



Iran casts doubt on US peace efforts

CIA analysis suggests Iran can withstand US blockade for months

AGENCIES

Iran questioned the seriousness of American diplomacy yesterday in the wake of renewed naval clashes in the Gulf, while keeping Washington waiting for a response to its latest negotiating position.

US President Donald Trump had said on Friday that he was expecting Iran's response to Washington's latest proposal for a deal to extend a fragile truce and launch peace talks – "supposedly tonight".

But if Iran did send Pakistani mediators a response, there was no public sign of it, and Tehran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called into question the reliability of the US leadership in a call with his Turkish counterpart.

"The recent escalation of tensions by American forces in the Persian Gulf and their numerous actions in violating the ceasefire have added

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A farmer tends vegetable seedlings grown on floating beds, locally known as dhap, in a low-lying waterbody in Barishal's Banaripara upazila yesterday. Practised from Boishakh to Ashwin, this centuries-old eco-friendly method allows farmers to raise seedlings of bitter gourd, beans, papaya, bottle gourd, pumpkin, chilli, aubergine and other vegetables on rafts made of water hyacinth and organic matter.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Press freedom needs stronger protection

Say speakers at Star 35th anniversary event in Khulna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

The Daily Star celebrated its 35th anniversary in Khulna yesterday, with speakers calling for the protection of media freedom and prioritisation of national interests over partisan politics.

At the event, held at Khulna Press Club's Liaquat Ali Auditorium, speakers also condemned the attack on The Daily Star office in Dhaka on December 18 last year.

Azizul Bari Helal, ruling BNP lawmaker from Khulna-4, called for respect for press freedom, stressing that individuals should not be targeted for drawing and publishing political cartoons.

He said The Daily Star had practised journalism "keeping its head high" and should continue to do so.

"The BNP believes in the freedom of press. We condemn the attack on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo. If the media creates a narrative, you can create a counter-narrative. Why would you attack a newspaper's office?" he said.

Sk Zahangir Hossain, Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker from Khulna-2, emphasised the necessity of factual reporting, noting that the public always seeks objective news.

Prof Anwarul Kadir, director of forest conservation organisation the Sundarbans Academy, said those who

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Interim govt curbed freedoms

In its latest annual report, Amnesty cites arbitrary arrests, harassment of critics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In 2025, freedom of expression, association, and assembly remained unnecessarily restricted under the interim government, London-based Amnesty International said in its annual report.

The rights organisation also noted that individuals, including human rights defenders, faced arbitrary arrests and harassment for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

"The interim government's ban on the Awami League political party brought into question their commitment to upholding freedom of association," Amnesty said in its annual report, titled, "The State of the World's Human Rights" covering 2025, published on April 21.

The interim government took office in August 2024 following the ousting of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League administration. After the February 12 polls, a BNP-led government assumed power.

Incidents of harassment, violence, and arrests targeting individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression – including human rights defenders, journalists, authors, bloggers, and poets – continued throughout 2025, the report said.

The Cyber Security Act of 2023, a law used by the former government against critics in ways that contravened the right to freedom of expression, continued to be used by the interim government to deter activism.

The Act was later repealed and replaced by the Cyber Security Ordinance, which took effect in May and was intended to remain in force until formal approval by a future parliament.

In August, the High Court dismissed a case filed in 2018 under the Information and Communication Technology Act against activist photographer Shahidul Alam.

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BANGLADESH JOURNALISM CONFERENCE 2026

Owners' business interests often hurt editorial freedom

Speakers say, call for greater transparency and self-regulation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The business interests of media owners pose one of the greatest threats to editorial independence in Bangladesh, speakers said at a conference yesterday.

AK Azad, managing director of Times Media Limited, a concern of Ha-Meem Group, which owns Channel 24 and The Daily Samakal, said that, as an owner, his businesses are always under pressure from the factions his journalists write against.

He made the remarks at the Bangladesh Journalism Conference 2026, organised by Management and Resources Development Initiative, at the Radisson Blu Water Garden in Dhaka.

Azad acknowledged his obligation to the 75,000 workers employed across his non-media businesses and admitted that he is sometimes compelled to

obstruct publication to protect them.

He spoke about how his commitment to independent journalism and his journalist employees is sometimes tested by his responsibility to employees in his other business concerns.

Responding to a proposal made by Kamal Ahmed, who was the chief of the now-defunct media reform commission, to convert media organisations into trusts or public limited companies to separate them from owners' other businesses, Azad said, "I want to turn either Samakal or Channel 24 into a trust, provided people like you [the panellists] take responsibility," he told a panel discussion titled "Media Self-Regulation in Bangladesh: Professional Oversight, Accountability and Grievance Redressal."

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"It [self-regulation in media] is something journalists should do [not the state]... It is based on moral authority, not legal authority."

JOAN BARATA
International media law expert

MOTHER'S DAY

Mothers in chars find hope close to home



BRAC-run centre reduces maternal deaths in isolated parts of Sirajganj

TANGILA TASNIM

Just a week ago, 20-year-old Murshida Akter gave birth to a baby boy at a small health centre in a remote char area of Chowhali Upazila, where childbirth often comes with as much fear as joy.

"We have suffered like this for years. Women in these areas often give birth on boats or roadside vehicles while seeking treatment.

For years, childbirth in the remote char villages [meant] a desperate race against time – across rivers, on horse carts, or balanced on the back of motorcycles. Many mothers never made it to a hospital alive.

With no caesarean facilities within reach, women facing complications had to travel long distances across rivers and rough roads to reach hospitals – journeys many did not survive in time.

Now, a BRAC-run health centre is offering rare maternal care in the isolated area, where access to doctors and emergency services has long remained scarce.

Taherima Kharun, a midwife at the BRAC health centre, said, "At home deliveries, we have seen both mothers and babies die.

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'Lost a piece of my heart'

Cries Bristy's mother as her body comes home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Shariatpur

The body of Nahida Sultana Bristy, the Bangladeshi PhD student brutally murdered in Florida last month, was laid to rest at her village home in Madaripur Sadar upazila yesterday.

After her namaz-e-jaanaza following Asr prayers, she was buried beside her grandparents in Char Gobindopur under Khoajpur union.

Earlier in the morning, Bristy's parents and relatives received her body upon its arrival at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

Bristy lived with her parents and elder brother in Mirpur before moving to the United States to pursue a PhD in chemical engineering at the University of South Florida last year. She and fellow Bangladeshi PhD student Zamil Ahamed Limon were reported missing on April 16.

Investigators later confirmed both had been murdered. Their bodies were subsequently recovered, and Limon's roommate was arrested and charged with double murder. Limon's body arrived in Dhaka on May 4.

Before Bristy's funeral prayers, Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Wadia Shabab told journalists Bangladesh had suffered an unimaginable loss. "Bristy was a PhD research

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Ivy Begum, mother of slain PhD student Nahida Sultana Bristy, breaks down in tears as she leans on her son, Jahid Akon, after receiving Bristy's body yesterday. A student of University of South Florida, Bristy was murdered in the United States. The photo was taken near HSA.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

I held over torture and abetment to teen's suicide

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Police on Friday arrested one person over the torture and abetment to the suicide of a teenager in Pabna's Chatmohar upazila.

Earlier that evening, police recovered the girl's body from her residence.

According to the victim's family, the 14-year-old was assaulted and humiliated by her employer over allegations of theft earlier that day.

The child used to work as a domestic helper at the home of one Hannan Mollah, who lived in the same village as the girl's family.

On Friday morning, Tk 120 went missing from Mollah's house. The family blamed the child and tied her to a pillar and beat her in front of locals, many of whom recorded the incident.

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