

## ROHINGYA GENOCIDE ICJ begins hearings on case today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The International Court of Justice will today begin public hearings in the case concerning Rohingya genocide, bringing renewed hope of ending decades-long suffering of the ethnic people denied of citizenship.

The public hearings at the ICJ in The Hague, Netherlands, will continue until January 29, according to a press statement.

"The hearings will be devoted to the merits of the case and will include the examination of witnesses and an expert called by the parties," it said.

"Seeing Gambia's landmark case against Myanmar finally enter the merits phase delivers renewed hope to Rohingya that our decades-long suffering may finally end," said Wai Wai Nu, founder and executive director of the Women's Peace Network, in a joint statement issued by the Human Rights Watch.

"Amid ongoing violations against the Rohingya, the world must stand firm in the pursuit of justice and a path toward ending impunity in

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## Avalanches claim three lives in French Alps

AFP, Lyon

Two separate avalanches claimed the lives of three off-piste skiers in the French Alps Saturday, local officials said.

In one incident, two French off-piste skiers died after being buried by an avalanche at Val d'Isere, the resort's tourism office said. The two men were buried under 2.5 metres of snow.

Members of their group had raised the alarm, but rescuers were unable to revive them after finally reaching them, said a statement.

## CA assures

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with body-worn cameras in polling centres considered "risky", and that a central app will be monitoring the footage. "This will allow authorities to monitor activities from Dhaka and all districts and upazilas. All centres will also have CCTVs so that those causing trouble can be identified. Besides, the army will remain deployed as a rapid response striking force."

Yunus also acknowledged at the meeting that an EU delegation observing the polls was a major step for Bangladesh's journey towards a democratic transition.

Following the meeting, CA Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam told journalists that the chief adviser told the delegation that women and young people had expressed a strong interest in voting. The CA said he expects a good voter turnout.

Shafiqul added that there was no discussion about the Awami League or its participation in the polls.

He said the interim government is campaigning for a "Yes" vote in the referendum, adding that it sought opinions from senior legal experts on whether it can do so. "They said there was no legal barrier in doing so."

The press secretary claimed that the law-and-order situation is now well under control. "A few incidents have occurred, but both the Election Commission and the government believe the overall situation remains stable and satisfactory."

He said law enforcement agencies successfully handled situations surrounding the funeral of Sharif Osman Hadi, the return of Tarique Rahman to the country, and the funeral of Khaleda Zia. He mentioned that the law enforcers also played an active role in arresting those responsible for several high-profile incidents, including the killing of Saeedulhaq Dal leader Azaizur Rahman Musabbir.

"Everyone is enjoying all the necessary facilities related to the election. Both small and large parties are getting a level playing field, and all will continue to enjoy equal opportunities even after the official election campaign begins. The government is not giving any extra advantage to any party."

Responding to a reporter's question regarding fake news, Shafiqul said the CA Office regularly issues alerts from its official page in this regard. "Coordinated efforts are underway involving government bodies, including the ICT Division and BRTC. We believe everyone, including the media, has a responsibility in this regard."

He urged newspapers and all media outlets to conduct their own fact-checking and help prevent the spread of false and fake information ahead of the election.

Noting that around 120 million people are likely Facebook users and about 60 million use TikTok, Shafiqul said it takes several hours to intervene on even one such large platform.

He also expressed frustration over not receiving timely feedback from the platforms.



Supporters march in Caracas on Saturday calling for the release of Venezuela's deposed President Nicolás Maduro, after he and his wife, Cilia Flores, were captured by US forces during strikes on Venezuela.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'Over 500' killed in Iran anti-regime unrest

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every province in Iran, according to the BBC and other international media. Protesters are now calling for an end to the clerical rule of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, speaking in parliament yesterday, warned against "a miscalculation".

"Let us be clear in the case of an attack on Iran, the occupied territories (Israel) as well as all US bases and ships will be our legitimate target," said Qalibaf, a former commander in Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards.

Earlier, Iran Human Rights, a Norway-based NGO, said at least 192 people have been killed in two weeks of protests. It said the toll could be much higher as a days-long internet blackout hampered verification, but did not break down the figures between protesters and security forces.

Meanwhile, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency yesterday reported that 109 security personnel had been killed in the protests across the country.

Staff at several hospitals told the BBC they have been overwhelmed with the injured and dead, with BBC Persian verifying 70 bodies brought to one hospital in Rasht city on Friday night and a health worker reporting around 38 people dying at a Tehran hospital.

