

Hamas open to long Gaza truce but not to disarming

Says official ahead of talks with peace mediators

AGENCIES

Hamas is open to a years-long truce with Israel in Gaza but is not willing to lay down its arms, an official said yesterday, as leaders of the Palestinian Islamist militant group met mediators in Cairo for ceasefire talks.

Sources close to the talks told Reuters Hamas hoped to build support among mediators for its offer, adding the group might agree to a five to seven-year truce in return for ending the war, allowing for the rebuilding of Gaza, the freeing of Palestinians jailed by Israel and the release of all hostages.

"The idea of a truce or its duration is not rejected by us, and we are ready to discuss it within the framework of negotiations. We are open to any serious proposals to end the war," said Taher Al-Nono, the media adviser for the Hamas



A woman mourns over the body of a child from the Al-Khour family in the yard of the Al-Shifa hospital after their house was hit by an Israeli strike in Gaza City's Sabra neighbourhood yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

said.

Hamas' founding charter calls for Israel's destruction, but it has signalled in the past that it might agree to a long-term truce in return for ending Israeli occupation.

Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Sharren Haskel downplayed chances this week for the new proposal to lead to a breakthrough unless Israel's core demands were met.

"The war could end tomorrow if Hamas laid the remaining 59 hostages and laid down its weapons," Haskel said in Jerusalem on Tuesday.

Israel resumed its offensive in Gaza

on March 18 after a January ceasefire collapsed, saying it would keep up pressure on Hamas until it frees the remaining hostages still held in the enclave. Up to 24 of them are believed to still be alive.

Israel has blocked all aid into Gaza and hundreds of thousands have been displaced as its forces have seized territories it has designated as a buffer zone. More than 2,000 Palestinians, many of them civilians, have been killed in Israeli strikes since, according to health authorities.

In Gaza City, in the territory's north, the civil defence agency said a strike on the

Al-Khour family home killed 10 people, with an estimated 20 more trapped in the debris.

Umm Walid al-Khour, who survived the attack, said that "everyone was sleeping with their children" when the strike hit.

"The house collapsed on top of us," she told AFP.

"Those who survived cried for help but nobody came... Most of the deceased were children."

Elsewhere in the city, three people were killed in Israeli shelling of a house in the Al-Shati refugee camp, civil defence official Mohammed al-Mughayyir said.

More strikes across the Gaza Strip killed four others.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

On Friday, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) -- one of the main providers of food aid in the Palestinian territory -- said it had "delivered its last remaining food stocks to hot meals kitchens in the Gaza Strip".

It said "these kitchens are expected to fully run out of food in the coming days".

Following the WFP warning, the World Health Organization's chief said medical supplies were also "running out" in Gaza while 16 WHO trucks wait to enter.

"This aid blockade must end. Lives depend on it", Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

Despite warnings from aid agencies and foreign governments, Israel has denied that there is hunger in Gaza and says blocking aid is meant to pressure Hamas into releasing hostages.

Since October 7 2023, the Israeli offensive has killed more than 51,400 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health officials.

Yunus pays last respect to Pope, attends his funeral with global leaders

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday attended the funeral of Pope Francis at St Peter's Square and paid his last tribute.

The chief adviser was greeted by senior officials of the Vatican as he entered St Peter's Basilica, where the mortal remains of the Pope lay in state, Chief Adviser's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder told UNB.

Prof Yunus stood in solemn silence in front of the coffin to pay his last respects to the late Pope Francis.

He then joined the two-hour-long funeral mass along with leaders of the world's more than 130 countries.

Ahead of the funeral and after the service, the Chief Adviser exchanged greetings with some of the world leaders, including the UN Secretary General António Guterres, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, EU President Ursula von der Leyen, former US president Joe Biden, and President of Finland Alexander Stubb.

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'No reason to assume I'll will join the new political party'

Says Adviser Asif Mahmud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid growing speculation about his political future, Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain yesterday said he was yet to choose any party to join.

"No decision has been made on my part yet," Asif said while speaking to reporters during a visit to the Palli Daridro Bimochon Foundation (PDBF) exam centres at the Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University.

"Since we led the July uprising from the front, the people expect us to work for the country for a long time. But the time has not come yet to decide which party to join. It's also uncertain when I'll join," he added.

When asked about the possibility of joining the newly formed National Citizen Party, Asif said, "There is no



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The world bids farewell

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into a tomb set inside an alcove, according to images released by the Vatican.

Fourteen white-gloved pallbearers carried the coffin into the church, as children placed baskets of flowers at the altar and a choir sang prayers.

The marble tomb is inscribed with just one

fighter jets on standby and snipers positioned on the roofs surrounding the tiny city-state.

Red-robed cardinals and purple-hatted bishops sat on one side of the altar in St Peter's Square during the funeral, with world dignitaries sitting opposite.

