

## Israel launches new airstrikes on Hamas

AP, Gaza City

Israeli airstrikes targeted Hamas for a fifth straight day yesterday, hitting a rocket squad and two workshops in Gaza, and the defense minister warned militants who attack Israel they should be "very afraid."

But Defence Minister Amir Peretz also said now is not the time for a major Israeli ground offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Hospital officials said two Palestinians were killed and four wounded in the latest Israeli strikes.

Days of Israeli air attacks on Hamas targets have coincided with a surge in deadly infighting between Hamas gunmen and rivals from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction.

Yesterday, the two groups reached a new cease-fire deal, pledging to pull fighters off the streets and exchange hostages, officials from both sides said.

Previous truce agreements quickly collapsed in recent days, and it was not clear whether this one would hold. Failure to stanch the bloodshed would spell the end of the shaky power-sharing agreement. Hamas and Fatah reached two months ago to end a previous round of internal strife.

Clashes erupted outside the home of a senior Fatah official in Gaza City as the latest truce was reached, and security officials said several people were wounded. In the course of the gunbattle, the convoy of a Fatah-aligned colonel in the Palestinian intelligence came under fire, but no one was hurt.

Later, however, teams of representatives from the various Palestinian militant factions went around to buildings to make sure gunmen had come down from rooftops. Once rooftops are cleared, an exchange of an unknown number of hostages kidnapped during the past week is to begin. Other faction members removed roadblocks that had been erected during the fighting to identify gunmen from rival factions.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said he expected the latest truce to stick because of Israel's military strikes.

"No one would accept to fight one another while the Israelis are shelling Gaza," he said.

Israel launched its latest round of airstrikes on Tuesday to counter a stepped-up barrage of Hamas rockets on Israeli border towns. The militant group, which refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist,

## Hannan Shah

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the same police station.

According to the complainant, Hannan Shah appointed his son as the chairman of Bhawal Paribahan using his influence even though the BNP leader did not own any vehicle.

Norman said he got permission to run his vehicles on the Raniganj-Mahakali route only after he paid Tk 1 lakh as extortion to the government, sources said.

The plaintiff said he had to stop operating vehicles finally as he failed to pay another Tk 2 lakh as demanded by the accused at a later date.

Norman said Hannan Shah and his son were able to extort Tk 1 crore from different owners of Bhawal Paribahan in such way.

Mohklesur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kapashia Police Station, confirmed filing of the cases.

Hannan Shah and his son are now on a 5-day remand in an extortion case filed on May 13 by Ruhul Amin, a lecturer at Kapashia Degree College.

They will be produced before a Gazipur court today on completion of the remand.

## Sachin, Sourav

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held sharply by a running Mohammad Rafiq just behind the bowing end to the 189-run fourth wicket partnership.

Earlier, Ganguly took a cheeky single from another short delivery as the aggressive Shahadat to complete his ton in 165 balls that contained 13 boundaries and two big sixes.

The right-hander was also dismissed in the same fashion as he chased an outside off-stump bouncer from Shahadat, only to hole out to Mohammad Ashraful in the covers.

Ace Bangladesh left-arm spinner Rafique brought another success for the home team when he had debutant Ramesh Pawar bowled for seven but still there was the dashing Mahendra Dhoni at the crease with 36 runs to his name as he accelerated the India run-rate.

But there might have been one more wicket for the Tigers when Rajin Selah took a difficult catch of Dhoni, who was then on 26, at the deep square leg boundary when the right-hander hooked Shahadat.

Rain is also expected today and tomorrow, which could further lengthen the wait of the players inside the confines of the dressing-room.

## Water saving rice

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percent water could be saved for the newly invented varieties," he added.

He also said among the 93, there are a few varieties which could be harvested in 120 to 130 days. Normally it takes 150 days, added the RDA official.

Zakaria said five South Asian countries would also initiate cultivation of the new varieties innovated by the Bangladeshi scientists.

## Nepal Maoists

FROM PAGE 16

"We'll start a nationwide strike and peaceful protests from Sunday if the government fails to make a decision to improve camp conditions," Maoist leader Prachanda said on Saturday, according to state-owned Nepal Television.

Yesterday, Israel missiles slammed into a rocket squad near the northern Gaza town of Beit Hanoun, the army said.

Earlier in the day, missile strikes demolished two suspected Hamas workshops.

Saturday's two deaths brought to 22 the number of Palestinians killed in airstrikes in the past week.

Peretz warned militants involved in rocket operations should be "very afraid," because "it is our intention to act against Hamas."

"We are mainly focusing on sensitive locations tied to Hamas," he told Israel Radio, adding that these locations included rocket workshops.

Asked whether Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas and the head of Hamas' military wing, Ahmed Jaber, could also be targets, Peretz said he would not rule out any action that "makes it clear to everyone that we don't intend to allow anyone to harm Israeli citizens."

At the same time, he said Israel would not embark on a major offensive in the Gaza Strip because it had other, unspecified tools in its arsenal to use against rocket-launchers.

Israel's Security Cabinet is to meet on Sunday with senior defense officials to discuss the rocket attacks and how to respond, Israel media reported.

Four rockets hit the border area Saturday, causing damage, but no injury. A day earlier, four Israelis were hurt in rocket attacks.

