

## Investigators get new warrant to arrest S Korea President Yoon

AFP, Seoul



South Korean anti-graft investigators yesterday secured a new court-ordered arrest warrant for impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, whose failed martial law bid threw the country into turmoil.

The former star prosecutor has refused questioning three times after his bungled December 3 martial law decree plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades.

As anti-graft officials and police got a fresh warrant from the same court that issued the first order, Yoon was believed to be holed up in his residence surrounded by hundreds of guards preventing his detention.

"The arrest warrant re-requested for the suspect Yoon was issued today in the afternoon," the Joint Investigation Headquarters said in a statement.

Seoul Western District Court declined to confirm when contacted by AFP.



A woman sunbathing her seven-day old nephew, who was admitted to Dhaka Shishu Hospital with a cold, after having his echocardiogram done yesterday. The child, born on December 31, was admitted to a Shariatpur clinic the very next day with a cold and then referred to the hospital in the capital. According to doctors, around 40 new patients are admitted every day, 60 percent of them with cold-related issues.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Meta shelves fact-checking program in US

REUTERS

Social media giant Meta yesterday scrapped its US fact-checking program for a community-based system similar to X and reduced the curbs on discussions around contentious topics such as immigration and gender identity.

The move marks a reversal in Meta's policy as CEO Mark Zuckerberg has long championed active content moderation despite criticism from conservatives over alleged censorship on its platforms.

It also comes shortly after the company named Republican policy executive Joel Kaplan as global affairs head and elected Dana White, CEO of Ultimate Fighting Championship and a close friend of President-elect Donald Trump, to its board.

"We've reached a point where it's just too many mistakes and too much censorship. It's time to get back to our roots around free expression," Zuckerberg said in a video.

"We're going to focus on reducing mistakes, simplifying our policies and restoring free expression on our platforms. We're going to tune our content filters to require much higher confidence before taking down content."

The end of the fact-checking program, started in 2016, caught some partner organizations by surprise.

## Iran begins military drills near Natanz nuclear site

AFP, Tehran

Iran's military has begun drills near the Natanz nuclear enrichment plant in the centre of the country, state media reported yesterday, as part of exercises planned nationwide.

The drills -- dubbed Eqtedar, or "might", in Farsi -- have involved the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the ideological branch of Iran's military, alongside the army.

"The first phase of the joint Eqtedar exercises in the air defense zone of the Natanz nuclear facility has commenced under the orders of the air defense headquarters commander," state TV said.

It added that IRGC air forces were undertaking "an all-out point defense" of the site "against a multitude of air threats in tough electronic warfare conditions".

On Monday, IRGC spokesman Ali Mohammad Naini said the drills, which will also cover other parts of Iran until mid-March, were being conducted in response to "new security threats", without elaborating.

Several branches of the IRGC, including the navy and the paramilitary Basij forces, will also take part in the exercises, he added.

Last week, US news website Axios reported that White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan had presented President Joe Biden with options for a potential US strike on Iran's nuclear facilities if Tehran moved toward developing a nuclear weapon before January 20, when Donald Trump takes office.

## Gas crisis

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"We pay a monthly rent of Tk 3,000. But we are having to spend more to be able to cook," said Meghla Akter, a resident of the project. "We pay for the gas but do not get it."

Residents said they can cook only from 3:00am-6:00am. Sometimes on weekends and holidays, they get gas for one or two hours.

Toma Sarker said, "Our lifestyle has changed due to the gas crisis. We have to wake up at midnight to cook."

Utara Sector-II resident Sakhawat Hossain Mukter said they faced a gas crisis every winter, but it was unbearable now.

## Election by Dec

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shared by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus in an address to the nation.

On December 16 last year, during a Victory Day address, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus stated that the next general election could be held either at the end of 2025 or in the first half of 2026 after completing necessary reforms.

## Clarification

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be obtained from the Dubai Land Department and other official sources.

3. In our report, we refrained from naming 442 individuals based on these two criteria.

4. We reiterate that we did not apply any personal bias or "pick-and-choose" method to either include or exclude any individual in our report.

We only followed the criteria mentioned above. Thank you for your understanding.

## Khaleda finally off to UK for treatment

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Khaleda will be meeting her son for the first time in seven years on her first overseas visit since July 16, 2017, when she travelled to London for treatment.

Tarique, acting chairperson of BNP, has been residing in London with his family since 2008. Khaleda's younger son, Aralat Rahman Koko, died in Malaysia in 2015.

Khaleda set out from her Gulshan residence "Firoza" at 8:12pm. Her motorcade reached the airport at 10:51pm. The journey from her home to the airport took over two hours due to severe traffic congestion caused by the presence of hundreds of party leaders and supporters on the streets.

