



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman poses for a photo with members of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh after a meeting at the Secretariat yesterday. This was the first meeting between the PM and NOAB. PHOTO: PTD

STRAIT OF HORMUZ Iran to help safe passage of Bangladeshi vessels

UNB, Dhaka

The Iranian embassy in Dhaka yesterday said it will continue its efforts to facilitate the safe passage of Bangladeshi vessels through the Strait of Hormuz and has also facilitated the safe evacuation of 186 Bangladeshi nationals from Iran via Azerbaijan.

The embassy, in a press statement, called upon all concerned to refrain from any actions or statements that may create misperceptions and to uphold the spirit of mutual respect that governs the enduring ties between the two brotherly nations.

Iran reiterates its firm commitment to strengthening the close and amicable relations between the two nations.

The embassy expressed its dissatisfaction with the selective dissemination of excerpts from recent media interviews concerning developments in the Middle East, which have been republished by certain media outlets and social media platforms.

"Such actions are deemed inconsistent with the friendly and brotherly relations between the two countries," said the embassy, noting that these inaccurate and selective representations are regrettable and contrary to the principles of responsible media conduct.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of Bangladesh enjoy longstanding, friendly, and brotherly relations founded upon mutual respect and shared values.

War to resume if talks fail

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Iranian official said Tehran was considering joining. But with the final hours of a two-week truce ticking by, there was little time left.

However, there was confusion regarding when the two-week ceasefire, which came into effect on April 8, would end.

Iranian state TV said it would expire at 3:30 am Wednesday, Tehran time (0000 GMT Tuesday).

The timing is consistent with when the 14-day truce went into effect, though US President Donald Trump recently said it would end a day later, on Wednesday evening Washington time.

Mediator Pakistan had said earlier in the day that the ceasefire would expire at 2350 GMT on Tuesday.

Asked about the possibility of extending the truce, Trump told CNBC: "I don't want to do that. We don't have that much time."

"I expect to be bombing because I think that's a better attitude to go in with," he added. "But we're ready to go. I mean, the military is raring to go."

Iranian government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani said: "We do not want to be attacked again, but if such attacks occur, we will definitely respond more firmly than before," according to the state news agency IRNA.

Late yesterday, Pakistani Minister of Information Attaullah Tarar said Iran's formal response on whether it will attend the next round of talks with the US in Islamabad is "still awaited".

Earlier yesterday, Pakistan urged both the US and Iran to end their ceasefire.

Though Trump yesterday upped his threat through a series of TV interviews and social media posts, there was no statement issued from the Iranian leadership.

Early today, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reacted, saying "blockading Iranian ports is an act of war and thus a violation of the ceasefire" in a reference to the ongoing US naval blockade around the Strait of Hormuz.

"Striking a commercial vessel and taking its crew hostage is an even greater violation. Iran knows how to neutralise restrictions, how to defend its interests, and how to resist

bullying," he wrote on X.

Earlier, the US military said it had boarded the Tifani tanker linked to Iran "without incident". The vessel last reported its position yesterday morning as near Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, according to MarineTraffic tracking data. It was close to fully loaded with 2 million barrels of crude and had signalled Singapore as its destination.

"As we have made clear, we will pursue global maritime enforcement efforts to disrupt illicit networks and interdict sanctioned vessels providing material support to Iran -- anywhere they operate," US Central Command said.

The US president told CNBC that US forces on Monday intercepted a ship carrying a "gift" to Iran from China as Tehran tries to restock its military during a ceasefire period.

The ship had "a gift from China" which "wasn't very nice," Trump told CNBC. "I was a little surprised," he added, saying he thought he had an "understanding" with China's President Xi Jinping.

A week ago, Trump announced that Xi had assured him there would be no Chinese weapons deliveries to Iran, a close partner with Beijing for years.

On social media, Trump also said Iran had carried out numerous violations of the ceasefire, without giving further details. He told CNBC that the blockade had been a success and the US was in a strong position to end up with a "great deal".