**More than 100 security forces' killed**

**Iran Speaker warns US against 'miscalculation'**

**President accuses US, Israel of fomenting 'riots'**

**Israel on 'high alert' for possible US intervention**

**Info flow scarce as internet blackout continues**

face the death penalty.

Speaking to state broadcaster IRIB, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian yesterday said that the US and Israel want to "sow chaos and disorder" in Iran by ordering "riots", and called

**"Iran is looking at FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The USA stands ready to help!!!"**  
US President Donald Trump

upon Iranians to distance themselves from "rioters and terrorists".

On Saturday, Reza Pahlavi, the US-based son of Iran's ousted shah, urged Iranians to stage more targeted protests with the aim of taking and then holding city centres. He also said he was "preparing to return to my homeland" on a day he believed was "very near".

However, analysts doubt how much support the shah still carries in Iran and say the protests appear to be spontaneous and targeted at "dictator Khamenei", whom they blame for their economic woes.

Khamenei has dismissed demonstrators as a "bunch of vandals" seeking to "please" Trump.

Three Israeli sources, who were present for Israeli security consultations over the weekend, said Israel was on a high-alert footing, but did not elaborate on what that meant.

An Israeli government spokesperson declined to comment. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Israel and Iran fought a 12-day war in June last year, in which the US joined Israel in launching airstrikes. Iran retaliated for those US strikes by firing missiles at an American air base in Qatar.

The flow of information from Iran has been hampered by an internet blackout imposed by the authorities since Thursday. Internet monitoring watchdog Netblocks reported national connectivity levels remained about 1 percent of the norm.

Video verified by AFP showed large crowds taking to the streets in new protests on Saturday night in several Iranian cities, including Tehran and Mashhad in the east, where images showed vehicles set on fire.

A social media video posted on Saturday showed large crowds gathered in Tehran's Pukh neighbourhood at night, drumming rhythmically on the railings of a bridge or other metal objects in an

apparent sign of protest. Reuters verified the location.

Iranian state TV broadcast funeral processes in western Iranian cities such as Gachsaran and Yasuj for members of the security forces killed in the protests.

The Revolutionary Guards on Saturday accused "terrorists" of attacking security facilities. On the same day, Iranian army said in a statement that it would defend the country's "national interests" as it accused Israel and "hostile terrorist groups" of seeking to "undermine the country's public security".

Iran's rulers have quelled previous bouts of unrest, most recently in 2022 over the death in custody of a woman accused of violating dress codes.

Trump, posting on social media on Saturday, said: "Iran is looking at

**"Let us be clear: in the case of an attack on Iran, the occupied territories (Israel) as well as all US bases and ships will be our legitimate target."**  
Iranian Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf

FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The USA stands ready to help!!!"

His comments came a day after he said Iran was in "big trouble" and again warned that he could order strikes.

"That doesn't mean boots on the ground, but it means hitting them very, very hard - where it hurts," the US president said.

In a phone call on Saturday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio discussed the possibility of US intervention in Iran, according to an Israeli source who was present for the conversation.

A US official confirmed the two men spoke, but did not say what topics they discussed.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar yesterday said that Israel supports the Iranian people in what he described as their "struggle for freedom".

A senior US intelligence official on Saturday described the situation in Iran as an "endurance game". The opposition was trying to keep up pressure until key government figures either flee or switch sides, while the authorities were trying to sow enough fear to clear the streets without giving the United States justification to intervene, the official said.

I announced a meeting on December 24 via the executive committee's WhatsApp group to discuss election strategy as well as the alliance. Around 40 members attended, but many who opposed forging the alliance were absent at the meeting.

"As a result, all those present except two or three opined in favour of the alliance. The decision was implemented by showing a majority among those present," said a leader familiar with the proceedings.

Another leader claimed that the path to the alliance became easier for the top leadership following the death of Ingilab Monchon spokesperson Sharif Osman Hadi.

Former NCP ICT cell head Farhad Alam Bhuiyan said, "I was not associated with any political party before. But after the mass uprising, I joined the NCP and contributed to their IT for one and a half years."

"But when I saw the process of aligning with the leadership of Jamaat,

I immediately opposed it through a note of dissent and was the first to resign. I did not want to be a part of the so-called politics."

Regarding the pressure to return, Farhad said, "The party top leaders have contacted me and urged me to return. However, I have made it clear that I will not return unless the NCP severs ties with Jamaat."