In front of the altar lay the pope's simple cypress

Israel -- angered by Francis's criticism of its war in Gaza -- sent only its Holy See ambassador. China, which does not have formal relations with the Vatican, did not send any representatives.

Francis died of a stroke and heart failure less than a month after he left the hospital where he had



Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus arrives at St Peter's Square to attend the funeral Mass of Pope Francis at the Vatican yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

word: "Franciscus", his papal name in Latin.

Trump was among more than 50 heads of state at the funeral. He met several world leaders in a corner of the St Peter's basilica before, notably Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, in their first face-to-face meeting since their Oval Office clash in February.

Francis, who died on Monday aged 88, was "a pope among the people, with an open heart", who strove for a more compassionate, open-minded Catholic Church, said Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, who led the service.

There was applause from the masses gathered under bright blue skies as he hailed the pope's "conviction that the Church is a home for all, a home with its doors always open".

Francis sought to steer the Church into a more inclusive direction during his 12-year-long papacy, and his death prompted a global outpouring of emotion.

Italian and Vatican authorities mounted a major security operation for the ceremony, with

coffin, inlaid with a pale cross.

The funeral set off nine days of official Vatican mourning for Francis, who took over following the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in 2013.

After the mourning, cardinals aged under 80 will elect a new pope from among their number.

Many of Francis's reforms angered traditionalists, while his criticism of injustices, from the treatment of migrants to the damage wrought by global warming, riled many world leaders.

Yet the former archbishop of Buenos Aires's compassion and charisma earned him global affection and respect.

Trump's administration drew the pontiff's ire for its mass deportation of migrants, but the president has paid tribute to "a good man" who "loved the world".

Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden also attended the funeral, alongside UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, Germany's Olaf Scholz, Italy's Giorgia Meloni, and Lebanon's Joseph Aoun.

battled pneumonia for five weeks.

The Church's 266th pope loved nothing more than being among his flock, taking selfies with the faithful and kissing babies, and made it his mission to visit the peripheries, rather than mainstream centres of Catholicism.

His last public act, the day before his death, was an Easter Sunday blessing to the world, ending his papacy as he had begun it -- with an appeal to protect the "vulnerable, the marginalised and migrants".

Francis's admirers credit him with transforming perceptions of the Church and helping revive the faith following decades of clerical sex abuse scandals.

He was considered a radical by some for allowing divorced and remarried believers to receive communion, approving the baptism of transgender believers and blessings for same-sex couples, and refusing to judge gay Catholics.

But he also stuck with some centuries-old dogma, notably holding firm on the Church's opposition to abortion.

Bangladesh races to expand air cargo capacity

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freighter flights per week.

"India's decision is a wake-up call. We now have an opportunity to become more self-reliant," Alamgir said.

Mohammad Ibrahim Khalil, public relations officer at the airport, said Chattogram's cargo station, capable of handling 250 tonnes for imports and 20 tonnes for exports, had remained largely unused since the suspension of import cargo flights two years ago.

Industry stakeholders have welcomed the move, but stressed that long-term success would depend on comprehensive infrastructure improvements and cost competitiveness.

"This service should not operate on an ad hoc basis. Full facilities, including screening equipment and scanning machinery for export shipments, must be installed so that exporters feel encouraged to use the airport regularly," said Kabir Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association (BAFFA). He noted that Sylhet's cargo infrastructure

had remained largely underutilised until now.

Ahmed said the success of the initiative would also hinge on cost. If regular flights from Sylhet to Europe could maintain rates between \$2.6 and \$2.7 per kilogram, air shipment would be attractive for exporters, he said. For chartered flights, a rate of around \$3.5 per kilogram would still be competitive, he added.

Ahmed cautioned that the government should open cargo services at Sylhet and Chattogram airports to all exporters, rather than prioritising shipments for specific companies.

COST DIFFERENTIALS

The urgency reflects the scale of the disruption. Freight forwarding industry estimates indicate that about 600 tonnes, or roughly 18 percent of Bangladesh's weekly garment air exports during lean seasons, were routed through Indian airports before the ban. The Indian route, which gained prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic, offered faster lead times and lower costs compared to shipping directly out of

Dhaka.

Cost differentials were substantial. Even after factoring in overland transport costs, shipping garments to Europe via India had cost about \$2.6 per kilogram, compared to \$2.9-\$3.2 per kilogram through Dhaka airport during off-peak periods and up to \$4.5 during peak season, according to freight forwarders. Major buyers such as Inditex, which maintains a distribution hub in Delhi, had increasingly shifted shipments to India to meet tight delivery schedules.

By contrast, HSIA has long struggled with capacity and operational inefficiencies. Its cargo village, designed to handle 300 tonnes a day, regularly processes more than 800 tonnes in off-peak periods and up to 1,200 tonnes during peak seasons. Reports of cargo being left exposed to the elements, coupled with high ground-handling fees -- 29 cents per kilogram in Dhaka compared to just five cents at Delhi airport -- have compounded frustrations among exporters.

