

Poland signs deals for 'Europe's most modern' anti-drone system

AFP, Warsaw

Poland yesterday signed contracts worth over four billion dollars for "the most modern anti-drone system in Europe" to protect its eastern border, Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced.

Poland, which lies on both Nato and the EU's eastern flank, has in recent years invested heavily to modernise its military following fears of a Russian threat.

"This is a historic moment ... we are truly at an absolute turning point in the effective, high-performance defence of Poland's, Europe's, and Nato's eastern border," Tusk said.

He added that Poland's borders will be "the best protected in Europe".

The cost "will be close" to 3.6 billion euros reported by Polish media earlier, Defence Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz confirmed.

The system, named "San", will include 18 anti-drone batteries, 52 firing platoons, 18 command platoons and around 700 vehicles and will be fully operational in two years, he added.

The contracts signed cover Polish public and private companies as well as Norway's Kongsberg.

In a statement released yesterday, the Scandinavian group said it will supply the Polish army with 18 CUAS batteries worth approximately 1.4 billion euros.

Creating an anti-drone system became an urgent necessity for Poland after Warsaw and its Nato allies had to scramble fighter jets in September when about 20 Russian drones violated Polish airspace.

San will complement a multi-layer air defence system being developed in Poland, which includes the "Wista" programme with US medium-range Patriot systems, the "Narew" involving British short-range surface-to-air missiles and the so-called very short-range Pilica and Pilica+ programs.

Boy killed in Brazil shark attack

AFP, Brasilia

A 13-year-old boy was killed on Thursday after he was mauled by a shark at a beach on Brazil's eastern coast, the state government said in a statement.

The attack happened off the coast of Chifre beach in Brazil's tourist hotspot Pernambuco, the State Committee for Monitoring Shark Incidents (CEMIT) said.

The boy was taken to hospital but "did not survive his injuries," CEMIT added.

Dozens of beaches along the turquoise coastlines of Pernambuco have been issued with shark warnings, authorities said, adding that Chifre beach had issued four such signs for beachgoers.

Nonetheless, CEMIT said it would beef up shark monitoring following the boy's death and bring back a suspended program to track the creatures with microchips.

People will show 'red card'

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where "the king's son becomes king, and the minister's son becomes minister."

Shafiqur made the remarks while addressing a campaign rally as the chief guest at Feni Government Pilot High School ground yesterday.

Hinting at the BNP and incidents of political violence across the country, he said, "We are seeing hot-headed behaviour in various places. If you lose your cool in winter, what will you do in the month of Chaira [summer]? Keep your head cool. Show some respect to the July fighters... Respect those who stood firm before bullets, risking their lives. If you can show that, there will be no room for hot-headedness."

From the rally, Shafiqur also promised that if the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance comes to power, it will hold talks with India to resolve Feni's flooding problem.

"We respect them and hope they will respect us as well. Through fruitful dialogue, we will find a peaceful solution, InshaAllah."

Shafiqur also spoke about Abrar Fahad, a Buet student beaten to death by Chhatra League activists on October 6, 2019, for criticising several Bangladesh-India agreements, including a water-sharing understanding involving the Feni River.

"He (Abrar Fahad) spoke for you and the country. That is why those who are allies and agents of hegemony could not tolerate him," he said.

The Jamaat chief vowed

to replace hereditary politics with meritocracy.

"Just because someone is born in a royal family does not mean he will become king, and being born in a minister's family does not mean he will become minister. Only those with merit will be selected for such responsibilities."

"We want a Bangladesh where even the child of a rickshaw-puller, through the development of his or her talent, can one day become the prime minister. That is the Bangladesh we want to build."

Around 12:15pm, Shafiqur flew by helicopter from Feni to Noakhali, where he joined another rally organised by the 11-party alliance at Zila School ground.

There, hinting at the BNP, he said, "Those in whose hands the people are not safe even before coming to power, and who are involved in extortion and other crimes, will make people even more insecure once they take office."

Reiterating his pledge to build a corruption- and extortion-free Bangladesh, he added, "We do not want the misrule of the last 15 and a half years to return to Bangladesh. That is why there will be two votes on the 12th. The first vote is for reforms, where 'yes' stands for freedom, 'no' for slavery."

Shafiqur also promised that if elected, the 11-party alliance would upgrade Noakhali to a division, elevate Noakhali town to a city corporation, and take measures to prevent river erosion in Hatiya, Companiganj, and

Only 78 women in polls, a third with family

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Of the 78 women candidates, 61 have been nominated by 30 political parties, while 17 are independents.

Election Commission data shows that women with family or marital ties to prominent political figures consistently fare better than those without such connections.

"The electoral process in Bangladesh remains deeply male-dominated," said Jesmin Tuli, former additional secretary of the Election Commission and a member of the Electoral Reform Commission.

"In Bangladesh, most women leaders or members of parliament have risen through family influence. The number of women who have struggled up from the grassroots is very small. Very few female leaders have gradually built themselves up from university life through fieldwork," she told The Daily Star.

"Our social and family structures are also responsible. Parents in middle-class families generally do not want their daughters to enter politics. Politics has not yet become safe for women; in fact, it remains unsafe," she added.

The Representation of the People Order (RPO), 1972, requires political parties to reserve at least 33 percent of committee posts for women, including at the central level. Yet almost all parties have failed to meet this obligation. In 2021, the Election Commission extended the deadline to 2030.

At least 30 parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Islami Front, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Jonotar Dal, Bangladesh Sangskritik Mukti Jote, Bangladesh Congress, Jatiya Party (JP), Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, Bangladesh Nationalist Front and Bangladesh Jasad, have fielded only male candidates.

Asked why Jamaat did not nominate any women, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said the party follows a grassroots-based selection process. While men are guided by

party instructions, women are given the freedom to decide whether to contest, considering family and personal circumstances.

"We haven't fielded [women candidates] this time; Inshallah, we'll do it the next time," he said, adding that some of the other parties in the Jamaat-led alliance have nominated women.

The BNP, meanwhile, nominated 10 women. At a roundtable titled "Women Leadership in Politics: Crisis and Possible", BNP Standing Committee Member Selima Rahman said political parties generally do not treat women seriously when it comes to nominations.

"Parties consider that women whose father or brother or husband is a politician have more chance of winning. It is true that not a single women leader who comes from the grassroots level has been nominated by the party," she said at the event, jointly organised by the party, the BNP, and the Forum for Women's Political Rights, and Democratic Bangladesh on January 28.

Jesmin Tuli echoed this view, noting that parties prioritise winning seats above all else.

"Women usually do not have the financial resources and muscle power. So parties prefer men. Women who enter politics through the support of their fathers or brothers are comparatively advantaged. Their families already have workers and networks. This ready-made base increases their chances of winning and makes survival in politics easier," she said.

FAMILY LINK
All 10 BNP women candidates have direct family or marital ties to senior party figures.

Organising Secretary Shama Obaid is contesting Faridpur-2. She is the daughter of former BNP secretary general and minister KM Obaidur Rahman.

Nayab Yusuf, joint general secretary of Jatiyatabdil Mohila Dal, is running in Faridpur-3. She is the daughter of former minister and BNP vice-chairman Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf.

Farzana Sharmin of Natore-1, a special assistant

to BNP's Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee, is the daughter of Fazlur Rahman, a four-time BNP MP from the constituency.

Sabira Sultana Munni, contesting Jashore-2, is the widow of former BNP MP Nazmul Islam, who was abducted in Dhaka in 2011 and later found dead.

Israt Sultana Elen Bhutto of Jhalokathi 2, who defeated Awami League heavyweight Amir Hossain Amu in 2001, is the widow of slain lawmaker Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

Nadira Akhter of Madaripur-1 is the widow of Shibchar upazila BNP president Mithu Chowdhury.

Afroza Khanam Rita of Manikganj-3 is the daughter of industrialist and former minister Harunur Rashid Khan Monno.

Sansila Jabrin Priyanka of Sherpur-1 is the daughter of district BNP General Secretary Hazrat Ali.

Tabsina Rushdir Luna of Sylhet-2 is the wife of former BNP lawmaker Ilias Ali, a missing victim of enforced disappearance.

Sanjida Islam Tulee of Dhaka-14 is the sister of BNP leader Sajedul Islam Sumon, a victim of enforced disappearance. She is the coordinator of Maayer Daak, a platform of families of enforced disappearance victims.

Among the 10 women candidates of Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist), Sima Dutta (Dhaka-7) is the wife of party leader Manash Dutta, while Taslima Akhter (Gazipur-1) is married to another party candidate, Masum Reza.

Gonosamhati Andolan nominated four women, including labour leader and photographer Taslima Akhter (Dhaka-12), the wife of party Chief Coordinator Zonayed Saki.

Party activists said that BSD's Sima and Gonosamhati's Taslima have been in politics since their student life.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal's Senior Vice-President Tania Rab (Lakshmpur-4) is the wife of party president ASM Rab.

Insaniyat Biplob Bangladesh nominated six women, including Sabina Khatun (Chattogram-10), wife of party leader Emdadul

Haq.

Jatiya Party fielded six women, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal five, Gono Odhikar Parishad three, and Gono Forum, National Citizen Party and Revolutionary Workers Party two each.

Among independent candidates, Rumeen Farhana (Brahmanbaria-2) is the daughter of late Democratic League leader Oli Ahad.

Samira Azim (Cumilla-9) entered politics after the death of her father, former MP Anwar-ul Azim.

Akhter Sultana (Mymensingh-6) is the wife of ex-BNP MP Shamsuddin Ahmed.

Hasina Khan Chowdhury (Mymensingh-9) is married to former BNP MP Khurram Khan Chowdhury.

Antara Selima Huda (Dhaka-1) is the daughter of former minister Nazmul Huda.

A LONG, UNEVEN HISTORY

According to EC records, no women were elected in the first two parliamentary polls in 1973 and 1979. Five were elected in 1986 and four in 1988.

In 1991, 40 women contested and four won. In June 1996, 30 women ran and five were elected. In 2001, 38 contested and six won. In 2008, 59 women ran and 19 were elected. In 2014, 29 contested and 18 won. In 2018, 69 women contested and 22 won. In 2024, 99 women ran and 20 were elected.

The 2014 and 2024 elections were widely criticised as one-sided, with most opposition parties boycotting the polls and allegations of dummy candidates. The 2018 election, though contested, was marred by claims of ballot stuffing, intimidation and institutional failure.

Across decades, the pattern remains unchanged: women enter politics, but rarely on their own terms — not as self-made actors, but as inheritors of political lineage, stepping into a system still guarded by men, where power is passed down like an heirloom rather than earned in the field.

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AERIAL ATTACKS

170 civilians killed during Myanmar polls Says UN rights office

AFP, Geneva

At least 170 civilians were killed in more than 400 military air strikes conducted in Myanmar during nearly two months surrounding its widely-criticised elections, the United Nations said yesterday.

The UN rights office said "credible sources" had verified that at least 170 civilians were killed in some 408 military aerial attacks reported by open sources during the voting period — between December 2025 and January 2026.

James Rodehaver, head of the rights office's Myanmar team, warned that the actual numbers might be higher.

Speaking from Bangkok, he told reporters in Geneva that the verification covered a period from December to late last week, from the beginning of the election campaign and up until the three phases of voting were nearly complete.

But he warned that "because of the way in which communications are cut off and because of, frankly, the fear of individuals in some of these locations to speak to us, it sometimes takes a lot longer to get that information".

His comments came amid global outrage over Myanmar's month-long vote that democracy watchdogs dismissed as a rebranding of army rule, five years after a coup that ousted popular democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi.

UN rights chief Volker Turk warned in a statement yesterday that "the profound and widespread despair inflicted on the people of Myanmar" since the 2021 coup "has only deepened with the recent election staged by the military".

He pointed out that "many people chose either to vote or not to vote purely out of fear, flatly at odds with their internationally guaranteed civil and political rights — and with ripple effects on their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights".

"The conflict and insecurity continued unabated in large parts of the country. Opposition candidates and some ethnic groups were excluded," he said.

His office pointed out that the elections were held in only 263 of 330 townships, and often exclusively in urban centres under military control, and limited in conflict areas.

"As a result, large segments of the population, especially the displaced and minorities, such as the ethnic Rohingya, were excluded," it pointed out.

Turk decried that five years of military rule in Myanmar had been "characterised by repression of political dissent, mass arbitrary arrests, arbitrary conscription, widespread surveillance and limitation of civic space".

"Now, the military is seeking to entrench its rule-by-violence after forcing people to the ballot box," he said. "This couldn't be further from civilian rule."

Panama court annuls HK firm's canal port concession

AFP, Panama City

Panama's Supreme Court annulled on Thursday the concession allowing Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison to operate ports at the Panama Canal, a ruling that undermines Chinese sway over the waterway.

As Beijing and Washington vie for global influence, container ports have become a prized currency — especially those situated in geopolitically strategic locations such as the Panama Canal.

Just days into US President Donald Trump's second term, he threatened to take back the canal — built by the United States and handed to Panama in 1999 — claiming Beijing was effectively "operating" it.

Panama has rejected the claim that China had de facto control over the canal, which handles 40 percent of US container traffic, while taking actions to appease Trump.

The firm has sought to sell its Panama Canal ports to a consortium led by US asset manager BlackRock. The status of that proposal is unclear following the court ruling.

On Thursday the Supreme Court found the laws which allowed CK Hutchison Holdings to operate two of the five ports of the canal "unconstitutional," according to a court statement.

The CK Hutchison subsidiary concerned by the ruling rejected the judgement, saying that it "lacks legal basis".

The ruling "jeopardizes not only PPC (Panama Ports Company) and its contract, but also the well-being and stability of thousands of Panamanian families who depend directly and indirectly on port activity," it said.

Beijing, meanwhile, yesterday vowed to "take all necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies".

The United States and China are the canal's top users, with around five percent of global maritime trade transiting from there.

Panama Ports Company — a CK Hutchison Holdings subsidiary — manages the ports of Cristobal on the canal's Atlantic entrance and Balboa on the Pacific side.

The concession was automatically renewed in 2021 for another 25 years.

BNP-Jamaat rule