

## US wants violence-free polls in Bangladesh

Says state dept  
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US wants an election in Bangladesh that will be violence-free, said US State Department Spokesman Matthew Miller on Tuesday.

During a regular press briefing, he also declined to comment on whether India and the US have different stances on Bangladesh's election.

"I just don't have any comment on that," Miller said.

After the 2+2 ministerial dialogue in India on November 10, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra restated that a stable Bangladesh is a prerequisite for the stability of the Indian subcontinent.

He also raised concerns over third-country intervention in a country's internal affairs, saying it has historically promoted extremism.

Miller said they have consistently said that they believe elections in Bangladesh should be free, fair, and open and should take place in a violence-free atmosphere.

## Bishwa Ijtema to begin on Feb 2

BSS, Dhaka

The first phase of Bishwa Ijtema, a large congregation of Muslims, will begin on the bank of the Turag River at Tongi, on the outskirts of the capital, on February 2 next year.

The decision was taken at a meeting on the law and order situation at the home ministry yesterday with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan in the chair. Senior Public Relations Officer of the ministry Sharif Mahmumud Apu told BSS.

The followers of Maulana Jubayer will join the first phase of Bishwa Ijtema to be held from February 2 to 4.

The second phase of the Ijtema will be held from February 9 to 11, and the supporters of Indian preacher Maulana Saad Kandhalvi will take part in it.

Representatives of law enforcement agencies and different departments were present at the meeting.



Trading Corporation of Bangladesh has started selling potatoes and onions at subsidised prices in different areas to help the poor and low-income people make ends meet amid the elevated inflation. The photo was taken on Saat Masjid Road in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Biden, Xi pledge to reduce tensions at summit

AFP, Woodside

US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping shook hands early today and pledged to reduce tensions as they met for the first time in a year at a high-stakes summit in California.

A smiling Biden greeted Xi after the Chinese leader stepped out of a black limousine at the scenic Filoli country estate in the California foothills near San Francisco, before the two leaders shook hands on the front steps.

The two leaders then headed inside for painstakingly choreographed, closed-door talks on issues including Taiwan, sanctions and trade that have roiled relations between the world's largest economies.

Biden opened his remarks by saying that tensions should "not veer into conflict."

Xi responded by saying that "turning



their back on each other is not an option" for the superpowers.

Biden was to give a solo press conference at 4:15pm (00:15 GMT Thursday) to discuss the summit, which was being held on the sidelines of the APEC summit in San Francisco, the White House said.

Protesters lined part of the route of Biden's motorcade from San Francisco, many with pro-Xi signs and red and yellow

Chinese flags hung up on security fences.

US officials have played down the chance of major breakthroughs although an agreement on restoring a hotline between the Chinese and US militaries on the cards, along with cooperation on stopping supplies of the drug fentanyl.

The last time Biden and Xi met in person was in Bali in November 2022, and relations nosedived after the United States shot down an alleged Chinese spy balloon in February this year.

"Tensions"

The talks, which come after months of delicate diplomatic negotiations, come against the backdrop of a long struggle for global primacy between the United States and an increasingly assertive China.

One of the most sensitive issues is Taiwan, the self-ruling democracy over which Beijing claims sovereignty and which it has not ruled out seizing by force.

## Will this help EC hold fair polls?

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"The EC has a mandate to hold free and fair elections... Will this announcement help it achieve its goal?" said Majumdar. The election commissioners are appointed to make sure the right environment prevails and, as it currently stands, the EC will not be fulfilling its constitutional obligation, he said.

The EC could have said that under the circumstances it cannot ensure free and fair elections, he said. "They could have gone to the court and sought direction."

Majumdar said, "Will holding this election help the government get out of the legitimacy crisis it is in? Will it strengthen our democratic processes or serve the interests of the ruling party?"

## EC has to answer

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among the masses," she said.

"I have never seen such an intolerable and violent atmosphere. Will the Election Commission be able to handle such a situation? Do they have the ability?"

She went on to ask a series of questions. "Will the Election Commission be able to earn the trust of the people? Will it be able to reshuffle the administration that was politicised by the ruling Awami League government? Will it be able to release the opposition leaders who are in jail without charges? Will the other political parties be able to conduct their campaigns? Will it be able to arrange a free and fair election by making a level playing field?"

These are the questions in people's mind, she said, adding that the EC needs to answer all these and end the political impasse by taking effective steps.

## Politics is back

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"It seems politics is back to square one. Both the ruling party and the opposition party have taken a hardline," said Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, former professor of government and politics department at Jahangirnagar University.

"But people wanted talks between the two parties 10 years ago, and they want the talks now," he added.

Shantanu Majumder, a political science professor at Dhaka University, said no one wants conflicts centring elections.

"Although the Election Commission has announced the polls schedule, there are still scopes for making the election more inclusive... We should all make an endeavour so that this election too does not slip through our fingers," he said.

## Polls on Jan 7

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with all stakeholders behaving responsibly. The election will be credible and praised at home and abroad," he said in a televised address to the nation in the evening.

Prior to his speech, the EC finalised the schedule at a meeting.

The announcement of the schedule comes at a time when the BNP and Jamaat are enforcing blockades demanding the AL government's resignation, reconstitution of the EC, and polls under a caretaker government.

Political unrest is harming people's livelihoods and businesses, according to reports.

The police have ordered all its units to be on high alert to prevent any untoward incident while teams of border guards and Rab were deployed across the country yesterday.

