

# Israel quits Nablus, Ramallah but Arafat remains cooped

## First stage of Operation Defensive Wall over, says Sharon

AFP, Nablus, West Bank

Israeli forces pulled out of the battered West Bank cities of Nablus and most of Ramallah yesterday after a three-week occupation that left scores dead, but Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat remained under close guard in his besieged Ramallah headquarters.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon later announced that the first stage of his Operation Defensive Wall to tackle Palestinian militants was over.

"The current phase of the operation is finished, but the fight against terrorism will go on," said Sharon at a news conference in a Jerusalem supermarket.

Israel, meanwhile, said it was ready to cooperate with a UN probe into its operation in the smashed northern West Bank refugee camp of Jenin that the United States called a "human tragedy".

But it warned that a UN envoy, who described Israel's behaviour there as "morally repugnant", could be declared persona non grata.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat dismissed the Israeli pullbacks in the West Bank as a charade. "This is lie for television. It doesn't mean anything."

Israel has said it will pull back to a close distance from the towns it is leaving, promising to withdraw further if the situation remains stable.

In Nablus, sporadic machine-gun and tank fire could be heard late Saturday and in the dawn hours of yesterday, when tanks rumbled through the devastated streets heading south towards Jerusalem.

Around 200 Israeli tanks and armoured personnel carriers stormed into this major northern West Bank town of more than 100,000 people on April 3 in the first

week of Sharon's sweep through the territory to track down militants.

Hospital officials said 75 people have been killed and 450 injured in the major weeklong battle in Nablus that followed. But many more are still missing, feared dead, or possibly arrested by the Israelis during their occupation.

The first signs of life appeared yesterday morning, as cars were visible on the city's streets for the first time in weeks, with the curfew now lifted.

Children ventured out and shop

owners began lifting the steel shutters covering their storefronts.

"I feel much happier now, but not completely happy just yet," one shop owner said. "But it looks like better days are ahead of us."

However, residents reported that Israeli tanks were still visible on the city's eastern outskirts, where several refugee camps are situated and where so-called special operations are expected to continue.

In Ramallah, Israeli forces also pulled out, with the exception of the sector around the offices of Arafat

who remained pinned down by troops as he has been since the start of the military operation on March 29.

The army kept approach roads closed to Arafat's wrecked headquarters compound, using tanks, large rocks and burned-out private cars destroyed in fighting to block the streets.

Israeli soldiers announced in Arabic that a curfew was still in place around the offices.



Residents clean a street in the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday after the Israeli army withdrew from most of the city they occupied since March 29.

# Govt trying to hide its corruption, repression from foreigners: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition leader and Awami League president Sheikh Hasina yesterday alleged that the government was putting restrictions on foreigners and journalists' visit to Bangladesh to hide its corruption and repression.

"Why put restrictions on foreigners and journalists? Why do diplomats have to seek government permission to go out of Dhaka? Because, they (government) fear that the world will witness their corruption and repression," said Hasina while addressing a reunion of Bangladesh Krishak League, peasants' front of her party, in the city.

Krishak League organised the reunion programme at the auditorium of the Institute of Engineers to mark the 30th founding anniversary of the organisation. It also awarded Sheikh Hasina the newly introduced 'Bangabandhu Krishi Padak' (Bangabandhu Agriculture Medal) for her contribution in making Bangladesh self-sufficient in food.

Two other co-recipients of the award are Grameen Krishi Foundation of Prof Mohammad Yunus and ex-VC of Bangladesh Agriculture

University Dr Mohammad Hossain (posthumously).

The reunion, scheduled for a 10 am-start, formally began two-and-a-half hours behind schedule after the opposition leader turned up at the venue and inaugurated the programme by hoisting the national flag and releasing pigeons and balloons.

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## Hasina leaves for UK today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina leaves Dhaka for London this morning on a flight of the British Airways.

During her visit for over a week to the United Kingdom, Hasina is due to meet her younger sister Sheikh Rehana and take part in some organisational activities besides meeting Bangladesh expatriates.

The opposition leader is expected to return home at the end of this month.

