

# 200 dead, 1,500 missing in Philippines landslide

AFP, Tacloban

About 200 people were believed killed and 1,500 others were missing in the central Philippines yesterday when a landslide buried an entire village, the Red Cross said.

Eyewitnesses said only a few houses were left standing after the landslide hit the village of Guinsaugon in the south of the Philippine island of Leyte.

"There are about 1,500 missing, 200 dead," Richard Gordon, the head of the Philippine Red Cross, said in a radio interview.

The first footage from the devastated village showed a sea of mud covering what had been lush green valley farmland.

Only a few sheets of tin roofing and the occasional coconut tree could be seen. Tiny groups of mud-spattered survivors were also shown, walking through the muck, apparently stunned by the scope of the destruction.

In a televised address to the nation, President Gloria Arroyo said rescue teams were rushing to the area from "air, land and sea" to cope with the catastrophe.

"I have ordered the Coast Guard and our entire naval force in the (central Philippines) region to the area," she said.

"Naval ships will be used as floating hospitals and command centres for relief and rescue."

Leyte Governor Rosette Lerias

said the latest census indicated there were 375 houses with 3,000 people living in Guinsaugon before the landslide. She described the village as totally flattened.

"It was like mud running down the mountain and it covered the village in seconds," she said, quoting survivors.

Experts blamed deforestation for the tragedy, which came after days of rainfall that was five times higher than usual.

Lerias said that many Guinsaugon residents had been evacuated after landslides earlier in the week had killed more than 20 people on Leyte, but that many had returned Friday because the rains had stopped and the sun had come

out.

A mild 2.6-magnitude earthquake which struck before the landslide may also have helped set off the wall of mud that crashed down on the village, said Rene Solidum, head of the government vulcanology office.

"The area could have really been ready for a landslide because of the amount of rainfall and if there was a minor earthquake, it might have hastened it," Solidum said.

Army Colonel Nestor Sadirin, head of a rescue task force, said 16 dead bodies had been recovered so far and 100 people rescued.

Leyte Congressman Roger Mercado said in a radio interview

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## Rafique-ul Huq clarifies

In response to a February 14 Daily Star report headlined 'Feuding SQ Chy family wanders in legal maze,' Barrister Rafique-ul Huq has stated that at no point of time he was retained and paid as legal advisor of QC Container Line Ltd and hence he has not violated any canons of professional conduct and etiquette.

The Star report quoted a letter of QC Container's Director Giasuddin Quader Chowdhury that said Barrister Rafique-ul Huq had been hired by QC Container Line Ltd on many occasions and therefore is privy to important confidential information about the company. In this letter Giasuddin requested Barrister Huq to withdraw himself from the Beximco lawsuit against QC Container.

Barrister Huq made available to The Daily Star a copy of his reply to Giasuddin, in which he wrote, "At no time I was retained and paid as Legal Advisor of QC Container Line

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Sri Lanka batsman Sanath Jayasuriya, left, Kumar Sangakkara and others on their arrival at the Zia International Airport yesterday.

# No EC meet on voter listing since Aug

Time for fresh enrolment ends on Feb 20

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Election Commission has not met even once since August 6 to discuss voter list preparation while the EC Secretariat continues with preparing a fresh roll with a deferred deadline of February 20.

"No meeting has been held since August last on voter list preparation. And I have not received any information officially about the ongoing voter-listing work," Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali told The Daily Star.

The fresh voter-listing task at an

estimated cost of Tk 146 crore began on January 1 according to a unilateral decision of Chief Election Commissioner MAAziz.

The EC Secretariat last Monday issued a circular directing the district election officers to complete preparing the draft voter roll by March 12, sources said.

It however is yet to clarify its position on remuneration of the 3-lakh-strong staff recruited to carry out the voter listing across the country.

