

INTERNATIONAL

Iran warns of 'deep distrust' with US

Adviser to Khamenei to visit Oman today after US-Iran talks

AGENCIES

Iran still holds "deep distrust" for the United States despite agreeing to return to talks on its disputed nuclear programme, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned yesterday.

"We are looking for serious negotiations to achieve a result, provided the other side shows the same seriousness and is also ready for constructive negotiations," the minister said.

"Unfortunately, a deep mistrust persists due to the behaviour of the United States in recent years," he said, addressing ambassadors at a diplomatic gathering in Tehran.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei yesterday called on his compatriots to show "resolve" ahead of the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution this week.

Since the revolution, "foreign powers have always sought to restore the previous situation", Ali Khamenei said, referring to the period when Iran was under the rule of Shah Reza Pahlavi.

Ali Larijani, an adviser to Khamenei and secretary of its national security council, will visit Oman today following indirect US-Iranian talks there, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported.

US and Iranian diplomats engaged through Omani mediation in the Gulf state last week in an effort to revive diplomacy.



Pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrate in Sydney, Australia yesterday against Israeli President Isaac Herzog's visit. The visit has attracted the ire of some people in Australia, who accuse Herzog of being complicit in civilian deaths in Gaza. Pro-Palestine groups have organised protests in cities and towns across the country.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel moves to tighten West Bank control

Eight Muslim countries condemn new measures; Israeli gunfire kills four Palestinians in southern Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's security cabinet has approved a series of measures set to deepen Israeli control over the occupied West Bank, paving the way for further settlement expansion in the Palestinian territory.

The territory, which Israel has occupied since 1967, would form the largest part of any future Palestinian state but is seen by many on the religious right as Israeli land.

"The security cabinet today approved a series of decisions... fundamentally changing the legal and civil reality in Judea and Samaria," a statement said on



Sunday evening, using the biblical names for the West Bank.

The measures, announced by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz, include the removal of decades-old regulations barring Jewish

citizens from purchasing land in the West Bank, according to a joint statement by the two ministers.

Smotrich said the move aimed at "deepening our roots in all regions of the Land of Israel and burying the idea of a Palestinian state".

Saudi Arabia and seven other Muslim countries yesterday condemned the new Israeli measures to tighten control of the West Bank.

Meanwhile, Israel's military said it killed four suspected Palestinian men who attacked its troops as the armed men emerged from a tunnel in southern Gaza yesterday, calling the group's actions a "blatant violation" of the ceasefire.

Xi to visit US 'toward the end of the year': Trump

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump has said he will host Chinese leader Xi Jinping at the White House late this year, as the world's top two economies look to reset ties marred by a roiling trade war.

Trump made the comment in an interview with NBC News taped Wednesday — the same day he and Xi had a wide-ranging conversation about trade, Taiwan, Russia's war in Ukraine, and the situation in Iran.

Trump is expected to go to China in April, before Xi would then visit the United States.

Fuel situation in Cuba critical

Says Kremlin, accuses US of 'suffocating' the island

REUTERS, Moscow

The Kremlin said yesterday that the fuel situation in Cuba, which has unveiled a plan to protect essential services and ration fuel, was critical and that US attempts to "suffocate" the island's economy were causing many difficulties.

Cuba detailed its plans to navigate the deepening crisis on Friday as the communist-run government dug in its heels in defiance of a US effort to cut off oil supply to the Caribbean island after declaring Cuba "an unusual and extraordinary threat" to US national security.

"The situation in Cuba is indeed critical. We are aware of this. We are maintaining intensive contacts with our Cuban friends through diplomatic and other channels," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Russia is trying to restore its own battered ties with the United States as US President Donald Trump seeks to broker a deal to end its war in Ukraine.

Open to dialogue with China

Says Japan's PM Takaichi a day after winning election landslide

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said yesterday she is open to dialogue with China after sparking a row with Beijing in November with comments about Taiwan.

"Our nation is open to various dialogues with China. We already have exchanges of views. We will continue the exchanges of views. But we will deal with them in calm and appropriate ways," Takaichi told a news conference a day after winning an election landslide.

Takaichi said her landslide election win showed that the public recognises the urgent need for major policy reforms.

"We believe that the public has shown understanding and sympathy regarding our appeals concerning the urgent need for a major policy shift," Takaichi said.

Campaigning draws to a close

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The party also promised electoral reforms, curbing corruption and ensuring discrimination-free socio-economic development.