During her stay abroad, other central AL leaders will go on mass-

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# 40 polling centres at Rajshahi 'very risky'

ABDUL WADOOD, Rajshahi

Forty of the 130 polling centres have been identified as 'very risky' and 86 as 'risky' for the Rajshahi City Corporation election, said sources in the Office of the Deputy Election Commissioner.

Many of the seemingly risk-free polling centres are also becoming 'risky', apprehend other sources.

Tension mounts with the candidates and their supporters becoming increasingly hostile to one another.

Incidents of ripping-down of posters, beating of rivals, resistance to campaign and clashes are also on the rise.

As part of special security measures, about 5,500 security personnel, including those of the army, Bangladesh Rifles and police, will

be deployed, with a 21-strong team at every polling centre.

The security team will comprise one inspector, one sub-inspector, ten constables, one PC and one APC of the armed Ansar Battalion and four female and six male ansars.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner Enayetullah Dewan said police patrol has already been arranged in the 'risky' areas.

Also deployed were police personnel at some other vulnerable points in the city.

A few untoward incidents took place and stern action was taken against the culprits, he said.

There will be 26 mobile police teams - each with one inspector, one sub-inspector and six constables.

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# Khaleda rejects AL plea to scrap new law

## Plaque of Zianagar UZ unveiled

UNB, Pirojpur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday rejected opposition plea for scrapping the newly enacted law for summary trial of offences of violence, saying that it is needed for maintaining peace and protecting public property.

"It will remain in force for two years. Those who will destroy property of the people and disrupt peace through acts of terrorism will be tried under this law," she said addressing a big public meeting at Indurkani College ground.

Khaleda Zia's firm stance on the law came in the wake of opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's demand for repeal of the law that has a provision for holding summary trial of those who will disrupt law and order.

Earlier, the prime minister unveiled the plaque of the newly formed "Zianagar Upazila" in the district. The upazila comprises three unions - Balipara, Pratyashi and Pererghat - with a total population of around 72,000.

Indurkani thana, 16 kilometres off the district headquarters, has been upgraded to an upazila named after President Ziaur Rahman to fulfil the

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# Saifur snubs western donor 'excesses'

UNB, Dhaka

Next external assistance accounts for only seven per cent of development spending, said the finance and planning minister yesterday, dismissing the common belief that Bangladesh depends on foreign aid.

Saifur Rahman was annoyed at "excesses" by some Western countries whose contribution to Bangladesh's development efforts is not all that significant.

"The annual assistance of five to six of those countries together would be even less than half the amount we get from Japan every year," the finance minister said to debunk the myth about the country's dependence on foreign aid.

He recalled Japan's strong presence in Bangladesh's major infrastructure projects since the independence and said the Japanese contribution would be around US\$ 6 billion in the last 30 years of its diplomatic relations with Bangladesh, whereas total support of the EU as a whole would come to little over one billion.

"But Japan doesn't shout, because they have the Asian values and culture," Saifur said in praise of the silent but significant presence of the Asia's economic powerhouse in Bangladesh.

If Japan had not extended support to the Jamuna Bridge, none of the ADB and World Bank would have come forward to finance the giant project, he said.

Saifur's strong words against some non-Asian nations came within a week of a corruption charge levelled against a minister by a visiting functionary of a Scandinavian country, which the government described as a "blot on diplomatic norms."

"Some countries speak in such away as if we are dependent on foreign aid. But, in fact, we depend on our own resources... we have a lot of resources," said the minister who, of late, speaks about the country's graduation from the LDC status.

The minister was speaking at the launch of Japanese Grant Aid project

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Apr 22		6-23 pm
Apr 23	5-31 am	

Prayer Timings		
Apr 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-25	6-30
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

# Khoka violating code, allege 13 in their memo to president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirteen mayoral candidates in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) election yesterday submitted a memorandum to President Badruddin Chowdhury seeking his intervention regarding Election Commission's "inaction" despite their complaint of "violation of polls conduct" by another candidate, Sadeq Hossain Khoka.