The schedule was announced two weeks after the 90-day countdown for the end to the current parliament's tenure began on November 1. According to the constitution, the polls must be held within the final 90 days of a parliament's tenure, which in this case ends on January 29.

In his speech yesterday, Awal said holding an election is a massive, difficult, and complex job. With assistance from the government, the EC will work honestly and sincerely to make it free, fair, and peaceful.

He urged all political parties and candidates to abide by the electoral

	Total voters: 11.97cr
	Polling centres: 42,000
	Polling booths: 2,62,000
	Returning Officers: 66
	Assistant Returning Officers: 592

said, adding, "Therefore, we sincerely request the cooperation of local and foreign media and observers."

The CEC also called upon voters to go to the polling stations with enthusiasm, courage, and confidence. He also urged them to exercise their voting rights freely to elect their preferred candidates and fulfil their civic duty of forming the parliament and the government.

"Don't be influenced by anyone," he said, adding "If you face any kind

## AL welcomes schedule; BNP, allies reject

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appeals. We strongly condemn and reject this," said the party's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

"This schedule has created a terrifying atmosphere in the country. People will not accept this," he added.

The CEC and the government must bear the responsibility for the political instability and violence that will follow, he added.

The Election Commission has taken a risky step by following Sheikh Hasina's orders, he said.

**AL ALLIES**

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu hailed the polls schedule as a bold step while Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon hoped that EC would take measures to hold a free and fair election.

Tarikat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary said the room for dialogues is still there.

"We still believe that there is no

alternative to dialogues," he said, adding that parties must not attach conditions for talks.

**JAIYA PARTY**

JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnun said it was EC's duty to announce the schedule. However, the schedule can be changed to create a congenial atmosphere.

The party's Chief Patron and Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad welcomed the schedule, saying, "It is the duty of the Election Commission to hold elections in a free, fair and impartial manner."

**GONO FORUM**

The party's General Secretary Mizanur Rahman said the EC had fulfilled the government's wish.

"The opposition parties wanted a peaceful environment for holding a free and fair election. The Election Commission cannot avoid its responsibility for not creating the environment," he said.

**CPB**

## Kohli, Shami guide India

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The target ultimately proved too steep, however, as the Indian juggernaut rolled on for their 10th win in as many matches in the 50-over showdown.

Shami finished with figures of seven for 57, his third five-wicket haul in the tournament.

Kohli's knock, which came off 113 balls, gave him the record for the highest number of centuries in the 50 overs format of the game, taking him past Sachin Tendulkar, the Indian batting great who was in the stands to applaud the feat.

After scampering two runs off fast bowler Lockie Ferguson to get to his mark, Kohli took off his helmet and bowed to the stands where television cameras showed Tendulkar and former England soccer captain David Beckham standing and clapping in appreciation.

The 35-year-old hit nine fours and

two sixes before holing out in the deep off fast bowler Tim Southee, who took three wickets for 100.

"This all feels like a dream, honestly. It's too good to be true. It feels surreal. I never thought I'd be here ever in my career," Kohli said during the mid-innings break.

"Just to help the team so many times. Again a big game today and I played the role I have throughout the tournament so that the guys around me could express themselves."

Iyer's blistering 105, which came off 70 balls and was studded with four fours and eight sixes, provided the late fireworks for India.

India captain Rohit Sharma, who made 47, gave the hosts a rollicking start in a 71-run opening stand with Shubman Gill.

Gill retired hurt due to leg cramps but returned to resume his innings and finished unbeaten on 80.

## 'Pitch switch' controversy at Wankhede

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Wankhede Stadium, a surface unused in the group stages.

However, the game was switched to pitch six, the surface used for South Africa's 229-run win over England on October 21, and India's 302-run victory over Sri Lanka on November 2.

According to the International Cricket Council's tournament playing conditions, the relevant ground authority -- in this case the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) -- "is responsible for the selection and preparation of the pitch" before any given match".

The Mail claimed the ICC's independent pitch consultant Andy Atkinson was frustrated by changes to pre-tournament plans.

They quoted a leaked email in which he speculated whether the pitch for Sunday's final in Ahmedabad "will be the first ever ICC CWC final to have a pitch which has been specifically chosen and prepared to their stipulation at the request of the team management and/or the hierarchy of the home nation board".

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, speaking after India skipper Rohit Sharma won the toss and elected to bat on Wednesday, said: "It's obviously a used surface but we'll try to make use of it with the ball first up and hopefully there's some dew later."

Used pitches generally aid spinners.

The semifinals of the 2019 World Cup in England were played on fresh pitches, but used strips were provided for the semifinals of last year's T20 World Cup in Australia.

On Wednesday, the ICC insisted there was nothing untoward with the change in pitch at the Wankhede.

"Changes to planned pitch rotations are common towards the end of an event of this length, and has already happened a couple of times," said a spokesperson.

"This change was made on the recommendation of the venue curator in conjunction with our host.

"The ICC independent pitch consultant was appraised of the change and has no reason to believe the pitch won't play well."

The winners of Wednesday's match will face either Australia or South Africa, who play in Kolkata on Thursday, in the final.

Australia captain Pat Cummins said Wednesday he had confidence in the integrity of the ICC's pitch process.

"Yeah, I saw that (the report)... obviously ICC have an independent pitch curator who manages that so I'm sure they are all over making sure it's fair for both teams," Cummins said.

"So far this tournament (on pitches) that we've played on I've not seen any issue."