

Pakistan HC restores 'bat' as PTI party symbol

DAWN ONLINE

In a major relief ahead of the February 8 general elections in Pakistan, the Peshawar High Court (PHC) yesterday declared "illegal" the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision to revoke the PTI's 'bat' electoral symbol and reject its intra-party polls.

In the short order, a copy of which is available with Dawn.com, the PHC said that the ECP order was "illegal, without any lawful authority and of no legal effect".

The court directed the PTI to publish the certificate filed by the PTI following internal polls on its website. "It is further held and declared that the PTI is entitled to the election symbol strictly in terms of Sections 215 and 217 read with any other enabling provision of the Election Act, 2017 and Election Rules, 2017," it said.



People check damages to the house of Palestinian Nofal family members, who were killed during Israeli bombardment, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Afghan women detained over improper hijab

AFP, Kabul

A Taliban official has said several girls and women were detained recently in Kabul for not covering themselves properly, after reports circulated of a crackdown in Kabul.

In a video posted on social media yesterday, security official Ehsanullah Saqib told a gathering of religious scholars in Kabul's western Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood that in the past week "we have detained a number of women and girls who were without hijab, with the help of women police".

Women have been squeezed from public life, barred from travelling without a male relative and ordered to cover everything but their hands and eyes when outside the home, though many women still go out in Kabul without covering their mouths.

US, UK repel major Houthi attack in Red Sea

Allies' warships, planes shoot down 20 drones, missiles

AFP, London

US and UK forces have shot down more than 20 drones and missiles over the Red Sea launched by Yemen's Houthis, in what London branded yesterday the "largest attack" yet by Iran-backed rebels.

The Western allies' warships and planes took out 18 drones and three missiles in their latest Red Sea military intervention on Tuesday, the US military said.

HMS Diamond, a British destroyer, intervened with "her guns and Sea Viper missiles" after the drones were "heading for her and commercial shipping in the area", UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said.

It comes a week after 12 nations led by the United States warned the Houthis of consequences unless they immediately halted firing on commercial vessels in the busy international shipping corridor.

The Houthis say they are

targeting Israeli-linked vessels in support of Palestinians in Gaza, where Israel is battling Hamas.

"Overnight, HMS Diamond, along with US warships, successfully repelled the largest attack from the Iranian-backed Houthis in the Red Sea to date," Shapps said in a statement.

"The UK alongside allies have previously made clear that these illegal attacks are completely unacceptable and if continued the Houthis will bear the consequences.

"We will take the action needed to protect innocent lives and the global economy," he vowed.

The US Central Command

(CENTCOM) said the Houthis had launched "a complex attack of Iranian designed one-way attack UAVs", as well as firing anti-ship cruise missiles and an anti-ship ballistic missile from Yemen.

They were downed by a combination of F/A-18 warplanes, operating from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier, three American destroyers and the British naval vessel.

The incident is the latest since the US set up a multinational naval task force last month to protect Red Sea shipping from attacks, which are endangering a transit route that carries up to 12 percent of global trade.



Gunmen in Ecuador storm TV studio on-air

REUTERS, Quito

Gunmen with explosives stormed a TV station on-air in Ecuador on Tuesday during a wave of violence around the nation that prompted President Daniel Noboa to name 22 gangs as terrorist organizations to be hunted by the military.

Police rescued the TV staff and arrested 13 men who burst into TC's studio during a live broadcast with long-range guns, grenades and dynamites, according to witnesses in the coastal city of Guayaquil.

Elsewhere in Ecuador, at least seven police officers were kidnapped and there were several explosions.

"Thank God, we are alive, because it was an extremely violent attack," said Jorge Rendon, deputy director of the news program that was interrupted.

West's hesitation on aid to Ukraine helps Putin

Zelensky warns

AFP, Vilnius

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday warned that any delays in Western aid to Kyiv emboldened the Kremlin, almost two years into Russia's invasion. Zelensky was in Lithuania's capital Vilnius as part of a surprise visit to one of Kyiv's staunchest allies. "He (Russian President Vladimir Putin) is not going to stop," he said at a news conference with his Lithuanian counterpart.