Jamaat vowed to build a state based on *insaf* (justice), envisioning a "new and prosperous Bangladesh" free from corruption, extortion and exploitation. NCP, born directly from the student-led uprising, promised to dismantle structural inequality, foreign dominance and systemic corruption.

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman and Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman toured dozens of districts, addressing rallies attended by tens of thousands and making area-wise development pledges.

On the final day, both intensified their efforts in the capital. Travelling in a red-green bus, Tarique attended eight rallies in Dhaka, starting from his constituency, Dhaka-17, where he said no party other than BNP had a clear plan, concrete programmes or the experience to govern, and reiterated a zero-tolerance stance on corruption and law and order.

Shafiqur began his last day with a rally in Dhaka-13, joined a mass procession in his constituency, Dhaka-15, and later held another rally in Dhaka-1. At one gathering, he urged party members to resist any attempt to hijack the election "through the back door".

NCP Convener Nahid Islam attended the Dhaka-13 rally alongside Shafiqur and went on to hold meetings and rallies at seven other locations in the city.

While the campaign period was largely peaceful, sporadic clashes between rival supporters were

reported in several districts, along with allegations of intimidation and breaches of the electoral code of conduct. At least one person was killed and several hundred were injured during in clashes during the 20-day campaign.

Although formal campaigning ends this morning, candidates are expected to continue outreach through social media. No public meeting or procession will be allowed in any constituency after this morning, and the restrictions will remain in force until 48 hours after voting ends, according to the Election Commission.

COUNTRYWIDE CAMPAIGN
Across the country, the final day saw similarly hectic scenes.

Bogura remained vibrant throughout the day, with a cycle rally held in support of Tarique, who is also contesting from Bogura-6.

In Chattogram, BNP Standing Committee member and Chattogram-11 candidate Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury urged voters at a press conference to remain vigilant against any election engineering.

In Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir called on voters to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War and the July 2024 uprising.

In Barishal's Mehendiganj upazila, IAB held its final rally at Freedom Fighters' Park, where its Ameer and Pir of Charmonai Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim reiterated its commitment to upholding ideology and Islam over power.

Large processions were reported from Sylhet and Sunamganj, where BNP and Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir held separate events,

causing traffic gridlock.

Sohel Chowdhury, former vice president of BNP's Sylhet District Unit, died of cardiac arrest while attending a campaign for the party's candidate in Sylhet-2.

In Mymensingh, mainly BNP and Jamaat candidates took to the streets with thousands of supporters, while voters expressed satisfaction over the absence of large-scale violence.

"It is a positive thing that no untoward incident took place here. We want such a peaceful situation to continue in the coming days," said Abul Hasan, a voter from Char Anandipur village in Mymensingh Sadar.

Similar reports of campaigning came from Chattogram, Pabna, Gopalganj, Bagerhat, Narayanganj and Munshiganj.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to the report.]

IAB commits

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leadership and policies.

Criticising Jamaat-e-Islami, Faizul Karim said the party had abandoned its earlier slogan of establishing Allah's law and honest governance. "Their manifesto contains no mention of Islam. So, anyone aspiring for Islam who votes for them will be deceived," he said.

Candidate Abul Khair pledged to address fishermen's problems if elected and promised to form an all-party development committee with representatives from across the political spectrum to advance local development.

BNP alone has plan, experience to govern

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Mazar Road in the Dhaka 8 constituency yesterday afternoon.

The BNP chief said it has now been proven that BNP can transform the fate of the people of Bangladesh. "If anyone can change the fate of this country, who can do it? If the reins of corruption are to be pulled tight in this country, who can do it?" he asked.

The crowd responded by shouting "BNP".

Tarique added that there would be no compromise on graft and law and order.

"Anyone who commits corruption is a corrupt person and does not belong to any party. Anyone who breaks the law and causes suffering to people cannot belong to any party; they are criminals. Therefore, the law will take its own course in their cases."

He also pledged several development initiatives in Dhaka 8, including playgrounds, expanded graveyard space, and measures to reduce waterlogging.

Earlier, Tarique, speaking at a gathering in the Dhaka-10 constituency, said a group has started conspiring around the polls.

At the Kalabagan Krira Chakra playground rally, the BNP chief said leaders and activists of a group were caught forging ballot seals and he urged vigilance.

"Those covert conspirators who mislead mothers and sisters and ask for bKash numbers and NID numbers — you must stay alert."

Tarique warned that failure to remain watchful could undermine the

sacrifices made to establish the voting rights. "If everyone remains alert, no one will be able to stop the pace of change in the people's fate."

