

Turkey says COP31 will push for more global action under its presidency

REUTERS, Antalya

This year's UN climate summit will seek to turn past decisions into action, with financing the main focus, Turkey's Environment and Climate Change Minister Murat Kurum told Reuters, as the country prepares to host and chair COP31 in November.

The minister, Murat Kurum, said financing was the most important task, with nearly \$1 trillion needed to help developing countries meet climate change targets, adding that raising public awareness about climate policies was essential at a time when wars and security crises dominate the global agenda.

"Important decisions have been taken in every COP so far. We will follow up these decisions, but what is essential is putting them into practice. The expectation of the world, of humanity from us is to move to practice," Kurum said in an interview at a diplomacy forum in Antalya at the weekend.



After having trekked long distances, men and women queue to collect fresh water from a tubewell at Deluti village in Paikgachha upazila of Khulna yesterday. Every dry season, coastal villages face an acute water crisis, leaving thousands without safe drinking water.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Philippines, US and allies start huge military drills

REUTERS, Manila

Philippine and US forces will carry out maritime strike drills on a remote Philippine island near Taiwan during annual exercises that started on Monday, which Manila's military chief said would test their readiness under "real world conditions".

The April 20 to May 8 exercises known as "Balikatan", or "shoulder-to-shoulder", will be the largest yet in terms of participating countries, with Australia included again and Canada, France, New Zealand and Japan joining as active participants for the first time, highlighting Manila's widening network of security partnerships.

The exercises will involve practising precision strike and interdiction operations in coastal waters of the Philippines and will feature integrated air and missile defence exercises, multinational maritime operations, and counter-landing, live-fire drills.

Launching the exercises, Philippine armed forces chief Romeo Brawner said their purpose was to reaffirm the strength of their alliance and their responsibility to secure the region.

"We train across the breadth of our archipelago ... testing our readiness in real-world conditions across all domains," Brawner said.

More than 17,000 troops are taking part, including about 10,000 from defence treaty ally the United States, even as Washington remains heavily engaged in the Middle East.

Talks still uncertain

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Iran's participation. The ceasefire had appeared in jeopardy after the US said it had seized an Iranian cargo ship that tried to run its blockade and Tehran vowed to retaliate.

A Pakistani security source said Pakistan's key mediator, Field Marshal Asim Munir, had told US President Donald Trump the blockade was an obstacle to talks, and that Trump had promised to consider ending it.

The US was hoping to start negotiations in Pakistan shortly before the ceasefire expires, with sweeping security preparations under way in Islamabad.

However, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said that "unconstructive & contradictory signals from American officials carry a bitter message; they seek Iran's surrender."

"Iranians do not submit to force," he added on X.

Meanwhile, a senior Pakistani government official told Reuters yesterday that Pakistan is confident it can get Iran to attend talks with the US.

"We have received a positive signal from Iran. Things are fluid, but we are trying that they should be here when we start the talks tomorrow or a day after," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Trump yesterday said he believed that a nuclear deal the US is currently negotiating with Iran will be better than a 2015 international agreement to curb Tehran's nuclear program.

"The DEAL that we are making with Iran will be FAR BETTER than the JCPOA, commonly referred to as 'The Iran Nuclear Deal'," Trump wrote

in a social media post after concerns expressed by Democrats and some nuclear experts that he is rushing negotiations on a highly complex topic.

During his first White House term, Trump in 2018 withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreed to by Iran, the United States and world powers, calling it "the worst deal ever."

"I am under no pressure whatsoever, although, it will all happen, relatively quickly!" Trump added in a Truth Social post.

Trump announced the two-week ceasefire with Iran on April 7, and has not specified when precisely it ends.

A Pakistani source involved in the talks said it would expire at 8:00pm ET on Wednesday, which would be midnight GMT or 3:30 am Thursday in Iran.

The US has maintained its blockade of Iranian ports, while Iran lifted and then reimposed its own blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which typically handles roughly one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied gas supply.

Oil prices rose around 5 percent as traders remained fearful that the ceasefire would collapse. Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz was at a virtual standstill with just three crossings in the space of 12 hours, according to shipping data.

The US military said it had fired on an Iranian-flagged cargo ship headed towards Iran's Bandar Abbas port on Sunday after a six-hour standoff, disabling its engines. US Central Command released video showing

Marines descending ropes from helicopters onto the vessel. The vessel is likely to have been carrying

what Washington deems dual-use items that could be used by the military, maritime security sources said yesterday.

Iran's military said the ship had been travelling from China and accused the US of "armed piracy", according to state media. They said they were ready to confront US forces over the "blatant aggression", but were constrained by the presence of crew members' families on board.