Senior BNP leaders greeted her at the Gulshan residence before departure while party supporters gathered along the route, cheering and chanting slogans in her support. A significant number of law enforcers were deployed to maintain order.

Earlier, Khaleda's family members, including her younger brother Shamim Eskander, his wife Kaniz Fatima, and her late brother Sayeed Eskander's wife Nasrin, also greeted her at her residence.

The former PM's deteriorating health had been a matter of grave concern for years. Despite repeated appeals from her party and physicians to allow her to seek treatment abroad, the AL government rejected over 20 such requests.

Khaleda's personal physician Dr Zahid Hossain said, "If they [doctors in London] say she needs further treatment that they can't provide

and there is a need to take her to Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Maryland, USA, that will be looked into."

According to doctors in Dhaka, the BNP chairperson may require a liver transplant because of the cirrhosis and the entire treatment process, including recovery, may take several months.

Zahid said doctors will decide the feasibility and timing of the liver transplant after a detailed evaluation at the specialised unit in London.

Khaleda's eventual departure only became possible after the fall of the AL regime on August 5, 2024, signaling a major shift in the country's political landscape. She was fully freed by an order from President Mohammed Shahabuddin the very next day, paving the way for her overseas treatment.

Her health crisis, compounded by political resistance, had become a rallying point for BNP leaders and activists, who are now hopeful for her recovery and the opportunity for her to reunite with her family in peace.

BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "We've long been demanding that she receive treatment abroad, but we were unsuccessful. Due to the lack of adequate medical care, she reached a critical point, where her life was at risk. She is now slightly better and will fully recover once she receives treatment abroad."

"Khaleda Zia made the greatest contribution to the July-August movement because she inspired the entire country and gave strength without any compromise."

## Injured victims to be given jobs in police

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"We are trying to recruit those who have recovered from their injuries as soon as possible. In the future, those who are still recovering can also be considered for employment," the adviser said.

He mentioned that each injured victim faces unique challenges. "One has lost an eye; another has lost a finger. They will be placed in departments where their abilities can be best utilised."

Regarding the number of those to be employed, the adviser said, "Initially, we plan to start with 100 wounded victims. We will increase the number in phases."

Asked if the recruitment would be limited to police, he responded, "We are starting with the police as it falls under my ministry's jurisdiction. However, we have a plan to expand this initiative to other departments in the future."

Jahangir also talked about the issue of traffic management, saying, "A proposal was submitted to recruit 1,000 students for controlling traffic. So far, 400 students have been recruited."

Besides, another proposal was sent

to employ retired staffers of army, navy, air force, police, BGB, and Ansar, under the traffic division, he said.

He, however, found a lack of interest among the retired employees.

"I expected more participation, but we have so far got only 50-60 people. We had a plan to start with at least 500 retirees."

Regarding concerns over students' education, the adviser said, "We have arranged limited working hours for students, around 2-3 hours per day, to ensure their studies are not hampered due to controlling traffic. They will receive an honorarium for the service."

Responding to a query from reporters, Jahangir said money laundering was a major problem during the previous government.

"I have instructed the CID chief to prioritise investigations into money laundering cases and submit reports, including that of the Bangladesh Bank reserve heist."

"Delayed investigation reports do not have any effect. I have made it clear that I expect report identifying those involved in money laundering without

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "During madam's imprisonment, she fell critically ill. We repeatedly urged Sheikh Hasina to allow her to seek medical treatment abroad, but she ignored our requests."

"She prays for the well-being of the people and the establishment of democracy."

CASES

According to Khaleda's lawyer, of the 37 cases filed against her during the caretaker government and AL government tenures, seven cases are still pending with the courts as of yesterday. These include the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case, the Niko corruption case, three sabotage cases in Cumilla, and two defamation cases.

On February 8, 2018, Khaleda was jailed in a corruption case.

In April 2019, Khaleda's health deteriorated due to inadequate medical treatment. On March 26, 2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, she was released from prison after 776 days.

The government temporarily released her on an executive order, suspending her sentence on the condition that she remain at her Gulshan residence and not leave the country. The term of her release had been extended several times.

In April 2021, she contracted Covid-19 and recovered while under treatment at home. However, as the other health complications surfaced, she was admitted to Evercare Hospital several times.

unnecessary delays."

Asked about the progress made since the interim government assumed office five months ago, the adviser opined, "You can judge for yourself whether there has been any improvement. Police have resumed their work and are continuously working to improve the situation."

He, however, acknowledged challenges, including the time required for the new officers to familiarise with their roles, as previous officers have been changed. Besides, there are shortages of vehicles and damaged police stations have not been repaired fully.