In the memorandum, they also demanded resignation of Khoka from the cabinet and the parliament; removal of wall writings, color posters and gates; security to all mayoral candidates and scope to present their views through the state-owned electronic media.

They also complained that Khoka violated the polls code by declaring himself a candidate of the four-party ruling alliance although the city corporation election is not being held on party basis.

Later talking to The Daily Star

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# Judgement on ETV: SC extends stay by two more weeks

BSS, Dhaka

The Appellate Division yesterday extended by two weeks its earlier order of stay on High Court judgement that declared the licence of Ekushey Television (ETV) as illegal.

The chamber judge Mohammad Ruhul Amin passed the order upon hearing an application moved before the court praying for extension of the order of stay as the authorities could not supply the certified copy of the High Court judgement.

A division bench of the High Court had declared the agreement between the government and ETV illegal after hearing a writ petition filed before the High Court.

ETV filed civil miscellaneous petition before the Appellate Division and prayed for an order of stay on operation of the High Court judgement.

The Appellate Division earlier stayed the operation of High Court judgement till April 23.

# Khulna city corp polls Too many 'rebels' may torpedo prospects of both BNP, AL

QUAZI AMANULLAH, Khulna

Election prospects of the candidates belonging to both BNP and Awami League seem to have been diminished due to too many 'rebels' from both parties contesting the forthcoming Khulna City Corporation (KCC) polls at ward level.

Independent candidates think they will have an easy sail taking full advantage of the intra-party rivalry of BNP and AL.

None of the 'rebel' candidates from the two main political parties has so far stayed back from the election race despite warnings and expulsions by their party high command.

As a result, there are at least two candidates each from BNP and Awami League running for ward commissioner in all the 31 wards, giving independent candidates a better chance to win voter sympathy, political observers believe.

The 'rebel' candidates are creating serious problems for party nominees. BNP, in particular, is expected to be the worst sufferer in the election due to its internal rift. Because, candidates of both Mayor and Manju group of the party are still

in the race in 24 out of 31 wards.

Besides, these two rival BNP groups have fielded their candidates for women's reserved seats in all 10 wards.

Similarly, Awami League is also facing the same problem with 'rebel' candidates in each of the 31 wards for male and 10 wards for female KCC commissioners.

Besides, BNP has not spared its ally Jamaat from being the worst victim of circumstances.

Jamaat has fielded five candidates in five wards only. These five candidates will not only contest against AL candidates but also against candidates fielded by the Mayor group of BNP. Despite fervent appeals by Jamaat leaders, Mayor Sheikh Tayebur Rahman did not ask his own nominees to stay back from the race.

Manju group claims that its candidates belong to the four-party alliance. This group has fielded none against Jamaat candidates.

Mayor group, on the other hand, also claims that its candidates belong to the four-party alliance. But it has fielded candidates in all the five wards where Jamaat candi

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# US, Kurds in secret talks to plan anti-Saddam strike?

AFP, Dubai

US officials held a secret meeting near Berlin with the leaders of the main Kurdish factions controlling northern Iraq to plan a strike against President Saddam Hussein "by year's end", an Arab newspaper reported yesterday.

The Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily Asharq Al-Awsat, quoting an Iraqi Kurdish source, said the US side at the meeting included military officials and representatives of the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Massoud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) chief Jalal Talabani, whose factions share control of a Western-protected Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, both attended the three-day meeting which ended on Friday, the paper said.

leaders closer, according to Asharq Al-Awsat's source.

One of the topics discussed was the possibility of merging the KDP's and PUK's military resources into a single force in anticipation of the anti-Saddam strike, which would take place "by year's end".

The United States has threatened to launch a military offensive against Iraq and try to overthrow Saddam unless he allows UN arms inspectors back into the country to verify that Baghdad no longer has weapons of mass destruction.

The three airports have been upgraded to serve as springboards for the attack, it said. A planned meeting of US officials with Barzani and Talabani in a mediation bid in Washington on Thursday was called off after the Berlin talks brought the rival

leaders closer, according to Asharq Al-Awsat's source.

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