China, the main buyer of Iranian crude, expressed concern over the "forced interception", and Chinese President Xi Jinping called for ships to resume passage through the strait as normal and for the conflict to be resolved through political and diplomatic channels, state news agency Xinhua reported.

Moscow yesterday called for the US-Iran ceasefire to be maintained and for diplomatic efforts to continue, after Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke with his Iranian counterpart, a close Russian ally.

French President Emmanuel Macron also called for the US and Iran to de-escalate.

"Our position remains the same. We need to settle things through diplomacy. Everyone must calm down," Macron said during a joint press conference with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Trump warned on Sunday that the US would destroy every bridge and power plant in Iran if it rejected his terms, continuing a recent pattern of such threats.

Iran has said that if the United States were to attack its civilian infrastructure, it would strike power stations and desalination plants in its Gulf Arab neighbours.

Chokehold on the poor tightens

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in March, continuing the elevated level. That sustained pressure has had a direct and measurable effect on household incomes.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, inflation has outpaced wage growth for 50 consecutive months, with the wage growth rate sitting at 8.09 percent in March, nearly one percentage point below the inflation rate.

In practice, this means that real incomes are negative, steadily eroding household purchasing power even as workers nominally earn more.

"Workers are under pressure from both sides: prices are rising while wage growth is losing momentum," said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Into that already strained reality, the government delivered another blow. On April 18, the energy ministry raised fuel prices to record highs. The increases amount to roughly a 20 percent jump across the board. In lockstep, the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission raised the prices of liquefied petroleum gas.

Past trends show that when fuel prices rise, the cost of related goods tends to increase even more. The LPG price increase will only add to the pressure.

For Rezanur Rahman Rifat, who works at a private packaging company, the arithmetic is simple and grim. Fuel will cost him 20 percent more overnight, but his salary won't increase until next year. So something has to give.

The 31-year-old father of one will cut spending, save less, and absorb the rest, even though his wife also works. Together, they must care for Rifat's elderly parents as well.

What worries Rifat most is the long run: the amount he can set aside each month will shrink, leaving his financial future more exposed than it was a week ago.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, put it in broader terms. Fuel price increases have wide-

ranging effects, he said, raising costs across transport, domestic industries, export-oriented sectors, and import-substituting industries — all of which eventually feed into broader inflation that households cannot avoid.

After years of elevated inflation, he said, this latest increase will erode purchasing power further at a moment when many families have little left to give. He expressed hope that the government would adjust domestic prices downward if global fuel costs decline, but was cautious about the near term: under current conditions, the impact is largely unavoidable.

The effects moved quickly through the city's markets. At Karwan Bazar, vegetable vendor Mosharaf Hossain said rising transportation costs, combined with the end of the season for some produce, had pushed prices up by Tk 15-20 per kilogram in just the past week.

The state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh confirmed the trend in data that made for uncomfortable reading. Coarse rice, which sold for Tk 52.5 per kilogram a week ago, now costs Tk 57.5. Flour price is up 2 percent, garlic 2 percent, ginger 13 percent, cinnamon 10 percent, and green chillies have surged 50 percent.

Kamal Hossain sells fruit near Kalyanpur New Market and said his children often ask for chicken. He can no longer afford the Sonali variety, so he buys a broiler instead. Rice prices have gone up too, he said. He used to avoid Pangas fish, an option of last resort. Now, struggling to balance what he earns against what everything costs, he buys it without a second thought.

Sajedur Rahman runs a small eatery in Ibrahimpur Bazar, and his daily vegetable budget has climbed from Tk 700 to Tk 1,000 in a single week. Palm oil, which cost Tk 170 per kilogram just days ago, now sells for Tk 185. He is thinking about raising his menu prices to compensate, but he is also afraid that if he does, customers will simply stop coming.

The pattern these stories describe is what prolonged inflation looks like at the household level. Responding to high inflation, people would initially

cut back on non-food expenses such as entertainment and clothing. If that is not enough, they would start reducing their food consumption, eventually skipping nutritious foods and opting for cheaper, lower-quality alternatives. It is a sequence that plays out gradually enough to be easy to miss, until a fuel hike in the middle of the night makes the whole thing visible at once.

In April, the World Bank projected weaker economic growth for Bangladesh and estimated that an additional 12 lakh people will remain below the three-dollar international poverty line this fiscal year, largely due to the economic fallout from the US-Israel war on Iran.

The World Bank predicted that the conflict will likely affect Bangladesh's economy materially, compounding existing vulnerabilities that already include high inflation, financial sector stress, limited policy space, and weakened confidence.

Since the taka broke the long-held Tk 85 stability level against the dollar in early 2022, it has lost about 30 percent of its value, inflating the cost of every imported commodity, from fuel to cooking oil, before it reaches a market stall.

