



(From left, clockwise) A rescue worker inspects the debris of destroyed buildings at the site of an Israeli strike in the southern Lebanese area of Maarakeh, near the coastal city of Tyre; a building damaged by an Iranian strike is seen in a residential neighbourhood in Israel's Ramat Gan; and Iranian state media released photos on Friday of what it claimed to be the wreckage of a US fighter jet downed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Photos were taken yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP, COLLECTED

## Iran executes two members of banned opposition group: judiciary

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday executed two men convicted of membership in a banned opposition group and carrying out disruptive actions aimed at overthrowing the Islamic republic, the judiciary said.

The executions were the latest in a series targeting members of the banned People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), after four other convicted members of the group were executed earlier in the week.

They also come against the backdrop of Iran's war with the United States and Israel, sparked by US-Israeli strikes on February 28 that killed the country's supreme leader and have since triggered a wider regional conflict.

"Abolhassan Montazer and Vahid Baniamerian ... were hanged after trial and their sentences were upheld by the Supreme Court," the judiciary's Mizan Online website said yesterday.

The men were found guilty of attempting "rebellion through involvement in multiple terrorist acts", as well as membership in the MEK group and carrying out acts of sabotage aimed at overthrowing the Islamic republic.

## Businesses seek reforms, steady energy supply

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The meeting is Tarique's first with members of the business community since taking office on February 17.

Tarique wanted to hear about business-related challenges in different sectors, said a meeting attendant preferring not to be named. Bangladesh wants to take the export-GDP ratio to 30 percent in the next few years from the current 10.5 percent, which is much lower than peer countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia.

Upon hearing this target, Tarique sought quick proposals from the businesspeople so that the government can facilitate resolving problems and challenges to expedite export and import processes.

To facilitate higher exports, the businesspeople recommended easier rules for export and import, better facilities at ports and expedited processes.

The PM is hopeful that the third terminal at the HSEA may be opened for business within the next one and a half years, said another meeting attendant.

Moreover, the deep seaport may also go into operation within the next six to seven years, he quoted Tarique as saying.

The structure of tariffs and protection should be modernised and rationalised to eliminate anti-export bias.

Advance income tax must be abolished – as it is a tax on revenue not profit – as well as tax deducted at source.

Bangladesh currently spends an estimated 15-20 percent of its GDP on logistics, which is significantly higher than the global average of 8-10 percent.

Improving logistical efficiency is critical for boosting manufacturing competitiveness across sectors.

The businesspeople called for continuing reforms and new investments in Chittagong port, new deep-sea ports, and terminals

to ensure faster and more efficient import and export of goods.

Dhaka airport passenger and cargo handling must be globally competitive with peer countries for speed and cost, the council said.

Unlogging traffic in Dhaka and Chittagong will improve productivity and efficiency through multimodal, environment-friendly systems, they said, adding that railway services should be re-energised for cargo and passenger movement through a public-private partnership model, like Virgin Rail.

### MAJOR DEMANDS

- Quick removal of regulatory bottlenecks
- E-visa system for foreign nationals; increase in on-arrival visa countries
- Starting operations at the third terminal at HSEA soon
- Reduction of corporate tax and bank interest rates

To hit \$70 billion in garment exports over the next three years, greater diversity is needed, such as man-made fabric, workwear and sports apparel.

The businesspeople suggested supporting the next ten export sectors that can each reach \$3 billion in exports annually.

They also sought government support for new sectors similar to what was provided to the garment sector and called for connecting small- and medium-sized enterprises to export firms through VAT and

bond facilities.

The National Export Strategy needs to be designed and implemented.

Pointing out that China is visa-free for 42+ countries, they asked why Bangladesh still requires visas for those coming in from Japan, Korea, the EU, the US and the UK.

The business people also called for supporting new export products – from outdoor equipment to stuffed toys, as well as Bogura's light engineering industry – which meets 80 percent of the country's agricultural machinery needs.

Semiconductors offer an opportunity to level up manufacturing and design capabilities and upskill graduating engineers, they said.

They suggested the government open up the banking sector to allow Bangladeshi companies to borrow offshore more freely based on their balance sheets and rebuild the local bond market to move beyond bank loans.

They called for accelerating the use of renewable energy, especially solar power and incentivising the shift to electric vehicles across commercial, public and private sectors, and suggested reviving commercial commuter rail services, especially in Dhaka and Chattogram.

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Energy Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud, Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir, State Minister for Energy Anindya Islam Amit, PM's Adviser Mahdi Amin and BIDA Executive Chairman Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun.

After the meeting, Khosru said the PM wanted to know what challenges the businesses were facing.

"Some were addressed and solved immediately – the rest will be resolved later."

The meeting discussed reopening closed factories in both the public and private sectors.

However, he denied that lowering bank interest rates was discussed.