"He wants to occupy us completely. "And sometimes, the insecurity of partners regarding financial and military aid to Ukraine only increases Russia's courage and strength," he added. He was speaking as other Western countries are wavering over continued support for Ukraine. Zelensky warned that Putin would not stop at Ukraine but would attack other neighbours unless allies joined forces to stop him. "He (Putin) won't finish this (war), until we all finish him together," the Ukrainian leader said. "We must understand that Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova may be next if we (Ukraine) do not withstand (Russia)," he added. His comments came as Ukraine is facing renewed aerial assaults from Russia.



INDIA LOK SABHA POLLS BJP sets up panel to recruit opposition MPs

NDTV ONLINE

Having set itself a mammoth target of winning 400 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats in the upcoming elections, India's ruling party BJP is looking at all avenues, including bringing in leaders from other parties, to achieve it, sources have told NDTV. At an important strategy meeting held on Tuesday, BJP President JP Nadda assigned different responsibilities to various general secretaries of the party. BJP General Secretary Vinod Tawde has been given charge of the joining committee. "This committee will explore the possibility of bringing influential leaders and sitting MPs from other parties to the BJP. The decision will be taken based on the person's influence in the constituency and his or her ability to win elections," a source said, adding that the party may explore this option particularly in seats where it does not feel it has a candidate capable of winning. This decision also ties in with the party's focus on 160 seats that it lost during the last election. The only time a single party has crossed the 400 figure in the Lok Sabha was the Congress, led by Rajiv Gandhi, in 1984. That election was also the last time a party had won a majority on its own until the Narendra Modi-led BJP stormed into power in 2014.

Polls lacked participation

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Fair elections with a viable opposition, independent democratic institutions and freedom of the press are critical to ensuring a strong and healthy democracy, the statement added.

Australia has said it is regrettable that the elections took place in an environment where not all stakeholders could participate meaningfully and substantially.

"While we welcome the fact that millions of Bangladesh voters exercised their right to vote on election day, it is regrettable that the election took place in an environment where not all stakeholders could participate meaningfully and substantially," Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said in a statement.

It said that as a longstanding friend of Bangladesh, Australia is concerned about the violence and the arrests of political opposition members that took place in the lead-up to the polls.

Australia has consistently highlighted to Bangladesh the importance of free and fair elections, it said.

The country urged the Bangladesh government to prioritise the strengthening of its democratic institutions, which underpin the protection of human rights, the rule of law and the promotion of development.

"As a close partner, Australia remains committed to working with Bangladesh to achieve our shared vision for an open, stable, prosperous and inclusive region."

Meanwhile, in a statement yesterday, Kobayashi Maki, press secretary of Japan's foreign ministry, said though some irregularities were reported, the election was conducted peacefully.

Japan had sent an election observers team, headed by former ambassador to Bangladesh Watanabe Masato, for the January 7 polls.

"As far as our mission was able to observe, the election process was conducted in accordance with procedures. On the other hand, we regret that there were incidents of violence with casualties in the process leading up to the general election," he

said. Japan hopes that Bangladesh, as a strategic partner, will make progress in its efforts for further development as a democratic nation and intends to continue its support to Bangladesh for its development and prosperity, and further develop the bilateral relationship.

In another development, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on all parties to reject all forms of violence and ensure that everyone's human rights and access to the rule of law are fully respected.

"And, that is essential for the consolidation of democracy and economic prosperity in Bangladesh. And he's, of course, concerned about reports of the violence that we've seen," said UN Secretary-General's Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric at a press briefing early today.

He made the comments after being asked what measures the UN Secretary-General was taking to stand beside the victims, oppressed and disenfranchised people of Bangladesh facing "a ruthless crackdown" by the regime.

Maldives upgrades ties with China

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future," Xi told Muizzu, Chinese state media reported.

"During the talks, President Dr Muizzu expressed gratitude for China's significant role in the Maldives' economic success... and infrastructure development," a statement from his presidential office read following the meeting, adding that "20 key agreements between the two countries" had been signed.