Between January 2024 and March 2025,

Bangladesh's garment exporters shipped more than 34,900 tonnes of apparel worth \$462.34 million through Indian airports to 36 countries, according to data from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Bangladesh's air cargo exports through India over the 15-month period included a range of products such as blouses, trousers, T-shirts, and baby garments. Key markets included the US, Germany, France, Japan, and South Korea, along with non-EU destinations such as the United Arab Emirates, Australia, Canada, South Africa, and Chile.

Now, CAAB and Biman are jointly reviewing civil aviation tariffs and ground-handling charges to improve competitiveness. "We expect to announce reduced handling charges very soon," Bhuiyan said, noting that the government plans to form a task force led by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism to coordinate reforms.

Longer-term hopes are pinned on the much-delayed third terminal at HSIA, which is expected to open early next year.

Once operational, the terminal is projected to raise Dhaka's export cargo capacity from 200,000 tonnes to 546,000 tonnes annually, supported by a new 36,000-square-metre cargo zone.

Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman said the government moved to expand shipment facilities at Sylhet and Chattogram airports to serve a wider range of exporters.

Rahman acknowledged that without substantial reductions in ground-handling charges at HSIA, it would be difficult to achieve competitive rates at other airports. "The government will substantially cut ground-handling charges and lower aircraft refuelling costs to reduce operational expenses. Overall logistics costs for air cargo shipment will fall significantly," he said.

The expansion is seen as critical for Bangladesh's \$40 billion garment export sector, which accounts for around 85 percent of total exports and depends heavily on efficient logistics to meet delivery deadlines in Europe, the US and beyond.

Jamaat for two-term cap on PM's tenure

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appointments to constitutional bodies, but demanded changes in its composition.

According to the commission's proposal, the NCC would include the president and the chief justice.

However, Jamaat argued that since the president and the chief justice are responsible for making crucial decisions during times of national crisis, they should not be included in the NCC.

Regarding the electoral system, Taher said the party proposed adopting the proportional representation system, where seats in the parliament would be allocated based on the proportion of votes received by each party.

The system would curb election-related corruption, vote rigging and uncontested elections across the country, Taher said.

Jamaat also agreed with the proposal for a bicameral parliament.

However, there were discussions on whether the PM, the leader of the house and the party chief should be the same person. No specific position was finalised; it would be discussed in the next meeting.

Yesterday's dialogue focused solely on constitutional matters, but the process of amending the constitution was not discussed, Taher said.

Jamaat presented some proposals for the commission's consideration, while discussions on other issues remained incomplete and would continue at a later date.

In his opening speech, Taher said his party would extend full support to constructive and pragmatic reforms aimed at ensuring the welfare of the country and its people.

"We agree that the nation wants to see a new Bangladesh. People are frustrated with Bangladesh even after 54 years of independence and they feel

deprived at least to some extent."

He called for inclusive dialogue to make the reform process more effective and sustainable.

"We hope the new opportunity before us will not be wasted like before. We must tread cautiously and, if necessary, act firmly. We must work to correct the fundamental issues," he said, adding that Jamaat envisions a "corruption-free Bangladesh".

Taher reaffirmed Jamaat's "strong commitment" to Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty.

"We do not fear the red eyes [threats] of any foreign powers. We will not allow interference in our independence."

Referring to the consequences of power without elections, he said the country has "plunged into chaos".

"We do not want a repetition of this. We want transparent and fair elections, and we will fully

cooperate to that end," Taher added.

The opening for reforms must not be missed under any circumstances, said Ali Riaz, vice chairman of the National Consensus Commission.

"We are at a historic moment. We owe a debt to the brave martyrs who have created this opportunity for us," he said in his introductory speech.

Riaz said they are keen to reach a national consensus quickly.

The commission -- which includes Safar Raj Hossain, Emdadul Haque, Badiul Alam Majumdar, Iftekharuzzaman and Chief Adviser's Special Assistant Monir Haider -- opened talks with political parties on March 20, aiming to build a consensus on the reform initiatives undertaken by the interim government.

The commission has already held talks with 16 political parties, including the BNP and the National Citizen Party.

Six killed as autorickshaw, pickup collide

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Deceased Nurun Nahar's husband, Abdur Rahim, told The Daily Star, "This [Saturday] morning, she [Nurun Nahar] went to Bethunia market for groceries. When she was returning home in a CNG [autorickshaw], a pick-up hit them. Three people in the vehicle, including my wife, were killed on the spot."

The bodies were sent to Rangamati General Hospital morgue for autopsy, said police.

Rangamati Additional Superintendent of Police Mohammad Jahedul Islam said, "We visited the scene. Legal action will be taken in this regard. The driver of the pickup has fled."