

Russia, Ukraine exchange over 300 POWs

AFP, Moscow

Russia and Ukraine swapped more than 300 prisoners of war yesterday in an exchange brokered by the United Arab Emirates ahead of New Year's Eve, officials from both countries said.

The two sides have exchanged hundreds of captive soldiers since Russia began its military assault on Ukraine in February 2022, in one of the few areas of cooperation.

"On 30 December, as a result of the negotiation process, 150 Russian servicemen were returned from territory controlled by the Kyiv regime. In return, 150 Ukrainian army prisoners of war were handed over," the Russian defence ministry said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv received 189 people as part of the deal, including soldiers, border guards and two civilians from the Russian-occupied city of Mariupol.

"We are working to free everyone from Russian captivity. This is our goal. We do not forget anyone," Zelensky said.



With underground iron rods sticking upright and no safety barrier in between, an elderly man walks on a wooden plank placed on a dug-up side of the Shaheed Captain Mansoor Ali road in the capital's Kakrail. The situation has been like this for over a week as Dhaka South City Corporation has been carrying out development works there, posing risks to pedestrians and vehicles alike.

Nation sees tectonic shifts

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The peaceful protests quickly gathered momentum to morph into a nationwide movement that forced Sheikh Hasina to flee Bangladesh on August 5 and seek refuge in India, where she has been staying until now.

The interim government, headed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Professor Muhammad Yunus, has been at the helm since the transition and focused on reforming democratic institutions that had been systematically destroyed by the Awami League's self-seeking interests throughout the 15 years it had been in power. On top of that, the incumbent was saddled with a crumbling economy, spiralling inflation, high unemployment and widespread corruption at every pore of public administration and the police, which were in fact the main factors behind strong public discontent.

The initial task, therefore, for the non-partisan interim government, was to stabilise the economy, restore law and order and help build back public confidence in government institutions — each task more challenging than the next. In addition, there were a string of protests across the country from almost every section of the people who felt wronged during the last 15 years and, although short-lived, intense floods along the eastern flank of Bangladesh.

A month into office, the interim government established six reform commissions — covering elections, constitution, judiciary, anti-corruption, police and administration — which are expected to submit reports in January.

The discord between the streams is becoming starker with time. Barely a couple of weeks ago, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman emphasised the need for quick and decisive action so far as reforms were concerned. He stressed that the people had a right to know the interim government's intentions about the timeline of these reforms. His remarks betrayed a growing impatience after the chief adviser indicated that the elections could be held by late 2025 after minimal reforms, but might take a little longer and be scheduled by mid-2026 if desired reforms were carried out. The BNP has called for further clarity on the election schedule and a concrete roadmap.

Of the two most significant reform commissions, one has been tasked with making recommendations for the elections, including the next one, to be free and fair. The other one is going to suggest major constitutional changes like limiting the prime minister's terms, bicameral parliament and a bar on prime ministers from heading their party.

Political analysts have pointed out that a timeline for implementing the reforms is critical. They argue that

if key reforms, particularly those related to elections and the constitution, are not finalised before the elections, the political situation may remain unstable, and the promised reforms might never be fully realised.

They warn that without clear progress on these fronts before elections, lasting and meaningful changes would remain difficult to achieve. At the same time, the endorsement of the political parties is also essential for these reforms to take root in essence.

Eminent political analyst Al Masud Hasanuzzaman told The Daily Star that there was no doubt about the necessity of a political consensus for meaningful reforms.

"Without it, the process will likely be futile." Stressing consensus, he said, "In the absence of unity, the political landscape may face significant fractures in the coming days."

He indicated that given Bangladesh was sailing into uncharted waters, there was bound to be some "trial and error" in the process before finding the right course.

He explained this complex and challenging situation necessitated a political compact for proper planning and implementation of these reforms.

Due largely to the significant transitions of 2024, which earned it the Economist's Country of the Year crown, Bangladesh's future is as fraught with challenges as it is filled with possibilities.

people to assemble on that day in their respective places of worship, there to pay homage to the memory of President James Earl Carter," Biden said.

World leaders and former US presidents paid tribute to a man they praised as compassionate, humble and committed to peace in the Middle East.

"His significant role in achieving the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel will remain etched in the annals of history," said Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in a post on X.

Chinese leader Xi

Jinping told his American counterpart Joe Biden that he was "deeply saddened" by the death of former US president Jimmy Carter, Chinese state media said yesterday.

"Deeply saddened by the passing of former USA President Mr Jimmy Carter. A statesman of great vision, he worked tirelessly for global peace and harmony."

"His contributions to fostering strong India-US ties leave a lasting legacy. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and the people of the US," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a statement.

Carter, a Democrat,

Disagreements

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democracy in the country through elections.

Seeking people's blessings, Tarique expressed his hope to return to the country soon.

Tarique was addressing the gathering at a madrasa ground in Nilphamari Sadar upazila while handing over a new house to the family of Golam Rabbani, who was killed in a "crossfire" with Rab members in 2014.

He said democratic methods are followed in developed countries while forming governments.

"To take Bangladesh forward in the coming days, it is essential to restore the democratic system. Whether it is union council, municipal, upazila, or parliamentary elections, Bangladesh must bring back the electoral process."

The BNP second-in-command added that collective opinions will help develop the country.

"Everyone will express their opinions. But in the end, we will build the country based on the opinion of most people."

Tarique said elections are essential for the country's overall development, as they come forward."

help bring in the capable leaders.

He stressed the importance of maintaining an electoral process, saying, "This electoral process must be maintained consistently, year after year, generation after generation, at any cost. Only then will capable leaders come..."

"If we can remain united and committed, we will be able to move the country forward. There is a lot of work ahead. We need to increase crop production, excavate canals, overhaul the existing education system, and create employment opportunities for the unemployed youth."

Tarique acknowledged past shortcomings of the party, saying, "Maybe we couldn't always achieve 100 percent success due to various reasons, but we never left the people. The source of all our power is the people."

He also shared his vision for a government that prioritises the people's wellbeing.

"We want to form a government that will actively address the grievances and concerns of the people. To establish such a government, everyone, irrespective of their parties or opinions, must come forward."

Jimmy Carter passes away

FROM PAGE 1

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But it was also dogged by an economic recession, persistent unpopularity and the Iran hostage crisis that consumed his final 444 days in office. Carter ran for re-election in 1980 but was swept from office in a landslide as voters embraced Republican challenger Ronald Reagan,

the former actor and California governor.

Carter lived longer than any US president and, after leaving the White House, earned a reputation as a committed humanitarian. He was widely seen as a better former president than he was a president — a status he readily acknowledged.

The Carter Center said there will be public observances in Atlanta and Washington. These events will be followed by a private interment in Plains, it said.

Final arrangements for the former president's state funeral are still pending, according to the center.

Cops complicit in crimes

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ensuring preservation of agricultural products and smooth supply of fertiliser.

The chief adviser addressed the officials via videoconference from his office in the capital's Tejgaon.

He instructed the field-level officials to work tirelessly to keep the prices of essentials at a tolerable level and ensure their smooth supply during the upcoming Ramadan.

"Ramadan is approaching, and special attention have to be paid to market prices. You will have to work not only on the market prices but also on exploring ways to ease the transportation of goods.

"Paying special attention to rising commodity prices is crucial now to ensure that they are not causing difficulties to the people. We must focus on controlling the prices

and make every efforts to address the situation effectively," he said.

Yunus directed the

administration

officials to

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He mentioned that

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