In the circular, the EC Secretariat asked the district elec-

tion officers to start preparing the draft roll after February 20 using the prescribed form, said some of the officers. But, "the Secretariat has sent us only one copy of the form and asked us to photocopy it, though it has not given us the money for the photocopying," a district election officer told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

In the wake of the widespread controversies and legal litigation, the EC now keeps mum. The officials, who had prepared the last voter list in 2000, expressed sur-

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## Salman Khan jailed for poaching

AFP, Jodhpur

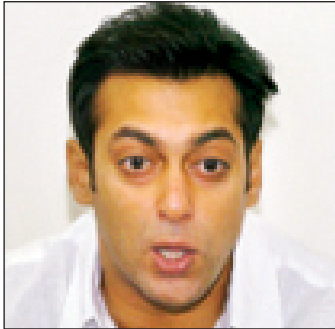
A court in western India yesterday sentenced Bollywood superstar Salman Khan to a year in jail for shooting two rare black buck deer.

"The court has sentenced Salman Khan to one year's imprisonment. He also has to pay a fine of 5,000 rupees (113 dollars)," his lawyer Vimal Sarswat told AFP.

The actor would appeal and apply for immediate bail, the lawyer said.

Khan, 40, who enjoys a massive following in India, was accused of poaching the protected species in the Jodhpur district of Rajasthan in September, 1998.

The lawyer said the eight other accused, including actor Satish Shah, were acquitted.



Salman Khan

Shah said he was relieved the case was over.

"I have been making rounds of this court for the past eight years, I am very happy that I have been

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## Israeli reprisal plan to isolate Hamas govt

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel decided yesterday to submit a range of reprisals against a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority for government approval a day after the radical faction takes up seats in parliament for the first time.

Chaired by Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Israel's security and political cabinet examined a series of punitive measures,

deciding to refer the proposed reprisals for formal government approval on Sunday.

Israel is demanding that the radical Islamist movement, responsible for scores of suicide attacks, recognise the Jewish state's right to exist and renounce violence, following its massive election win last month.

"The security and diplomatic and security establishments gave assessments and made recommendations," the prime minister's office said. "Olmert decided the issue would be submitted to the cabinet on Sunday."

Hamas's likely candidate for prime minister, Ismail Haniya, has slammed Israel for seeking to impose collective punishment on the Palestinians.

The prospect of a Hamas-led

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Prayer Timing		
February 18		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-20	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-03	6-07
Esha	7-30	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

## Top outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A regional leader of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) was killed in 'crossfire' between his accomplices and members of the Rapid Action Battalion at Baoishona village under Naragati Police Station of Narail district at midnight on Thursday.

He was identified as Mohammad Akhter Hossain, 34, son of late Omar Ali Shaikh of Joar village under Rupsha upazila of Khulna.

Rab sources said Akhter was arrested in Savar area of Dhaka Thursday morning.

On his confessional statement, the members of the elite force set out for Baoishona village, taking Akhter with them, to recover fire-arms and arrest his cohorts.

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## 'Biharis' in Saidpur split over inclusion in new voter list

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

The community of 60 thousand stranded Pakistanis in Saidpur has divided over their inclusion in the list of prospective voters, raising the spectre of clash between the opposing groups.

Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC), an organisation dedicated to repatriation, opposes the inclusion while other organisations of the community are in favour of being on the list.

Sources said that field level workers of the Election Commission (EC) have included a good number of stranded Pakistanis in the list, bowing to pressure from the ruling alliance activists.

Locally known as Biharis, the people of this community have long been living in the camps run by International Red Cross Committee in Saidpur.

The leaders of the Repatriation Committee strongly protested the bid to enrol any stranded Pakistani in the voter list. General Secretary of its Saidpur unit Riaz Akbar told The Daily Star that they are the citizens of Pakistan and they should not be included in a voter list of Bangladesh.

But newly formed Stranded Pakistanis Youth Repatriation Committee (SPYRC) campaigns for enfranchisement of the young stranded Pakistanis. General

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## Journalist AZM Haider passes away

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Veteran journalist AZM Haider passed away after a prolonged illness at Central Hospital in the city yesterday evening. He was 71.

He left behind by his wife, two daughters, one son and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his death.

During his long career, Haider worked in now-defunct Eastern News Agency (ENA) as its editor and editor of the UNB. He also held senior positions in The Bangladesh Observer, The New Nation and The Independent.

Family sources said he will be buried at Azimpur graveyard today.

Opposition leader and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at the death of AZM Haider.

She conveyed her deep sympathy to the members of the bereaved family and prayed for the salvation of the departed soul.