Sources said the NCP had scheduled an internal meeting with the leaders who had resigned to discuss their reinstatement. However, within minutes of the schedule being set, the announcement leaked outside party circles. As a result, the meeting was abruptly cancelled.

The party leadership, however, said the door remains open for the leaders to return.

NCP, founded in February last year by frontline activists of the July uprising, has seen many of its leaders part ways over various issues.

## Ctg microbus driver, Pathao rider killed Police probe separate killings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A microbus driver and a Pathao motorcycle rider were stabbed to death in separate incidents in Chattogram early yesterday, sparking protests and raising concerns over public safety in the district.

The microbus driver, identified as Mahbub Alam, 35, of the Azimpura area under Ward 3 of Hathazari municipality, was attacked around 4:00am at the yard of a building known as Alao Hall in the Kolabagan area.

Jahidur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Hathazari Model Police Station, said a group of assailants stabbed Mahbub and fled the scene.

Locals rushed him to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), but he died on the way.

Initially, the body was taken to the victim's house.

Police later visited the residence, prepared an inquest report and sent the body to the CMCH morgue for autopsy, the OC said.

Following the death, leaders and activists of the Microbus Drivers' Association staged a protest, demanding the immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of those involved in the killing.

They blocked the Chattogram-Rangamati road in the Kolatol area, disrupting vehicular movement for about 20 minutes. Police said traffic returned to normal after they intervened.

Preliminary investigation suggests that an altercation over a gambling-related dispute led to the murder, according to the law enforcers.

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## BB orders banks

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same, he added.

He said the letter from the CA's office also asked banks to provide funds to nongovernmental organisations campaigning to raise public awareness of the referendum.

"We will also provide support through the ABB. Banks will undertake many activities because it's complicated, and ordinary people need to understand it."

"As the ABB chairman, I will spend money here and carry out some activities," he added.

Earlier last week, the BB sent a letter instructing banks to put up banners at each branch to raise public awareness and encourage a 'Yes' vote in the upcoming referendum, said a managing director of a private commercial bank who attended the meeting.

A significant number of banks have already started campaigning at their branches.

When contacted, Arif Hossain Khan, executive director and spokesperson for the central bank, said he was not aware of the issue.

## Gas crisis fuels sufferings

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a brief flame appeared the next morning before the supply dropped again, making cooking impossible. The family managed to cook just one meal using a rice cooker.

With LPG cylinders both scarce and costly, Hojifa said he was forced to buy breakfast and dinner from outside almost every day.

The long queues at eateries made the situation even more difficult, as he struggled to find time to wait in line between office hours and returning home exhausted at night. "I have lived in Kathalbagan since 2018, and this is the first time I am facing such a severe problem. I had to throw away half-cooked rice," said Tamim Hasan, who gets a scanty gas supply for a couple of hours early in the morning.

West Dhamondi resident Fahim Reza Shovon said his household's two-burner pipeline gas stove has remained cold since the night of January 7.

Gas returned briefly at low pressure around 10:00pm on January 8. Some supply resumed the following morning but pressure remained weak before stopping again from Saturday morning.

As the outages persisted, his wife began urging him to buy an electric stove.

"The past few days have been mentally distressing. My salary is

previously dependent on trickling gas -- has not been possible for days. "Even during the usual late-night window, there has been no gas at all. The stove is completely shut," she added.

Mogbazar resident Rafsan Jani has been unable to refill his 45 kg LPG cylinder for three days now and is barely getting by with the little gas left.

The gas distributor, Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution PLC, has attributed the ongoing severe shortage to damage to a major pipeline beneath the Turag River and a burst valve in the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area, incidents that further reduced pressure in an already strained distribution network and disrupted supply across large parts of the capital.

Data from Petrobangla show that the capital's average daily gas supply has declined compared with previous years. Between January 1 and 10, the average supply fell from 2,826 million cubic feet per day (mmcf/d) in 2022 to 2,596 mmcf/d in 2026.

Although the import of liquefied natural gas -- which needs to be blended with the local gas production -- have increased over the years, a drop in local production has kept overall supply constrained, limiting pipeline distribution to households.

However, Fouzul Kabir Khan,



An LPG shop hangs a notice that says "sale is suspended due to no gas supply". The photo was taken in Bosila area of Keraniganj yesterday.

limited and most of it goes toward rent and daily expenses. The additional cost of buying an electric stove would be a heavy burden," Shovon added.

Khilgaon resident Sadekun Nahar Dilruba said her household depends on LPG cylinders, which are close to running out.

At present, a 12-kg cylinder is selling for Tk 2,400-2,50