## Turkey says second Turkish-owned ship has crossed Hormuz strait

AFP, Ankara

A second Turkish-flagged ship has crossed the war-torn Strait of Hormuz, Turkey's Transport Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu said yesterday.

Iran has closed the Strait of Hormuz, a key global waterway, since the US-Israeli strikes on Iran started on February 28 and sent the Middle East conflict and oil prices soaring.

Uraloglu said that on February 28 there were 15 ships belonging to Turkish shipowners waiting to go through the strategic strait.

"Two of these 15 made the crossing," he told the private CNN Turk channel. "This is explained by our initiatives and also by the fact that they were using Iranian ports or carrying goods coming from or bound for Iran."

Uraloglu did not say when the second ship crossed the strait. The first vessel had passed through, with Iranian permission, on March 13.

The two ships are the *Rozana* and *Neraki*, according to CNN Turk.

The minister said only nine of the blocked ships had sought permission to pass through the strait and that the transport and foreign ministries were trying to help them.

"Four of them have not requested to leave. Two of them are power-generation vessels and are stationed on site. The other two are waiting for the situation to calm down," he added.

## Nation braces for power cuts in hot summer

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a demand for 15,700MW.

Typically, a 1,000MW shortfall results in one to one and a half hours of nationwide load shedding.

However, past patterns, particularly during the 2022 crisis, suggest a stark urban-rural divide, with outages stretching to three to four hours in rural areas while one to two hours in the capital.

Since early March, when the power minister first warned of possible shortages, up to 500MW of load shedding had been introduced. It eased during the extended Eid holidays due to lower demand, but is now rising again.

The situation is further complicated by mounting dues to furnace oil-based power plants, amounting to around Tk 14,000 crore. Operators have warned they may not sustain production unless payments are cleared, raising the risk of further supply cuts.

Adding to the strain, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department has forecast multiple heatwaves in April, with temperatures nearing 40°C, which will likely push electricity demand sharply higher.

**BUSINESSES PUSH BACK**  
At yesterday's meeting, business leaders urged the government to allow shops to remain open until 8:00pm. The minister rejected the proposal, insisting that the cabinet's directive to close by 6:00pm must be followed for now.

"Observe the next three months," he said. "Decisions regarding this directive may be reviewed ahead of Pahela Baishakh and Eid-ul-Azha. But for now, you must comply with the cabinet's decision."

He emphasised that the burden of conservation is being shared. Fuel allocation for official transport has been cut by 70 percent, carpooling is

being encouraged, and office hours have been shortened. A decision on holding half of the classes online every week at educational institutions is expected today.

"If people know shops close at 6:00pm, they will adjust their shopping habits accordingly, just as they do with bank hours," the minister argued, adding that proposals would be discussed with the prime minister.

Essential services such as pharmacies and food outlets may remain open under special consideration.

Business leaders, however, argued that markets are being unfairly targeted.

They claimed electricity consumption in many markets is lower than in residential buildings and other institutions, yet businesses face restrictive measures.

They warned that early closures could leave commercial areas dark, increasing security risks, and called instead for targeted action against high-consumption sectors.

Their proposals include keeping shop hours from 11:00am to 8:00pm, and action against illegal electricity connections, particularly unauthorised charging of battery-powered rickshaws.

They suggested restricting fuel supply to high-capacity private vehicles above 1,800-2,000cc, and introducing an odd-even vehicle system – where vehicles with odd-numbered plates operate on odd-numbered dates, while even-numbered plates operate on even-numbered dates.

They also noted that businesses are still recovering from losses linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, and may struggle to absorb another shock.

Md Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners' Association, told The Daily Star that despite their objections, business leaders said they would comply with the 6:00pm closure order while continuing to push for revisions.

According to a source, the minister said, "The government understands the concerns and sentiments of the business community."

"However, the current circumstances have necessitated decisions that apply to everyone."

### FERTILISER SQUEEZE

Gas shortages have already forced five of the country's six fertiliser factories to remain shut for the past month, raising concerns ahead of irrigation during the Aus season when early summer rice is sown in March-April and harvested in July-August.

Under current plans, the Shahjalal Fertiliser Company Ltd, operational over the past month with around 40MMcfd gas supply, will be shut, while the Ghorashal-Palas Urea factory is set to resume operations this month, requiring about 72MMcfd.

This shift alone could divert an additional 30MMcfd of gas away from the power sector.

From next month, multinational KAFCO is also expected to resume operations, which would require about 60MMcfd of gas for fertiliser production – further tightening supply for power.

**LPG MARKET VOLATILE**  
The LPG market remains unstable despite repeated price adjustments.

In Dhaka, a 12kg cylinder was selling for no less than Tk 2,000 yesterday, with some retailers charging up to Tk 2,100.

