

NEW YEAR'S SPEECH

Russia will 'move forward' in 2025: Putin

REUTERS, Moscow

President Vladimir Putin told Russians in a New Year address that the country would move forward with confidence in 2025.

He said that Russia had strengthened its unity in the first quarter of the 21st century, achieving significant goals and overcoming trials.

"And now, on the threshold of the new year, we are thinking about the future. We are confident that everything will be fine, we will only move forward. We know for sure that the absolute value for us was, is and will be the fate of Russia, the well-being of its citizens," he said.

'No one can stop' unification with Taiwan Says China's Xi

AFP, Beijing

China's President Xi Jinping said yesterday that "no one can stop" unification with Taiwan, as he addressed the nation in a New Year's speech.

Beijing claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory, and has said it will not renounce the use of force to bring it under its control.

China has intensified pressure on the democratic island in recent years, and has staged three rounds of major military drills since President Lai Ching-te came to power in May.

"Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family. No one can sever our blood ties, and no one can stop the historical trend of the reunification of the motherland," Xi said in a speech broadcast on state media.



Displaced Palestinians try to keep themselves warm under the rubble of a building near a makeshift camp during a storm in Gaza City yesterday, amid the ongoing Israeli strikes on the Palestinian enclave.

PHOTO: AFP

Gaza hospitals have become 'death trap'

Warns UN rights chief, says Israel's claims of armed groups using hospitals 'vague'

AFP, Geneva

UN rights chief Volker Turk said yesterday that hospitals in the Gaza Strip had become a "death trap", insisting that such facilities must instead be protected during conflict.

"As if the relentless bombing and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza were not enough, the one sanctuary where Palestinians should have felt safe in fact became a death trap. The protection of hospitals during warfare is paramount and must be respected by all sides, at all times," the UN high commissioner for human rights said.

The UN human rights office report published yesterday found that Israeli strikes on and near hospitals in the Gaza Strip had left healthcare in the Palestinian territory on the "brink of collapse".

It said such strikes raised grave concerns about Israel's compliance with international law. Its 23-page report, entitled "Attacks on hospitals during the escalation of hostilities in Gaza", looked at the period from October 7, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

It said that during this time, there were at least 136 strikes on 27 hospitals and 12 other medical facilities, claiming significant casualties among doctors, nurses, medics and other civilians and causing significant damage to, if not the complete destruction

- Healthcare on 'brink of total collapse': UN
- There were 136 strikes on 27 hospitals since Oct 7, 2023: report
- Death toll in Gaza rises to 45,541

of, civilian infrastructure.

The report also found that Israel's repeated claims that Gaza hospitals were being improperly used for military purposes by Palestinian groups "vague".

"Insufficient information has so far been made publicly available to substantiate these allegations, which have remained vague and broad, and in some cases appear contradicted by publicly available information," it said.

Israel's military campaign has killed more than 45,541 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable.

The report concluded with a call for credible investigations into the incidents detailed, and said they had to be independent given the "limitations" of Israel's justice system in respect of the conduct of its armed forces.

'New resistance' against Israel to emerge in Syria Says Iran security chief

AFP, Tehran

Iran's security chief Ali Akbar Ahmadian said a new group would emerge in Syria to fight Israel following the fall of president Bashar al-Assad, state media reported.

"With the occupation of Syrian territories by the Zionist regime, a new resistance has been born that will manifest itself in the years to come," said Ahmadian, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, IRNA news agency reported late Monday.

In a meeting with Oman's foreign minister, Ahmadian insisted that Iran's anti-Israel axis of resistance was "not weakened" after the December 8 fall of Assad, a longtime Tehran ally.

Ahmadian maintained that Iran has "not changed" its nuclear doctrine against pursuing atomic weapons, IRNA reported. Assad fled Syria after rebel forces led by the Sunni Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) seized the capital Damascus after a lightning offensive.

Since his fall, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Syrian military facilities since Assad's fall, saying it aimed to prevent them from falling into hostile hands.

Israeli troops also occupied strategic positions in a UN-patrolled buffer zone between Syria and the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights which it seized in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

New textbooks

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had made the declaration.

Former NCTB officials said that when AL was in power from 1996-2001, the textbooks stated Sheikh Mujib made the declaration of independence and Ziaur Rahman read out the announcement. On the other hand, when the BNP was in power from 2001-2006, it was stated that Ziaur had made the declaration.

They, however, could not recall what was written in the textbooks before 1996.

Whether the change will spark new debates considering the difference of beliefs, Reazul said, "Of course not... This isn't a matter related to Awami League or BNP. This is a national issue. We want to give due recognition to individuals like Maulana Bhashani and Tajuddin Ahmed, who also played significant roles in the Liberation War."

"We're trying to make sure that focusing on factual representation remains consistent."

The former NCTB officials also pointed out that though the authorities in power kept changing the name of who declared independence, the constitution, in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is mentioned as the "Father of the Nation", included the telegram of the Declaration of Independence of Bangladesh made by Bangabandhu on March 26, 1971, in the sixth schedule.

The constitution also included the Proclamation of Independence of the Mujibnagar Government on April 10, 1971, in the seventh schedule.

It says, "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of 75 million of people of Bangladesh, in due fulfilment of the legitimate right of self-determination of the people of Bangladesh, duly made a declaration of independence at Dacca on March 26, 1971, and urged the people of Bangladesh to defend the honour and integrity of Bangladesh..."

NCTB Chair Reazul said the telegram was introduced in the constitution through an amendment. "The documents of the Liberation War, the then Indian leaders, and the first post-independence documentary prepared by the then information ministry show evidence in favour of Ziaur Rahman making the declaration."