Iran has largely blocked off the Strait of Hormuz since the conflict began on February 28. It had announced last week that it would reopen the strait, but reversed that decision on Saturday after Trump refused to lift his blockade of Iranian ports.

That has left the strait closed and the world deprived of the 20 million barrels of oil that typically crossed it each day.

Meanwhile, International Energy Agency (IEA) head Fatih Birol yesterday said the ongoing conflict has triggered the world's worst-ever energy crisis.

"The crisis is already huge, if you combine the effects of the petrol crisis and the gas crisis with Russia," Birol told France Inter radio. "This is indeed the biggest crisis in history."

Pakistani officials said that if the delegations do attend talks, they will not arrive until today.

US Vice President JD Vance, who was expected to start for Pakistan on Tuesday morning for talks, was still in Washington midday to participate in meetings, the White House said.

"Additional policy meetings are taking place at the White House in which the vice president will participate," an official said in a brief statement sent to AFP shortly after 1700 GMT.

A first session of talks 10 days ago produced no agreement, and Tehran had been ruling out a second round after the US refused to end its blockade. Trump has threatened to attack Iran's civilian infrastructure if no deal is made.

Still, a Pakistani source involved in the discussions told Reuters there was momentum for talks to resume.

An Iranian official said on Monday that Tehran was "positively reviewing" its participation, but stressed that it was waiting to see if its conditions would be met, including recognition of its right to enrich uranium.

Oil prices climbed about 5 percent yesterday after Trump said he did not want to extend the ceasefire. Brent futures LCOc1 rose \$4.30, or 4.5 percent, to \$99.78 a barrel at 1:13pm EDT (1713 GMT), while US West Texas Intermediate CLc1 crude rose \$4.75, or 5.3 percent, to \$94.36.

Trump wants an agreement that would prevent further oil price rises and stock market shocks, but has insisted Iran cannot have the means to develop a nuclear weapon. He wants Iran to give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which can, if further enriched, be used for a nuclear warhead.

Tehran hopes to exploit its control of the strait to strike a deal that averts a restart of the war and lifts sanctions, while retaining more of its nuclear programme, which it says is for peaceful purposes.

A Pakistani source involved in mediating between the warring parties said that the expected second round of talks could result in the signing of a memorandum of understanding to extend the ceasefire. It would then be followed by a comprehensive deal within 60 days.

Matiur added that Tarique agreed in principle to many of their demands, although some steps may take time to implement. According to BSS, those at the meeting included NOAB Vice President and Chairman of the New Age editorial board ASM Shahidullah Khan; Treasurer and Publisher of daily Sangbad Altamash Kabir; and Executive Members, AK Azad, publisher of Samakal; Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Prothom Alo; Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star; AMM Bahauddin, editor of Inqilab; Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor of Bonik Barta; Mozammel Haque, editor of Karatoa; Dr Ramiz Uddin Chowdhury, editor of Purbokone; and Nasim Manzur, publisher of Financial Express.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon, State Minister Yeaser Khan Choudhury, and the prime minister's adviser on information and broadcasting Dr Zahed Ur Rahman were also present.

Villages sweat amid lengthy power cuts

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200MW in these regions.

Fuel constraints have led to at least 71 of the country's 143 power plants to either remain idle or produce well below their capacities, said power sector officials. They said 45 of them run on furnace oil, 23 gas, and three are coal-fired plants.

An internal analysis by the Power Development Board states that it needs at least 1,200 Million cubic feet per day (MMcf/d) of gas to run power plants during the summer peak, with a projected demand of 18,500MW. The PDB's gas need is subject to coal-fired and furnace oil plants generating expected electricity.

In the first week of April, The Daily Star reported that gas supply to the power sector stands at 900 MMcf/d, allowing PDB to produce up to 5,200MW. The supply was expected to drop further as the government decided to restart at least two fertiliser factories.