"We are taking these matters seriously and working to address the issues."

Regarding reports of people fleeing the country after August 5, the adviser explained, "There was no government in place between August 5 and 7. Many fled during that time, some crossed borders into neighbouring countries. However, since we assumed office, no one has fled. If anyone attempts to leave, we will investigate the matter."

## International flights resume at Damascus airport

AFP, Damascus

International flights resumed at Syria's main airport in Damascus yesterday for the first time since rebels toppled President Bashar al-Assad last month, AFP journalists said.

Excitement was in the air at the Damascus airport, where an AFP correspondent saw passengers arriving from Qatar chanting and cheering with some draped in Syria's three-star independence flag.

"Today marks a new beginning," Damascus airport director Anis Fallouh told AFP.

"We started welcoming outbound and inbound international flights," he said, adding that the first flight was bound for Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.

The first Qatari commercial flight in nearly 13 years landed in Damascus at around 1:00 pm (10:00 GMT).

A Syrian Airlines flight bound for Sharjah took off at around 11:45 am (0845 GMT), marking the first international commercial flight from the airport since December 8, AFP correspondents said.

Syria's three-star independence flag, long associated with opposition to Assad and which the new authorities have adopted, was painted on the plane.

International aid planes and foreign diplomatic delegations have

already been landing in Syria, and domestic flights have also resumed.

"I was afraid that the airport would stay closed, my visa was about to expire, but now I am very happy," Amal Jeroudi, a 45-year-old Syrian, told AFP as she awaited her flight to Dubai where she was meeting her relatives.

She said airport employees during Assad's rule "were condescending, but today they are very nice and welcomed us with a smile".

Syria's state news agency SANA also reported that "the first Syrian plane after liberation" took off yesterday heading to Sharjah carrying "145 Syrian passengers onboard".

Yesterday, Qatar Airways resumed flights to Damascus after nearly 13 years, with three weekly flights scheduled.

Fallouh confirmed that "the first incoming flight is a Qatar Airways plane".

Jordan's state-run Petra news agency said a Royal Jordanian test flight had also departed yesterday for Damascus quoting Civil Aviation official Haitham Misto.

The flight is "a message of support and solidarity" that "aims to assess the technical condition of Damascus International Airport" Misto said.

A Qatari official told AFP last month that Doha had offered the new Syrian authorities help in resuming operations at Damascus airport.

## Strong tremor kills 126 in Tibet

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performing CPR on an injured person and soldiers erecting temporary shelters.

The Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader who fled to India along with thousands of Tibetans in early 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule, said he was deeply saddened.

Chinese President Xi Jinping said all-out search and rescue efforts should be carried out to minimise casualties and to resettle affected people.

Villages in Tingri, where the average elevation is around 4,000-5,000 metres, reported strong shaking during the quake, which was followed more than 150 aftershocks with magnitudes of up to 4.4.

Crumpled shop fronts could

be seen in a video on social media showing the aftermath in the town of Lhatse, with debris spilling out onto the road.

Three townships and 27 villages lie within 20 km (12 miles) of the epicentre, with a total population of around 6,900, and more than 1,000 houses have been damaged, Xinhua reported.

Southwestern parts of China, Nepal and northern India are often hit by earthquakes caused by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates.

Since 1950, there have been 21 earthquakes of magnitude 6 or above in what is known as the Lhasa block, the largest of which was the 6.9-magnitude quake in Mainling in 2017, according to CCTV.

## Govt to speed up rice import to contain prices

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The price of coarse rice, which was Tk 50 to Tk 55 a kilogram a month ago, was Tk 54 to 58 yesterday, meaning the rice price increased 6.67 percent in the last month. It increased more than 14 percent in the last year, according to data from TCB.

Asked about the rice price increase, Ahmed said: "This is a transition time as paddy harvesting is going on and rice is entering different markets from the farmers. There is no problem on the supply side but there could be some problem in the supply chain. We are monitoring the market so that the difference between production cost and consumer level cost is not too much."

The government took the initiative to import food grain after the flood in August. As of Monday, 24,720

tonnes of rice was imported at the government level and 1.07 lakh tonnes at the private level.

The total stock of foodgrain was 12.22 lakh tonnes as of Monday, of which rice was 7.99 lakh tonnes.

Salehuddin urged the common people to be patient.

"Once, the price of onion hit Tk 200 per kg. Now, it is Tk 40 per kg. We also have to think about the farmers," he added.

Besides, at another meeting with rice traders, Commerce Adviser Sk. Bashir Uddin said the government is easing the rules for importing rice.

He made the remark in response to rice traders' demand for easing the rules of margin for opening letters of credit for rice import, according to a commerce ministry press release.