In this regard, Rakkhal Raha said, "The constitution can be amended through a two-third majority. You can do anything if you have that kind of [backing by] a majority. Any immoral act can't be justified by the constitution. The truth is above the constitution."

It is to be noted that among the changes in the textbooks, the NCTB has also removed the title "Father of the Nation" with regard to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Bangladesh thriving in meat

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In the analysis, it was seen that the number of cow, buffalo, sheep and goat maintained a steady growth in the last decade.

The demand for meat was 76.21 lakh metric tonnes while the production was 92.25 lakh metric tonnes.

Yet, Bangladesh has a long way to go in achieving self-sufficiency in milk production.

In 2023-24, the demand for milk was 158.78 lakh metric tonnes, while the country produced 150.44 lakh metric tonnes.

Bangladesh has achieved visible success in agriculture despite being one of the most densely populated countries with limited

11 injured

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Madrasha Ghat area, where a heated altercation broke out between the students and the passengers of the other bus. A clash ensued, resulting in the injuries of 11 people.

Students alleged that the attackers were aided by some locals. Although a police station was nearby, law enforcers did not intervene, they claimed.

Shafiqul Islam, the officer-in-charge of

land, said Mohammad Jahangir Alam, a professor of agribusiness and marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University.

"Notable achievements include tremendous growth in fish and meat production."

While Bangladesh was heavily reliant on food imports post-independence in 1971, the dependency has significantly decreased.

"For instance, with a population of about 20 crore, reliance on local chicken varieties would have made poultry unaffordable for many. The country's success in broiler chicken production has ensured accessibility."

Alam attributed the progress to farm-friendly

policies introduced after 1990.

"Farm-friendly policies have not only boosted fish and broiler chicken production but also created jobs and addressed protein deficiencies," said Farida Akhter, adviser to the ministry of fisheries and livestock.

At present, fisheries account for 2.43 percent of GDP and livestock 1.80 percent.

Akhter identified institutional and tax-related barriers hindering production since taking her role as an adviser to the government.

"We are working on removing these barriers. If addressed effectively, production can increase further."

Mollahat Police Station, confirmed that 11 people, including eight students, were injured in the clash. The students left for Dhaka after receiving treatment in Mollahat.

Three other injured locals were treated at the Fakirhat upazila health complex, he added.

He said the bus convoy resumed its journey after police brought the situation under control.

Zahurul Tanvir, a

coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement in Khulna, said several students were injured in the incident.

"This attack was carried out by the collaborators of the ousted fascist government," he told journalists.

Minhajul Abedin Sompod, another coordinator of the students' platform, demanded the attackers be brought to book.

The year of BNP's

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Overnight, the outside political victimisation that the party and its leaders were subjected to over the past 15 years went into thin air.

Within hours of Hasina's ouster, President Mohammed Shahabuddin commuted the prison terms of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and the TV channels, in defiance of a High Court order from 2015, started broadcasting the party's acting chairperson Tarique Rahman's speeches.

From August 5, the 57-year-old Tarique, the party's de facto leader since 2018, emerged as a leader in waiting, continually stressing religious harmony, national unity and calm.

In fact, he along with the party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir often comes across as one of the voices of reason in the new political landscape of charged rhetoric.

The party has also been acting as a ballast to the country's plunge into any sort of constitutional vacuum and political complications.

For instance, when the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, which initiated the quota protests, demanded the resignation of President Shahabuddin, the scrapping of the constitution and the proclamation of a second republic, the BNP vetoed the move and the other political parties joined in.

In the end, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus decided not to go along with the student leaders' demand.

Similarly, when the student leaders and their sister platform Jatiya Nagorik Committee insisted on banning the AL, the BNP tacitly expressed its reservations with the extreme step and prevailed.

Sensing the public pulse, the party relaunched its 31-point structural reform agenda, first presented in 2018.

The reform agenda includes limiting the tenure of any individual as prime minister to two consecutive terms to prevent the recurrence of authoritarian rule in Bangladesh and a bicameral parliamentary system for checks and balances of power between different parts of the government.

The party is now holding workshops countrywide on the 31-point reform agenda

for feedback from the grassroots level.

However, challenges remain for the BNP.

Despite warnings and disciplinary measures, the party has been unable to prevent its workers from thuggish activities like extortion and encroachment -- a big gripe with the previous AL regime of 15 years.

More than 1,000 party members have been expelled for their involvement in rent-seeking and illegal occupation of properties and businesses and more than 12 committees were dissolved after allegations against members proved true, according to the BNP.

Tarique, who has been living in London since 2008, has repeatedly urged the public to hand over to law enforcement agencies anyone seeking rent or engaging in unlawful activities using any BNP placeholder. Yet, there seems to be little correction in behaviour among the party workers.

Keeping party discipline intact will be crucial for the BNP to convincingly sell to the masses its vision of 'rules-based' society.

Its student wing Chhatra Dal has also failed to make any waves on the university campuses in the wake of the enormous vacancy created by the ban on Chhatra League.

Most importantly, the BNP's fight for a free and fair election has not ended either given the interim government's greater preference for reforms over polls.

Although Yunus has announced the election is likely to be held at the end of 2025 or in the first half of 2026, the BNP has demanded an election within four to six months, a timeframe the party deems adequate to carry out the reforms needed for free and fair polls.

So, it appears that the BNP will start 2025 in the same spirit that it kicked off 2024: continuing the fight to restore democracy in Bangladesh. But this year, the party has the clearest sight in 17 years at the goal.

"If a free and fair election were to be held, the BNP is the party best positioned to form the next government," said Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, retired professor of Jahangirnagar University's department of government and politics.