Peretz said Israel is worried by Hamas' efforts to extend the range of its rockets, which include training in Iran.

The Israeli airstrikes have driven Hamas fighters out of their bases, prompting accusations that Israel is helping Fatah.

Peretz insisted Israel is not interfering in the internal fighting. However, he also said that "we certainly would like the moderate forces to emerge with the upper hand," a reference to Fatah.

It, however, said this did not include other factors like procurement of equipment, software loading after import, recruitment of 24,000 operators, their training and setting of establishment etc.

Collection of data can only begin after all those have been completed.

The news regarding time requirement to prepare voter list has created confusion and misled the readers, the rejoinder said, adding: "We urge all concerned to collect and provide realistic news and the proper evaluation of the published subject".

## Biman

FROM PAGE 1

Biman is also planning to buy new generation aircraft as part of its restructuring.

A private operator will be appointed to run the airlines on a commercial basis, said the source.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, Managing Director (MD) of Biman MA Momen said,

"We have 13 aircraft (seven of those now in operation) now and 4,800 staff. So, the excess manpower will have to be reduced."

He said, "Under the VRS, those who have completed 25 years of service would be asked to retire."

But Biman will try to ensure that its skilled officials and employees do not go into retirement under this scheme.

Implementation of the VRS scheme will require Tk 300 crore, and the World Bank has already given this amount to the government, sources said.

"We are trying to bring Man-Equipment Ratio (MER) [ratio of aircraft to manpower] of Biman to a reasonable level to reduce its expenses by 40 to 45 percent," said the Biman MD.

Biman's MER at present is 1:367 while the acceptable ratio is 1:200.

Singapore Airlines' MER is 1:52, Malaysian Airline's MER is 1:146 and Emirates' MER is 1:294.

About the proposed organogram and rules of business, Biman officials said working system would be made more computer oriented. "No helping hand (like personal secretary) would be provided for high officials anymore," one official said.

Biman now has Air Service Agreement (ASA) with 42 countries, of which it uses only 18.

"After becoming PLC, Biman will take all initiatives that a commercial organisation or a PLC takes," the MD said.

## Jadid al Qaeda

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blasts is going on.

Bombs were set off at Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet railway station on the day, leaving one person injured.

Later, a militant organisation, "Jadid al Qaeda Bangladesh," claimed responsibility for the serial blasts.

Director General of Rapid Action Battalion Hasan Mahmud Khanbaker, DMP, Commissioner Naim Ahmed and senior police officials were present on the occasion.

## Water saving rice

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## EC proposal

FROM PAGE 1

recommended holding fresh polls in such constituencies.

Electoral Commissioner Brigadier General (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain said the EC will consider the recommendations.

On de-linking front organisations from the political parties, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said the EC has asked the government to repeal the political party Act formulated in 1978 during the rule of Ziaur Rahman that allowed a party to have such front organisations.

"Now, we are including some new provisions in the Representation of People Order 1972 asking the political parties to dissolve their front organisations otherwise they will not get registration," Huda said.

According to the EC draft proposals, no registered political party shall form any front organisation with the students of any educational institution.

The registered political parties will not also form any front organisations with the teachers of any public or non-government educational institutions, which receive financial aid from the government.

The ultra-leftists launched their "People's War" in western Nepal in 1996. However, they now say they have renounced violence and will work within a democratic system.

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The original draft proposals disclosed on April 5 included giving the EC authority to cancel candidature on grounds of gross irregularities, making political parties registration mandatory, restriction on retired military or civil servant, loan defaulters, utility service bill defaulters and NGO officials to contest parliamentary election.

The draft also proposed restriction on a person to contest election from more than three constituencies at a time. The EC also proposed making public the wealth statements of the candidates.

A renowned editor said the EC should draft a proposal to prevent political parties from contesting the parliamentary election unless they are registered and involved with the political process for a certain period.

A few journalists opposed the criteria for wholesale disqualification of candidates to contest the parliamentary election, arguing that these restrictions will prevent many honest people from contesting the next polls.

According to the draft proposals, government and non-government officials cannot contest the parliamentary election within three years of their retirement.

The journalists said a civil

bureaucrat has the scope to misuse his office during the service to achieve political goals, but a schoolteacher does not have such scope.

Regarding civil bureaucrats, the CEC said former cabinet secretary MA Halim and former secretary Khandaker Shahidul Islam started election campaigns even before their retirement and they got encouragement.

Referring to Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury, the CEC said a person who was campaigning for election was even made an election commissioner.

These cannot be allowed, he said.

The CEC also said the EC asked the local government ministry to formulate laws to prevent all sorts of graft during election.

Referring to neighbouring India, a few editors proposed holding staggered elections - several polling days.

Fayez Ahmed, senior journalist, ABM Musa columnist, Golam Sarwar, editor of daily Jugantor, Abed Khan, editor of daily Salomak, Ataus Samad, adviser-editor of daily Amar Desh, Nurul Kabir, editor of daily New Age, Zagul Kabir, editor and managing editor of news agency BSS, Amanullah Kabir, editor of daily Amar Desh, Abdul Quayum, joint editor of daily Prothom Alo, and Farid Hossain, bureau chief of AP, among others, were present at the discussion.

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