AHM Shafiquzzaman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said the poverty rate has been rising for three years and that the middle class has been quietly sliding into the lower-middle class, squeezed by a lack of new employment and a growing burden on those who are still earning.

People are switching to cheaper food, he said, and the concern is not just financial. When families are forced to consistently eat less and worse, children do not develop properly, either mentally or physically, and the long-term cost of that is harder to measure than a fuel price, yet no less real.

Back in West Agargaon, Shahnaz Akhter is still looking for work. She has no timeline, no guarantee. What she could manage three months ago, she can no longer manage today — and nothing suggests next week will be any easier.

BNP unveils list of 36 women

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names at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan central office.

They include BNP standing committee member Selima Rahman, a former state minister for cultural affairs and a two-time reserved-seat lawmaker; and Shirin Sultana, a central committee member and a former lawmaker from 2001 and the wife of current BNP MP and Joint Secretary General Khairul Kabir Khokon.

Rasheda Begum Hira, BNP training affairs secretary and a reserved-seat lawmaker in 2001 and 2008; and Rehana Akter Ranu, assistant training affairs secretary, who also served in reserved seats in 2001 and 2008, are also on the list.

Others with prior parliamentary experience include Bilkis Islam, a former reserved-seat lawmaker and BNP executive committee member; Helen Zerín Khan, assistant education affairs secretary and a former lawmaker from a reserved seat; Nilufar Chowdhury Moni, assistant self-reliance affairs secretary and a former reserved-seat member; Sultana Ahmed, Mohila Dal general secretary and a former lawmaker from a reserved seat; and Shammi Akter, a BNP media cell member and assistant local government affairs secretary who also served in parliament through a reserved seat.

The family-linked nominees include Newaz Halima Arly, sister of current State Minister for Cultural Affairs' Ali Newaz Mahmood Khyom. Arly was also a former lawmaker.

Meanwhile, Nipun Roy Chowdhury, Dhaka district BNP general secretary, who is the daughter of former cultural affairs minister Nitai Roy Chowdhury and the daughter-in-law of BNP leader Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, is also nominated.

Shakila Farzana, daughter of former BNP chairperson adviser and former chief whip Syed Wahidul Alam, and Bithika Binte Hossain, wife of late BNP leader Shafiul Bari, are also set to become members of parliament.

Also included are Ferdousi Ahmed, joint convener of Dhaka North BNP and sister of BNP leader Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintu, and Jahrat Adib Chowdhury, daughter of former state minister for disaster management and relief Ebadur

Rahman Chowdhury.

Jahrat, of Sylhet's Moulvibazar, is also a former deputy CEO of mobile operator Banglalink.

The list features a strong presence of first-time nominees: Mosammát Farida Yasmin, a BNP central committee member; Zeeba Amina Khan, a member of the BNP executive committee; Fahima Nasrin Murni, assistant secretary of international affairs; and Suraiya Zarin Rony, joint general secretary of Bogura district Mohila Dal.

Fahmida Haq, wife of Zillur Rahman, was also added in the list. Zillur is the host of Channel i's popular talk show "Tritiyó Matra" and the executive director of Centre for Governance Studies, while Fahmida is a member of its board of directors.

Shamim Ara Shapna, general secretary of Cox's Bazar district BNP and the district's first female public prosecutor, and Madhabi Marma, former general secretary of Bandarban district Mohila Dal, are also set to become members of the 13th Jatiya Sangsad. Among the more notable first-time entrants is Anna Minj, from the indigenous Oraon community and a former senior director of programmes at BRAC International, who is set to enter parliament for the first time. Her husband, John Gomez, is BNP's assistant religious affairs secretary.

Mahmuda Habiba, a BNP media cell member, and Momtaj Alo Ahmed of Munshiganj, international affairs secretary of the central Mohila Dal and president of France Mohila Dal, have also received nominations.

The list also features several leaders with backgrounds in student politics.

Mansura Akter is currently joint general secretary of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal central committee, while Sanzida Yasmin is also a joint general secretary of the central committee and the immediate past member secretary of Eden College.

Others nominated from the student front include Arifa Sultana, a former joint general secretary of Chhatra Dal and a member of Dhaka South BNP; Nadia Pathan Papon, a former assistant general secretary of the same committee and also a member of Dhaka South BNP; Selina Sultana Nishita, a former joint general secretary

of Chhatra Dal; and Shawkat Ara Akter, an Eden College Chhatra Dal leader and joint secretary.

Rezeka Sultana, president of Rangpur city Mohila Dal and assistant organising secretary of the central Mohila Dal, is another inclusion.

The three nominees who had lost in the 2026 national election are Sabira Sultana, president of Jikargacha upazila BNP in Jashore; Mayer Daak coordinator Sanjida Islam Tulee in Dhaka; and Sherpur BNP joint convener Sunсила Jabrin Priyanka, daughter of Hazrat Ali, former convener and general secretary of Sherpur BNP.

Meanwhile, the inclusion of Subarna Thakur, who reportedly joined the BNP ahead of the national polls after previously being associated with Kashiani upazila Awami League in Gopalganj, has drawn attention following the announcement.

Local BNP leaders, speaking on condition of anonymity, said nominating someone who recently joined from another party is "unfair to loyal workers and could create internal divisions within the party". They also warned that such decisions may negatively affect party unity and electoral activities if dissatisfaction grows at the grassroots level.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Subarna said, "Yes, a point needs to be clarified. At one time, I was listed as the Environment Affairs Secretary of Kashiani Upazila Awami League, but I did not give any consent for this. My name was included without my knowledge, and I never saw it or took part in any meetings, rallies, or party activities. For this reason, I never formally resigned either, because I never accepted the position in the first place."

"My involvement in politics actually dates back to my student life. While studying at Khulna City College, I was involved with BNP's student wing and was actively engaged in politics at that time. There are also some records of that period, including newspaper coverage of my activities."

Meanwhile, senior party leaders said the 36 nominations were made to strike a balance between experience, family political background, young leadership, and social diversity.

Some groups out to confuse people

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This was Tarique's maiden visit to Bogura since he assumed office as the head of the government following the February 12 polls. During the visit, he attended a series of programmes.

The PM unveiled the plaque of Bogura City Corporation, upgrading the 150-year-old municipality to city corporation status, reports UNB.

It will be the 13th city corporation in the country.

Speaking at the ceremony, the PM said the long-standing demand of people has been fulfilled through the creation of the city corporation.

"Bogura must be turned into a model town. This cannot be done by the government alone; everyone's cooperation is needed," he said.

Earlier, the PM arrived at Bogura Circuit House by bus around 10:00am. His wife Zubaida Rahman was among his companions on this one-day tour.

Tarique also inaugurated an emergency measles-rubella vaccination campaign at Ziaur Rahman Gram Hospital in Bagbari of Gabtali upazila and distributed Family Cards among women at the Shaheed Zia Degree College ground. He launched the excavation work on the Chowkidah canal at Nasipur by cutting soil with a spade.

He visited his ancestral home "Zia Bari" in Bagbari in the afternoon.

At a rally, he said, "We want to introduce Family Cards and Farmers' Cards for our people. We want to provide honorariums for imams and muezzins. We want to excavate canals, plant trees, and create jobs for young

people at home and abroad. These critics have done nothing on any of these issues."

He questioned the credibility of those misleading the public about the July charter, arguing that they never believed in the country's independence or even its existence.

The PM assured the crowd that every promise made by the BNP to the people would be fulfilled.

Addressing local demands, he said construction of the Sirajganj Bogura railway line was a top priority and would begin soon.

Describing Bogura and surrounding areas as major agricultural hubs, Tarique said he wanted to increase exports of agricultural products abroad.

He added that work would soon begin at Bogura University to introduce specialised departments in agriculture, engineering, and medicine.

He opened the "e-bail bond" system in seven more districts, including Bogura, on the District and Sessions Judge Court premises in the morning.

At the event, the PM said that after being freed from one and a half decades of fascist rule and exploitation, an accountable and democratic government has been established in the country through direct votes of the people, reports BSS.

"The people have regained their lost democratic political rights."

Besides, he inaugurated the newly constructed building of the Bogura District Bar Association on the court premises.

Tarique said unless the rule of justice is established in the country through coordination among the three branches

— legislative, executive, and judiciary — the benefits of citizens' democratic rights will not be ensured.

Noting that the role of judges is key in establishing the rule of law, he said therefore, president Ziaur Rahman had opened the door to the independence of the country's judiciary, which had been taken away through the fourth amendment of the constitution.

"But during the fascist regime, the judiciary was turned into a partisan court."

Tarique said the government is implementing the "e-bail bond" system to reduce harassment of people in the judicial process by establishing a corruption-free, transparent, and independent judicial system, as part of transforming judicial administration and judicial process into a fully electronic system and modernising the judiciary.

If the system can be introduced in all courts across the country, it would help establish justice by removing delays and discrimination in getting justice, he added.

Launching the second phase of the Family Card programme, the PM said his government would fund key welfare programmes, including Family Card and Farmers' Card, by recovering money laundered during the previous regime.

"As we said before the election, we will work to stop the corruption that took place during the previous autocratic regime, when hundreds of crores of taka were laundered abroad and public wealth was stolen."

[Our Bogura correspondent contributed to this report.]