Consumers continue to face difficulties, raising concerns about affordability and supply stability.

## Trump signs executive order aimed at regulating college sports

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Friday signed an executive order aimed at regulating US collegiate sports in the wake of rule changes that allow student athletes to be compensated financially.

The order, which is the second that Trump has issued on college sports, directs the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to create rules that allow college athletes to play for "no more than a five-year period."

He also asked that rules be put in place that would allow them to transfer schools just once before they graduate without having to sit out a season.

The changes are scheduled to go into effect on August 1, and institutions who allow athletes who don't meet the criteria risk losing federal funding.

Trump said that the loosening of "consistent rules or limits concerning eligibility, transfers, and pay-for-play schemes has created an out-of-control financial arms race... that is driving universities into debt."

Friday's order came as the hugely popular NCAA basketball tournament reached its closing stages.

The women's semi-finals took

place on Friday and the men's Final Four semi-finals were scheduled for Saturday.

In addition to demanding eligibility and transfer limits, it calls on governing bodies to ban "improper" financial arrangements and urges Congress to pass legislation to address the issues.

It follows an order issued by Trump in July that sought to block some recruiting payments by third parties to college athletes in big-money sports like football and men's basketball in order to preserve funds available for women's and non-revenue sports.

The president said last month that the rising value of name, image and likeness (NIL) contracts for players in high-visibility sports like football has created a burden for colleges that forces some to abandon other sports.

Some of those sports – such as athletics, swimming and gymnastics – have long been pipelines for US Olympic teams.

The NCAA long prohibited student athletes from accepting any compensation for use of their name, image and likeness, but after a 2021 Supreme Court ruling, the rules were changed so that some collegiate athletes could receive financial compensation.

## Six killed as fire rips thru' Keraniganj factory

FROM PAGE 1

people work at the factory, most of them women and children. The fire, they said, originated around 12:10pm.

Shyamal Chandra Das, a resident living next to the factory, said, "As the fire broke out, we heard several loud noises, and the flames rose very high. Locals immediately evacuated the women and children and removed furniture from nearby houses."

Following the incident, relatives of the workers gathered in front of the factory in search of their loved ones. By around 4:00pm, a crowd had gathered outside, while firefighters continued dousing operations inside the factory.

Around an hour later, Md Sabbir, 25, was seen frantically searching for his mother, Manju Begum, at the factory gate. She had joined work at the factory that very day.

"My sister lives in a house where one of the residents works at the factory. After speaking to them, my mother joined today [yesterday] for her first day on the job. I don't know what happened afterwards. I still haven't found any trace of her."

Another worker, Shahinur Akter, was also missing.

Her brother Sagar Hossain said, "My sister's phone has been off since the incident. We searched everywhere and still could not find her."

**'MAIN GATE LOCKED'**

Twelve-year-old Ayesha Akter, who had been working at the factory for the past eight months, said, "As soon as the fire started, I ran to get out of the factory. When I reached the gate, I found it closed. After waiting for some time, it was opened from outside, and I managed to get out safely."

Several others also alleged that the factory's main gate had been locked, making it difficult for workers to escape. Many had to look for

alternative escape routes.

Md Mahmud, an employee of an internet service provider shop beside the factory, confirmed the gate was closed at the time of the fire, leaving several people stranded near the exit.

"A girl came running to the gate right after the fire broke out. I asked the guard to open it, but he refused. As a result, they were forced to find other ways to get out."

"The factory authorities cannot evade responsibility for the deaths."

### FRANTIC SEARCH FOR AN ONLY CHILD

Delowar Hossain, a security guard by profession, lived with his only daughter Mim, 16, in Keraniganj.

**"A girl came running to the gate right after the fire broke out. I asked the guard to open it, but he refused.... The factory authorities cannot evade responsibility for the deaths."**

Md Mahmud, employee of ISP shop next to the factory

The girl had been working at the factory for the past five months.

After learning about the fire, Delowar rushed to the factory in search of his daughter. Failing to find her, he went to Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue in the evening, where the bodies of five had been kept.

There, he was able to identify her body and immediately broke down. "My wife died three years ago. I didn't remarry thinking whether it would affect my daughter..."

Morgue sources said Mim died from extreme heat and smoke inhalation.

### HEALTH MINISTER'S VISIT

Following the incident, Health Minister Sardar Sakhawat Hossain

injured.

Labour and Employment Minister Ariful Haque Chowdhury also visited the site around 8:00pm and ordered the formation of a separate five-member probe committee, led by a joint secretary, to determine the exact cause of the fire. It was asked to submit its report within five working days.

Meanwhile, the fire service also formed a five-member probe committee, headed by its director of operations and maintenance Lt Col Md Mahmudul Hasan, director of the Operations, which is expected to submit its report within seven working days.