"Today, we must take an oath and make a commitment that, at any cost, we will establish democratic and political rights in this country, and we will work together in unity to build the country we expect."

Tarique also said BNP does not intend to make promises beyond people's capacity or reach.

"We must stay alert about this election. A group has started conspiring around the polls. We have seen reports in newspapers. Their people are trying to mislead the public."

Tarique attended eight rallies in the capital yesterday, starting from his own constituency, Dhaka-17. He travelled by a red-green bus, accompanied by party leaders and activists.

Addressing a gathering at the Kamal Ataturk Avenue playground, he said if BNP comes to power, it will build a country where people can move safely, traders and working people can work freely, and families can sleep peacefully at night.

"There are many problems in Dhaka-17. There are traffic problems, air pollution, and waterlogging. If everyone works together, these problems can be solved."

At one stage, Tarique said his mother, late Khaleida Zia, endured imprisonment, oppression, and torture but never left the country. "Even knowing death was near, she did not leave the country and stayed among the

people."

At 7:00pm, speaking at another rally in Jatrabari under the Dhaka-5 constituency, Tarique said those who took away the people's rights over the last 16 years and those who were once their allies were now hatching conspiracies.

The party chief said, "It will not be enough to just cast votes and leave. We must understand the vote count and then return home."

Referring to the gas crisis, Tarique said new gas fields must be discovered, adding, "Gas was imported from abroad during the fascist regime so that their own people could earn money. We will discover our own gas fields."

Speaking at a rally at the Basabo Tarun Sangha field at 5:00pm, the BNP chief said initiatives would be taken to build a playground, improve hospital services, develop roads, and reduce waterlogging in the Dhaka-9 seat.

After many enforced disappearances, killings, and repression, the people of this country have finally regained their voting rights. "We must ensure that no one can take away this voting right," he told a gathering at Lalbagh Balur Math in the Dhaka-7 seat last night.

Tarique last night visited the graves of former president Ziaur Rahman and former prime minister Khaleida Zia at the capital's Zia Uddin, concluding his 19-day election campaign.

Since January 22, Tarique has joined rallies at 29 venues in 26 districts outside the capital and addressed 15 election meetings within Dhaka.

India-Pakistan T20 World Cup match

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right to approach the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC), should it choose to do so," the media release read.

Bangladesh, who are scheduled to co-host the 2031 ICC World Cup alongside India, will now get to host another mega event prior to that, declared ICC.

"As part of this understanding, an agreement has been reached that Bangladesh will host an ICC event prior to the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2031, subject to the usual ICC hosting processes, timelines, and operational requirements," it added.

Then, at around midnight, the Pakistan government declared on social media that its national team will face India in Colombo in their group-stage match of the T20 World Cup, jointly taking place in India and Sri Lanka.

"In view of the outcomes achieved in multilateral discussions, as well as the request of friendly countries, the Government of Pakistan hereby directs the Pakistan National Cricket Team to take the field on February 15, 2026, for its scheduled fixture in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup," the post read.

Earlier, the tripartite dialogue was held in the aftermath of the Pakistan government instructing its national team not to play India on the 15th. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif later said this step was taken in solidarity with Bangladesh, who were replaced by Scotland in the World Cup for refusing to travel to India over security concerns.

Since the Pakistan government's declaration on February 1, the ICC tried, through both formal and informal channels, to persuade the PCB to convince its government to reconsider.

As part of its attempts, ICC's deputy chairman Imran Khawaja arrived in Lahore for a meeting with PCB officials and BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul, who was invited by the PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi.

BCB issued a press release last night, minutes before ICC released its statement, where it expressed "profound and heartfelt gratitude" to the PCB chairman and Aminul requested Pakistan to play against India on the 15th.

"Following my short visit to Pakistan yesterday and given the forthcoming outcomes of our discussions, I request Pakistan to play the ICC T20 World Cup game on February 15 against India for the benefit of the entire cricket ecosystem," he was quoted in the press release. According to reports, ICC could have incurred losses of around \$250 million if the India-Pakistan clash did not happen.



Pakistan face the USA in a Group A clash of the T20 World Cup in Colombo today, two years after the Americans stunned the 2009 champions and knocked them out of the 2024 edition. The USA pushed favourites India hard in their opener in Mumbai before going down by 29 runs, while Pakistan nearly stumbled into another upset against the Netherlands on Saturday. With a Super Eight spot on the line, Pakistan can ill afford any slip-ups.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK