

IMF ignores Imran Khan's demand

Says ready to work with new Pak gov't

DAWN ONLINE

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) yesterday said that it is looking forward to engaging with the new Pakistan government on policies to ensure "macroeconomic stability and prosperity for all of Pakistan's citizens".

The development comes a day after PTI Senator Ali Zafar told reporters that a letter would be sent from incarcerated party founder Imran Khan to the international lender urging it to call for an independent audit of the February 8 general elections before it continues talks with Islamabad.

Zafar said the IMF, the European Union and other organisations had a charter that stated that good governance was needed for working in the country or giving a loan.

During a press briefing held early yesterday, Julie Kozack, the head of the Communications Department at the IMF, was asked whether the IMF would entertain any letter by Imran calling for investigations into election irregularities.

In her response, Kozack said: "On January 11, the IMF Executive Board approved the first review of the Stand-By Arrangement, with Pakistan that brought total disbursements under the Stand-By Arrangement to \$1.9 billion. The Stand-By Arrangement is supporting the authority's efforts to stabilise the economy and to, of course, with a strong focus on protecting the most vulnerable."



Women stand amid the rubble of a home destroyed by overnight Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. The United Nations Human Rights Chief Volker Turk said that perpetrators of gross human rights violations in the offensive must be held accountable.

PHOTO: AFP

Children as young as five in Gaza want to die

Says MSF, slams US ceasefire veto at UN Security Council

REUTERS, United Nations

The head of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) told the United Nations Security Council on Thursday that medical teams in the Gaza Strip have come up with a new acronym: WCNSF - wounded child, no surviving family.

"Children who do survive this war will not only bear the visible wounds of traumatic injuries, but the invisible ones too," MSF International Secretary General Christopher Lockyear told the 15-member council.

"There is a repeated displacement, constant fear

and witnessing family members literally dismembered before their eyes," he said. "These psychological injuries have led children as young as five to tell us that they would prefer to die."

Lockyear slammed the United States, saying he was appalled it had repeatedly used its veto power to block the council from demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the war between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas in Gaza.

"The people of Gaza need a ceasefire, not when practicable, but now. They need a sustained ceasefire, not a temporary period of calm," Lockyear said. "Anything

short of this is gross negligence."

The US has vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions since the start of the current fighting on October 7, most recently blocking on Tuesday a demand for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire as it instead pushes council to call for a temporary ceasefire linked to the release of hostages held by Hamas.

China's UN Ambassador Zhang Jun told the council he felt "appalled" by Lockyear's briefing.

"We hope the tragic picture that he painted of Gaza for us can touch the conscience of a certain member of this council," Zhang said.

10 dead as fire guts Spanish tower block

AFP, Valencia

At least 10 people died in a huge fire that ripped through a 14-storey tower block in Valencia, eastern Spain, and at least 14 were reported missing, with officials warning yesterday the death toll could rise.

Experts said the building was covered with flammable cladding, which could account for the rapid spread of blaze after it broke out on fourth floor around 5:30 pm on Thursday.

Dramatic images showed clouds of black smoke as the flames consumed the high-rise building of 138 flats in the western Campanar district.

Indian farmers burn effigies of ministers

REUTERS, Shambhu

Indian farmers demanding higher prices for their crops burned effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other ministers yesterday as they sought to expand their protest against his government months before elections. Thousands of farmers began a 'Delhi Chalo' (Let's go to Delhi) march last week but were stopped by security forces about 200 km (125 miles) north of the capital, with water cannons and teargas being used to push them back. Farmer leaders on Thursday announced a series of "mega programmes" across India to press their demands. The "Black Day" will be followed by a tractor rally on highways on February 26, and a farm workers' public meeting in Delhi on March 14. Black flags were hoisted on tractors and trolleys lined up at the protest site yesterday. Several protesters, most of whom are Sikhs from the northern state of Punjab, also tied black cloth over their turbans in solidarity. Farmers also burnt effigies of Home (interior) Minister Amit Shah and the chief minister of Haryana state, whose police force they accuse of using force against them, and chanted slogans demanding minimum prices for their crops. A general election is due by May.

MIGRANT CRISIS Five die as boat capsizes off Malta

REUTERS, Valetta



Five migrants, including a woman, died when their boat capsized as they were being rescued off Malta yesterday, the island's armed forces said. Another eight were injured and taken to hospital, including two who swallowed a considerable amount of seawater and fuel. Armed Forces of Malta deputy commander Colonel Eddric Zahra told reporters that the incident happened at about midday when the eight-metre boat was four miles south of Malta. Some 21 migrants were rescued. They are believed to be from Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt. Mediterranean sea crossings from North Africa to Italy or Malta are among the most dangerous migration routes in the world.

'IS bride' loses appeal against removal of UK citizenship

REUTERS, London

A British-born woman who went to Syria as a schoolgirl to join Islamic State lost her latest appeal yesterday over the removal of her British citizenship.

The British government took away Shamima Begum's citizenship on national security grounds in 2019, shortly after she was found in a detention camp in Syria.

Begum, now 24, argued the decision was unlawful, in part because British officials failed to properly consider whether she was a victim of trafficking, an argument that was rejected by a lower court in February 2023.

Begum, whose family is of Bangladeshi origin, left London in 2015, aged 15, and travelled with two school friends to Syria, where she married an IS fighter and gave birth to three children, all of whom died as infants.

She has been in the al-Roj camp since 2019, with thousands of other foreign women and children.

The Court of Appeal in London yesterday rejected her appeal following an appeal in October.

Judge Sue Carr said: "It could be argued that the decision in Ms Begum's case was harsh. It could also be argued that Ms Begum is the author of her own misfortune.

"But it is not for this court to agree or disagree with either point of view. Our only task is to assess whether the deprivation decision was unlawful.

"We have concluded it was not and the appeal is dismissed."

The government welcomed the ruling.

"Our priority remains maintaining the safety and security of the UK and we will robustly defend any decision made in doing so," a spokesperson for the interior ministry said.

Begum's lawyers called on Britain to repatriate her and others who remain in Syria, describing the refusal to do so as "disgraceful".

"Every other country has taken their nationals back - France, Germany, Belgium, America, Canada, Australia," Begum's lawyer, Gareth Peirce, told reporters.

"Every country in a comparable position has seen that there is no alternative but to take their nationals back. The UK stands now virtually alone."

Britain has repatriated 17 individuals since 2019 as of December, according to human rights organisation Rights and Security International.

Daniel Furner, another of Begum's lawyers, said: "I want to say that I'm sorry to Shamima and to her family that, after five years of fighting, she still hasn't received justice in a British court and to promise her and promise the government that we are not going to stop fighting until she does get justice and until she is safely back home."

Yesterday's ruling is the latest chapter in a long-running legal battle, though Peirce said she needed time to properly read the ruling before a decision is taken on whether to seek permission to appeal.

Consider cost of environment

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"Illumination will be bad if you see that wetland and forest land are lost," he said, "But it will show as GDP growth.

"We should net it [GDP] out from environmental degradation. I think that literature of how you combine environmental degradation with GDP growth can be something. For Bangladesh, it is of utmost importance," he said.

Prof Wahiduddin said nighttime illumination data can be used to see whether remittance-receiving households can create urban-like settlements by spending on services and other things.

Another question could be whether illuminated areas around the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest, has increased.

The eminent economist said there was a popular movement to protect the Sundarbans. The movement was against construction of a coal-fired power plant in the area.

"We can trace whether the Sundarbans are shrinking by looking at the lighted area around it," he said.

"But more generally, we can think of whether the government infrastructure projects are helping or not in terms of decentralisation of urbanisation," he said.

He added that poverty data can be supplemented by using data on lighted areas.

He, however, said Dhaka illumination may present a paradox because there are so many expressways and new metro rails are being built right on the top of the main roads, which are the busiest and illuminated at night.

"Now, Dhaka may present a paradoxical picture of diminished illumination even if Dhaka is progressing as a city," he said at the event moderated by SANEM Executive Director Prof Selim Raihan.

In his keynote, Professor Jean-Louis Arcand cited NTL data to show the impact of bombing of Gaza by Israel and said most of the Gaza city was dark by December 16 since Israel began the assault.

He said the bombing caused roughly 60 percent loss in household expenditures per adult equivalent.

Barishal victory settles BPL

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eliminator and the loser of the first qualifier will face off in the second qualifier on February 28.

The winner of that match will take on the victor of the first qualifier in the final on March 1.

In yesterday's afternoon game, the batters found it difficult with morning showers having an impact on the conditions as Comilla slumped to 97 for 7 in the 17th over against an in-form Barishal attack.

Jaker Ali Anik once again came up

with a cameo, notching a 16-ball 38 to help Comilla reach a challenging score of 140 for 8.

Tamim and West Indies' Kyle Mayers strung together a 64-run stand for the second wicket to set the base for the chase.

Although Tamim couldn't see the team home, departing off Andre Russell in 18th over, Soumya Sarkar (six off three) and Mahmudullah Riyad (12 off 11) took Barishal to victory with two deliveries to spare.

The match between Tamim's

Barishal and Shakib Al Hasan's Rangpur on February 19 had produced the most thrilling game in this year's league so far, with Rangpur edging out Barishal by one wicket.

The two sides could face off in the second qualifier, if Barishal wins the eliminator and Rangpur loses the first qualifier.

And if Rangpur win against Comilla on February 26, Barishal will have to win the eliminator and the second qualifier to set up a showdown against Rangpur in the final.

'We are living in fear'

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Grameen Telecom Bhaban, and said the current board of Grameen Bank appointed seven directors, including the chairman, for Grameen Kalyan and Grameen Telecom, two social business ventures established by Yunus.

"Some people stormed our offices and declared that they would occupy them. What kind of demand is that?" Yunus said.

Prof Yunus made the remarks on a talk show hosted by Khaled Muhiuddin of DW Bangla, which was aired live on YouTube.

Yunus, the champion of microcredit and social business models, which are aimed at alleviating poverty and addressing social issues, said he sought help from the police, but did not get any support, while the outsiders occupied the offices of several social business organisations.

"We went to the police and they said that they could not do anything about it. And they did nothing, so where will we go?" he added.

"In the panic created by the occupiers, employees in the entire office building, including the female staff, felt terrorised. So the problem is worsening, not lessening."

Prof Yunus further pointed out the "fearful state they were in", as people besieged the building amid slogans, making it a "very critical situation".

Responding to a question on what could be the reason for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to dislike him, Prof Yunus said: "She thinks I am the worst thug, a criminal, a usurer and a bribe taker. She just says anything she wants probably because she has a very bad opinion of me."

Yunus also spoke on Grameen Bank's ties with Grameen Telecom, which holds a 34.2 percent stake in Bangladesh's biggest telecom operator Grameenphone.

"Grameen Bank had earlier been authorised to nominate the chairman [for Grameen Telecom and Grameen Kalyan]. After we were removed from

let in the staff of the companies. With each day, they have become more aggressive."

When asked who is behind the recent attacks, Prof Yunus said, "In Bangladesh everybody knows how these things happen. We are not supposed to name names; it brings heavy consequences."

Referring to the report that Alexei Navalny died in Russia while imprisoned, the German media asked whether Prof Yunus was worried. He replied, "I leave it to my destiny."

Yunus said that many of his friends from abroad invite him to go to their countries. "I have been offered citizenship, resources and research facilities at universities. But I don't want to leave Bangladesh. I always tell them I have been working in Bangladesh all my life. Also, if I go, what happens to the many people I work with? Once I leave, nobody will know what happens to those people who gave their lives to build these amazing institutions for the world."

Prof Yunus, one of today's most trenchant social critics, also touched on his aspirations of building a new world of three zeros - zero carbon emissions, zero resource concentration and zero unemployment. The world of three zeros aims to bring forth a new civilisation from the economic experiments his work has helped to inspire.

In another interview with ZEIT ONLINE, a news outlet based in Germany, Prof Yunus said, "They might put me in jail. Also, I fear that whatever has been built will be destroyed."

The situation is "very alarming" and "very bleak", he said.

"Our offices have been taken over by strangers. A crowd of about 35 people entered the new building which houses the headquarters of our social business companies and they passed the security guards, jumped over security barriers, and announced to take over the eight companies."

"...They locked the offices with their own locks as they left the building for the night. The next morning they came back, and opened the locks to

US slaps sweeping

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last year, when the US imposed sanctions on over 200 individuals and entities while Commerce targeted 90 companies for the first anniversary of the war.

The Biden administration has also imposed new trade restrictions on 93 entities from Russia, China, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Kyrgyzstan, India and South Korea for supporting Russia's war effort in Ukraine.

Yesterday's sanctions from the United States came in partnership with those from European Union member nations and Britain. The actions are the latest of thousands of targets announced by the United States and its allies following Russia's February 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine, which has killed tens of thousands and destroyed cities.

5 Transcom officials

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The magistrate rejected three remand prayers filed with the court by the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) and granted the five bail until submission of the police probe report upon bail bond of Tk 3,000 each, said defence lawyer AKM Muhiuddin Faruk.

On Thursday, the PBI arrested the five at their homes and office in the three cases filed the same day

by Shahzreh Huq, the daughter of Transcom Group's late chairman Latifur Rahman.

The cases were filed with Gulshan Police Station against the five, the Transcom Group chairman, the Group's CEO, and the head of transformation, bringing allegations of fraud and breach of trust with regard to the company's shares and properties.