Muizzu took office in November, after winning on his "India Out" campaign platform under which he called New Delhi's huge influence a threat to sovereignty.

His government has since asked dozens of locally based Indian military personnel to leave while talking up opportunities for Chinese

investors despite being heavily indebted to Beijing.

Relations between India and China nosedived after soldiers from both sides clashed in the western Himalayas in June 2020, resulting in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese troops.

By upgrading ties with the Maldives, China is setting the stage for further investment in a region where India has already seen another neighbour, Sri Lanka, gravitate towards China.

"China firmly supports the Maldives in safeguarding its national sovereignty, independence and national dignity," state media reported Xi as saying. Beijing would also be willing to "exchange experience of state governance" with Male, Xinhua said.

Muizzu was given a tour of the

Chinese Communist Party Museum in Beijing ahead of meeting with Xi, a video on X, formerly known as Twitter, from his presidential office account showed.

The World Bank in an October development report on the Maldives warned further cosying up to China could spell trouble as a "build-up of sovereign exposure" had taken place during the pandemic and there was a "lack of domestic investment opportunities".

Xi said he backed increasing the number of direct flights between the two countries, in a potential boon for the Maldives' travel and tourism sector, which constituted 79 percent of economic growth in 2022, according to the Asian Development Bank.

Winter storm batters US

REUTERS

A massive winter storm moving across the eastern half of the US on Tuesday knocked out power to about 811,000 homes and businesses in 12 states ahead of a brutal freeze expected to blanket the region starting this weekend.

The hardest hit states so far are New York and Pennsylvania, each with about 182,000 power outages, and New Jersey with over 127,000 outages, according to data from PowerOutage.us.

The biggest power companies in

those states are units of Con Edison ED.N in New York, FirstEnergy FE.N in Pennsylvania and Public Service Electric and Gas, a subsidiary of The Public Service Enterprise Group PEG.N in New Jersey.

Extreme weather is a reminder of the February freeze in 2021 that left millions in Texas and other US Central states without power, water and heat for days, and a winter storm in December 2022 - known as Elliott in the energy industry - that almost caused the collapse of power and natural gas systems in parts of the eastern half of the country.

2 leaders of BNP, Jubo Dal

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were injured after the train was set on fire on the night of January 5 in Dhaka's Golapbag.

The next day, SM Nurul Islam, a director of the railway, filed a murder case with Dhaka Railway Police Station against some unnamed people.

In addition, on January 6, Mansur was shown arrested in another arson case filed with Bangshal Police Station, while Nabi was shown arrested in a case filed with Jatrabari Police Station over political violence. Both were placed on remand in the cases that day.



PHOTO: AFP

This photograph taken yesterday shows an inflatable dinghy washed up on the rocky shores of Agios Georgios, east of the Greek island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea. At least two people died when the dinghy carrying migrants capsized off Lesbos, port police said, while up to 16 people were missing.

'Fighting extortion is the plan'

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independent candidates would form an opposition alliance in the 12th parliament, he said: "We are all from the Awami League. We will discuss with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and do as she instructs."

He told reporters after taking oath as an MP yesterday that he will speak in the interest of the country, against corruption and in favour of truth.

"I believe we will be able to speak [in parliament] with an open mind. We will identify mistakes committed by the previous government and suggest what can be done to correct those."

About his feelings to become MP for the first time, Azad said it was an amazing feeling.

'Will raise voice for the oppressed'

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the same as before. I will speak against corruption, speak up for the oppressed people and will realise Bangabandhu's Sonar Bangla vision as much as possible in my area," he told reporters after taking oath as MP yesterday.

Asked about the challenges in materialising his vision, he said: "There will be numerous challenges - not one or two. No one wants to work in Bangladesh. Still, if I have Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's blessings, I will be able to go a long way."

Sumon feels people in his constituency will vote him out if he does a bad job in the next five years.

"But the word barrister will not go away from my name - it will stay with me until I die."