RURAL HARDSHIP DEEPENS
Persistent outages are severely disrupting daily life in rural Khulna, where residents report three to five hours of cuts daily, with conditions worse in Batiaghata, Dacope, Dumuria, and Koyra.

SSC examinees are among the worst affected.

"For the past week, power cuts have been occurring almost every evening from dusk until around 8:30pm. It is seriously hampering my studies," said Trina Bairagi, an SSC candidate from Chaksholmari village in Batiaghata.

Her mother Tripti Bairagi added that their shrimp farm is at risk. "If we cannot run aeration machines due to power cuts, the shrimp will be damaged. In this heat, prolonged outages could wipe out the entire stock," she said.

However, official data from the West Zone Power Distribution Company Limited shows only marginal shortfalls of around six to seven MW in recent days.

In Rajshahi, where temperatures

reached 39.5 degrees Celsius, residents reported multiple outages daily, often lasting one to two hours, disrupting sleep, work and irrigation during the crucial Boro season.

Officials said supply is falling short by up to 30-40 percent in some rural zones.

In Mymensingh, supply was 750MW against a demand for around 1,075MW, leaving a deficit of up to 325MW. This has resulted in four to five hours of daily outages, nearly double in rural areas.

In Rangpur, rural consumers say the crisis has become unbearable.

Mahibur Rahman of Milonpur village in Mithapukur upazila said the heat has become intolerable without electricity, noting that supply often lasts only a few hours a day.

His son, SSC examinee Shariful Islam, added that studying at night has become nearly impossible due to outages and the stifling heat.

Sirajul Islam of Mahipur village in Gangachara upazila said his sleep has been disrupted for a week, as electricity is available for only five to six hours in total over 24 hours.

Monirul Islam, a schoolteacher from Lalmonirhat town, said outages have worsened since Sunday. While daytime cuts can be endured, he described the repeated night-time blackouts as unbearable.

In Rangpur city, electricity is unavailable for hours at a stretch, forcing shops, markets and small businesses to rely on generators.

Businessman Solaiman Ali of Payra Chattar said the added costs are hurting livelihoods, while the noise of generators has weighed heavily on the city's roads.

Khurshid Alam, General Manager of Rangpur Rural Electricity Association, acknowledged the hardship. "This suffering is not only in Rangpur; there is an electricity crisis across the country. People are calling and telling us about their suffering. There is no electricity at my house either."

Ashrafur Islam, chief engineer of

Rangpur NESCO, said that on Monday night, demand in Rangpur city and surrounding areas was around 75MW, while supply averaged only 45MW.

Prof M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to Consumers' Association of Bangladesh, said rural consumers are bearing a disproportionate share of the cuts.

"Loadshedding is distributed in a way that protects high demand urban and commercial areas, while rural feeders are switched off for longer. Even a moderate national shortfall can translate into prolonged outages in villages due to how distribution is managed," he said.

He added that a more balanced load management policy could ease hardship without increasing overall generation.

"A shortfall of around 1,500MW in a system of this size should not, by itself, lead to such extensive disruptions. The way load-shedding is distributed is a key factor behind the suffering people are facing," he said.

DATA MISMATCH
Discrepancies in official data have added confusion.

REB recorded over 2,800MW of shortage at 7:00pm Monday, far higher than 1,840MW, the national figure reported for the same period.

Officials said such variations arise because demand is estimated, not directly measured.

"The national data is based on how much electricity can be generated in a given hour, not on actual demand," said Prof Shamsul.

He explained that generation is regulated by fuel availability rather than demand, with load-shedding used to manage fuel consumption and costs.

Md Zahurul Islam, member (generation) of the PDB, said the ministry has formed a committee headed by PDB Chairman Md Rezaul Karim to examine the discrepancies. "REB's claim does not seem logical," he said.

[Our correspondents in Khulna, Rajshahi and Mymensingh contributed to this report]

PM assures press freedom at first meet

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takes updates on issues reflected in the media, and gives necessary instructions accordingly.

