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195 killed in Israeli air strikes on Gaza

World powers call for peace, Hamas responds by firing rockets

AFP, Gaza City

At least 195 Palestinians were killed across the Gaza Strip on Saturday in massive Israeli air strikes on the Hamas-run enclave, said the head of Gaza emergency services Moawiya Hassanein.

Another 300 people were wounded, some 120 of them seriously in the attacks.

An Israeli man died as Hamas swiftly responded to the air raids by firing rockets into the Jewish state.

As Israel warned that the bombardment was "just the beginning," Hamas told Israelis living near their Gaza strong-

hold to "prepare the funeral shrouds."

In Gaza, thick clouds of smoke billowed into the sky and mangled, bloody, charred corpses littered the pavement around Hamas security structures in the coastal strip where the bombardment sowed panic in the streets, television images showed.

The deadly attacks came after days of escalating violence around the besieged coastal strip that the Islamist Hamas movement has run since June 2007, with militants firing rockets and Israel vowing a fiery response.

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas

told AFP from Saudi Arabia that he was in "urgent contact" with numerous countries to stop "the cowardly aggressions and massacres in the Gaza Strip."

The bombardment sparked international calls for a stop to the violence, with Russia, France and the European Union calling for an end to the bloodletting by both sides.

The European Union, the bloc's current president France, Britain and Russia urged both sides to stop the fighting, the United States said Israel should avoid civilian casualties, while in the Middle

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4-party candidate back to grabbing land in Rangpur

PORIMOL PALMA and RAFIQUE SARKER

A four-party alliance parliamentary nominee allegedly re-encroached upon more than 11 acres of recovered public land in Rangpur, immediately after the joint forces had been withdrawn from civilian areas earlier this month.

The alleged land grabber is Alhajj Rahim Uddin Vhorosha, chairman of RV Group of Industries also the president of BNP Rangpur district unit,

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Judicial magistrates won't be in field

EC decides they will do the job from office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) has finally decided that judicial magistrates assigned to try electoral offences concerning the parliamentary polls tomorrow would do the job in their offices.

Even on the polling day, they will not move around in the constituencies where they are deployed to take into cognizance electoral offences for trial.

"There is no plan for mobile courts comprised of judicial magistrates," the EC Secretariat said yesterday in a circular sent to chief judicial magistrates.

Earlier, the establishment ministry had appointed 319 government officials as executive magistrates and vested them with the authority of running mobile courts for trial of polls offences.

But, as per the Criminal Procedure Code

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Tigers in Murali maze again

SPORTS REPORTER

Muttiah Muralidaran worked his magical spell around the Bangladesh batsman on the second day of the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium yesterday.

The champion off-spinner's 66th five-wicket haul helped peg back the Tigers to 171 for nine after the visitors were bowled out for 293 in their first innings at the

SEE PAGE 6 COL 7

Indian ships leave Bangladesh waters

Envoy summoned to foreign office to lodge protest

STAR REPORT

Tension over India's trespassing into Bangladeshi maritime boundary diffused yesterday morning as the three Indian oil and gas survey ships withdrew from Bangladeshi waters.

Meanwhile, the Indian high commissioner to Dhaka was summoned to the foreign ministry and handed Dhaka's protest note.

Navy sources said immediately after the survey ships left, an Indian coastguard vessel went to the spot and asked the Bangladeshi offshore patrol vessels there to leave the spot

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

2 ballot boxes found in street

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two ballot boxes of the Election Commission (EC) were left abandoned at Kakoli intersection in the city's

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5



Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Trial of War Criminals of 1971 forms a human chain around the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday demanding war-criminal-free parliament.

PHOTO: STAR

Don't elect corrupt, war criminals
Eminent citizens urge voters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nineteen prominent citizens yesterday called upon people not to vote for corrupt people, terrorists, extortionists, loan and bill defaulters and war criminals in the national election tomorrow.

In a joint statement, they also urged people to refrain from casting vote for black money holders, land grabbers and persons who use religion for political gains.

Voting for such candidates

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Fresh face relief for Barisal voters

EMRAN HOSSAIN and RAFIQUOL ISLAM, from Barisal

Jahangir, a rickshawpuller, shows a scar on his back caused when Awami League (AL) activists beat him up while Abul Hasnat Abdullah was a lawmaker here.

The reason? He refused to pay Tk 200 -- an entire day's earnings for him -- as toll to them.

"You talk about bigger things like corruption and criminal activities, I was attacked for Tk 200 only," Jahangir says as he ponders if he would ever vote for such a party again.

It is not like BNP is any different. Stories of criminal activities, corruption and wrong doing are abundant.

Sayed Zamal Hossain Noman, incumbent counselor and a close aide of former mayor Mozibur Rahman Sarwar -- contesting from Barisal-5 constituency tomorrow -- realised Tk 2 crore from local businessmen -- in the name of allocating them shops at a market -- and shared the money with Sarwar.

It is alleged that Sarwar also encroached adjoining

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Chopper to be used in remote Khagrachhari polling centres

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

At least 100 polling centres out of the 179 in the area have been identified as vulnerable while the election commission (EC) has decided to use a helicopter to reach four polling centres of the hill district considering the remoteness of these centres.

The four centres, which have no proper road communication, are Naraichhari polling centre under Dighinala upazila and Shuknachhari, Putthachhari

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Requisition, restriction to curtail city mobility

SAYEDA AKTER

People may face a commuting problem in Dhaka from early today as many private bus and minibus owners have planned to halt or reduce the movement of vehicles, fearing forced requisition of their transports by the police.

Also, the Election Commission has banned movement of some modes of vehicles countrywide from the midnight of December 28 to the midnight of December 29 because of the elections.

The vehicles that came under such restrictions include autorickshaws, taxicabs, pickups, cars, buses, trucks and other human haulers -- and motorised river vessels.

However highways are not under the purview of such a ban. There are allegations from bus and minibus owners that police have taken away many of their vehicles without any notice for requisition or settling any payment, which the law-enforcement agency denied.

According to the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), around 562 bus and minibuses have been requisitioned during the election time.

DMP says it needs 70 buses and minibuses a day usually for patrolling and other purposes in the metropolis.

Contradicting the figure of the vehicles claimed to be requisitioned by the DMP, the transport owners association said as many as 2,300 vehicles, including bus, minibus, pickup and truck, were taken for polling duty.

As per the Requisition Act of DMP, any company owning more than 30 buses must keep a bus reserved for police every day and the DMP has an unwritten agreement with the owners in this regard.

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