

Leader calls for massive turnout at upcoming elections



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called for massive turnout at the upcoming elections across the country, saying the path of reform passes through elections. Speaking at a meeting with a group of people from East Azarbaijan Province on Sunday, Ayatollah Khamenei said everyone should participate in the elections, Press TV reported.

"Elections are the main pillar of the Islamic Republic. The way to reform the country is through elections," he said. He reminded the candidates that political differences should not affect

the national unity of the Iranian nation against the enemies.

"Do not assume that the enemy is weak and incapable," the Leader asserted. "An important condition for victory is knowing the capabilities of the enemy, yet not fearing it."

Iran is gearing up for parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections slated for March 1. Almost 15,000 candidates have been approved to compete in the parliamentary elections that are held every four years.

In the Assembly of Experts elections, 144 candidates are vying for

88 seats at the body, which elects and oversees the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and is in a position of authority to either appoint or dismiss the Leader.

In recent months, Ayatollah Khamenei has consistently encouraged people to participate in the elections. Early last month, he said, "Anyone who opposes the elections is opposing the Islamic Republic and Islam."

He also censured attempts aimed at demoralizing the people and making them distrustful by claiming that the elections in Iran are meaningless.

● khamenei.ir

Close ties with neighbors prerequisite to US expulsion: Iran deputy FM



Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Baqeri-Kani said cordial ties with neighboring countries were a prerequisite to the ultimate expulsion of US forces from West Asia.

Speaking at a TV program on Sunday morning, Baqeri-Kani said Iran had prioritized the policy of de-escalating tensions with regional and neighboring states and would not allow foreigners to take advantage of possible gaps, Press TV reported.

"By consolidating our very strategic and deep-rooted relations with neighboring countries, including Azerbaijan, we show a serious will to create a stable region through collective cooperation and security in order to provide a basis for the US withdrawal from the region," he added.

"The US pullout from the region requires us to create a brotherly, friendly and unbreakable bond with neighbors. This is a firm and strategic decision of the Islamic Republic of Iran's government."

The senior diplomat also hailed the Iranian government's interaction with the neighboring countries.

"President Ebrahim Raisi managed to resolve obstacles hindering the expansion of ties between Iran and its neighbors," he noted. Since taking office in 2021, Raisi's government has pursued a good neighborliness policy and forged partnership with several countries.

Last March, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed under a Chinese-brokered deal to restore diplomatic relations severed in 2016.

Prospects dim for Gaza truce as US vows to veto UN resolution

Brazilian president accuses Israel of committing 'genocide'

International Desk

Prospects for a cease-fire in Gaza dimmed Sunday after the United States signaled it would veto the latest push for a UN Security Council resolution and mediator Qatar acknowledged that separate truce talks have hit an impasse.

Efforts to pause the over four-month-old war languish as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to reject international appeals to spare Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where around 1.4 million people have sought refuge.

The Health Ministry in Gaza said on Sunday that a total of 127 people were killed in Israel's strikes in just 24 hours. So far, nearly 29,000 people

have been killed by Israel's attacks on Gaza. Egypt, which controls the Rafah border crossing from Gaza, has repeatedly warned against any "forced displacement" of Palestinians into the Sinai desert.

Even if a temporary truce deal is struck, Netanyahu said the ground invasion of Rafah will go ahead. Next week's possible United Nations Security Council vote appears unlikely to advance the cease-fire effort, with Washington already voicing opposition.

"The United States does not support action on this draft resolution," said US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield. "Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted."

Algeria's draft resolution seeks an immediate humanitarian cease-fire, but Thomas-Greenfield said the United States instead supports a truce-for-hostages deal that would pause fighting for six weeks.

Attacks on hospitals

Israel's military on Sunday said troops in the southern city of Khan Younis are still operating "in Nasser Hospital".

The ongoing raid followed a week-long siege which has left the hospital "not functional anymore" even though 200 patients remain there, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on social media platform X.

Gaza Health Ministry



spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra also said Nasser Hospital was out of service, after troops had turned it "into a military barracks".

He said one more person had died due to lack of oxygen because power has been out for three days, bringing the total of such deaths to seven.

'Genocide' in Gaza

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva accused Israel on Sunday of committing "genocide" against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and compared its actions to Adolf Hitler's campaign to exterminate Jews.

"What's happening in the Gaza Strip isn't a war, it's a genocide," Lula told reporters in Addis Ababa where he was attending an African Union summit. "It's not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It's a war between a highly prepared

army and women and children," added the veteran leftist.

"What's happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people hasn't happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: when Hitler decided to kill the Jews." Lula, who met with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh Saturday on the sidelines of the summit, reiterated his call for a two-state solution to the conflict, with Palestine "definitively recognized as a full and sovereign state."

'We are under occupation'

"Palestine is ready. We have the institutions, capabilities, but our serious problem is we are under occupation," Shtayyeh told the Munich Security Conference. "We are under Israeli occupation and we need it to end."

When asked whether

bringing Hamas into the broader Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) platform would alienate international partners, he said Hamas was an integral part of the Palestinian political arena.

"In order for Hamas to be a member of the PLO there has to be prerequisites that Hamas has to accept — the political platform of the PLO, an understanding on the issue of resistance; we are calling for popular resistance and nothing else," he said.

"Russia has invited all Palestinian factions who will be meeting on the 26th of this month in Moscow. We will see if Hamas is ready to come to the ground with us," Shtayyeh said.

This handout picture released by the Israeli army on February 17, 2024, shows troops on the ground in the Gaza Strip. ● ISRAELI ARMY/AFP

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iranian, British envoys discuss Afghanistan in Doha

Iran's special representative on Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Qomi held talks with his British counterpart on the sidelines of a meeting on Afghanistan in Qatar's capital, Doha.

The talks with the UK envoy revolved around the question of the international coordinator's efficiency in the face of the issues that had piled up in Afghanistan after decades of war, the Iranian representative said in a post on his X account, Tasnim News Agency reported.

Doha is hosting a meeting of special envoys and representatives on Afghanistan on February 18 and 19.