Ruman said the premier listened to NOAB members patiently and said that such view-exchange meetings between the government and newspaper owners would be arranged regularly at three-month intervals.

The meeting began at 2:20pm and lasted an hour and 10 minutes, after which the prime minister joined a luncheon with NOAB members.

He then took part in a photo session with them.

This was his first formal meeting with the association since the formation of the BNP government.

At the onset of the meeting, the association's president and Manab Zamin editor Matiur Rahman Chowdhury spoke about the existing problems in the newspaper industry and sought the prime minister's support in resolving them.

Meanwhile, NOAB members congratulated Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on forming the government with a landslide victory in the 13th National Parliament elections.

They mentioned that during the BNP government in 2001,

newspapers were declared an industry, but said it has now turned into "a sick industry".

Noting that huge government advertisement bills accumulated during previous governments remain unpaid, association leaders sought the PM's support in clearing the dues, the BSS report said.

NOAB members also drew the prime minister's attention to withdrawing cases filed against journalists during the previous interim regime and sought his support regarding bail of arrested journalists.

According to a UNB report, NOAB President Matiur said the prime minister made it clear that he does not want to make any journalist or media outlet hostile.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, he said, "We talked about press freedom.... He [Tarique] said he does not want to make anyone hostile. This is a very good thing as no head of state or head of government has said this before."

The veteran editor said the media industry is under serious pressure, particularly due to economic strain, raising concerns about its sustainability.

"We shared our concerns with the prime minister. He listened to us

carefully. We also told him that he is a man of this industry, as you know who was associated with a newspaper [Dainik Dinkal] for a long time. So, he understands the challenges. He listened to us and spoke to us with sincerity."

Matiur added that Tarique agreed in principle to many of their demands, although some steps may take time to implement.

According to BSS, those at the meeting included NOAB Vice President and Chairman of the New Age editorial board ASM Shahidullah Khan; Treasurer and Publisher of daily Sangbad Altamash Kabir; and Executive Members, AK Azad, publisher of Samakal; Matiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Prothom Alo; Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star; AMM Bahauddin, editor of Inqilab; Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor of Bonik Barta; Mozammel Haque, editor of Karatoa; Dr Ramiz Uddin Chowdhury, editor of Purbokone; and Nasim Manzur, publisher of Financial Express.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon, State Minister Yeaser Khan Choudhury, and the prime minister's adviser on information and broadcasting Dr Zahed Ur Rahman were also present.

Family of four brutally murdered

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Police arrived soon after.

Niamatpur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mahbubur Rahman said Habibur and his children were killed inside a room, while Popy, who appeared to have tried to flee, was chased down and slain in the yard.

Investigators and relatives suspect the murders resulted from a bitter land feud with their relatives.

Family sources said Habibur, the only son of 70-year-old Namir Uddin, had long-standing disputes with his five sisters after receiving the largest share of property. Popy said this created deep resentment among the sisters.

Popy's mother, Sabina Begum,

wept as she spoke to journalists.

"They [Habibur's sisters] have been abusing my daughter for a long time. They together killed my daughter, my son-in-law, and my grandchildren over a land-related dispute," she alleged.

Her father, Moazzem Hossain, said, "They beat my daughter a few days ago. They even tried to kill her in the past. I want justice."

Namir Uddin, who was sleeping in another room, said, "I could not understand when my son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren were killed. I woke up hearing a commotion after the neighbours saw the bodies early in the morning."

Police have detained the five sisters

for interrogation. OC Mahbubur said the nature of the killings did not suggest robbery.

No case had been filed as of 8:30pm yesterday.

Naogaon Superintendent of Police Mohammad Tarekul Islam said, "Initially, we suspect the murder took place due to a land-related dispute among siblings. Several units of police are investigating."

Assistant SP Abdullah Al Mahmood Shawon said the bodies were sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy and expressed hope of significant progress in the investigation within 48 hours.



Relatives devastated after four members of a family were killed in Niamatpur, Naogaon. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN