sber Bank already operates in India. According to Russia's TASS news agency, its Indian branch now handles most India-Russia transactions in national currencies, has expanded rupee lending to Russian exporters and significantly reduced payment processing times.

Bangladeshi officials believe a similar arrangement could help restore bilateral trade and financial transactions.

Asked how vulnerable Bangladesh is to the current geopolitical uncertainties, Michael Kugelman, resident senior fellow for South Asia at the Atlantic Council, said Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable because Russia remains an important partner in the energy sector at a time when global market shocks have heightened the country's energy security concerns.

"This makes Dhaka's commercial ties with Moscow all the more high-stakes."

He also said Bangladesh faces the same dilemma as many Global South countries that have maintained neutrality over the Ukraine war.

"They are having to pay the price of a Western sanctions regime that doesn't take the economic needs of the developing world into consideration," he told The Daily Star from Washington.

Kugelman suggested Bangladesh could use its currently stable relationship with Washington to seek either a sanctions waiver or greater flexibility so that legitimate commercial transactions with Russia do not trigger punitive measures.

An affront to July martyrs, sovereignty

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Hasina to speak on the anniversary of the uprising was a "calculated move orchestrated by Indian policymakers".

"Sheikh Hasina was given the chance to speak in a highly planned and deliberate way. This was completely planned by Indian policymakers," he said.

Speaking after paying tribute at the graves of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, Rizvi alleged that the event was intended to insult those killed during the uprising and reflected India's disregard for Bangladesh.

He also questioned why India had not responded to Bangladesh's request to extradite Hasina under the 2013 extradition treaty.

Allowing her to continue political activities instead of returning her amounted to an affront to Bangladesh's sovereignty, he said.

Speaking at another programme later in the day, Rizvi again accused India of using Hasina as a "tool" to influence Bangladesh, saying the country that claims to be the world's largest democracy had patronised the move.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed also questioned India's decision to allow Hasina to address the media from its territory.

In an interview with BBC Bangla, he said Bangladesh wanted to know why India was permitting Hasina -- who has been sentenced to death in Bangladesh in a crimes against humanity case -- to continue political activities.

Hasina has remained in India since being ousted on August 5, 2024.

Salahuddin said proceedings over alleged crimes against humanity involving the Awami League were continuing before the International Crimes Tribunal.

"BNP does not want to ban any political party through executive order. But the matter concerning Awami League's activities is for the court to decide," he said.

He added that the public would also judge the party over allegations of repression, enforced disappearances and killings during its years in power.

State Minister for LGRD Mir Shahe Alam, during an inspection of a secondary waste transfer station in Sylhet, said Hasina had no realistic prospect of returning to Bangladesh and would be arrested immediately if she did.

Prime Minister's Adviser Mahdi Amin, in a Facebook post, said one of the aspirations of the July mass uprising was to establish an independent and sovereign Bangladesh free from a submissive foreign policy. He said the foreign ministry's strong protest over Hasina's appearance in New Delhi reflected that aspiration.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam urged India to clarify whether it would continue allowing Hasina and other Awami League leaders to carry out what she described as conspiratorial political activities from Indian soil.

Speaking at the foreign ministry, she warned that such activities could deepen public concern in Bangladesh and affect bilateral relations.

Shama said Bangladesh wanted relations with India based on equality, mutual respect and dignity. She also rejected allegations linking Bangladesh to militancy, accusing the Awami League of reviving an old political narrative to attract international attention.

Despite the dispute, she said Dhaka remained committed to dialogue with New Delhi on key bilateral issues, including water sharing, energy cooperation and border management.

Meanwhile, the National Citizen Party (NCP) accused India of using Hasina as a "pawn" to undermine Bangladesh's democratic environment.

At an emergency press conference, Joint Member Secretary Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain said the party viewed Hasina's media appearance not merely as an Awami League event but as a threat to Bangladesh's sovereignty.

"We see that the Indian government is using Sheikh Hasina as a pawn and a tool to destroy the existing order and democratic environment in Bangladesh."

He alleged that despite diplomatic efforts before the event, the government had failed to stop Hasina from making political remarks from Indian soil.

Calling it a diplomatic failure, Asif urged the government to intensify efforts to stop Hasina's political activities from India, secure her extradition under the bilateral treaty, summon the Indian high commissioner in Dhaka and lodge a formal protest.

He warned that continued political activities by Hasina could harden the NCP's position against any future reconciliation with the Awami League.

Asif also criticised former Bangladesh cricket captain and Awami League MP Shakib Al Hasan for attending the event, saying it clarified his political position.

The NCP further accused some Bangladeshi media outlets of broadcasting Hasina's remarks despite restrictions on promoting the activities of the banned Awami League, and criticised the information ministry for failing to enforce those restrictions.

In a written statement, the party again urged India to return Hasina under the extradition treaty and criticised the Bangladesh government for what it described as inadequate efforts to enforce court decisions against the former prime minister.