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Bangladesh honours Father Marino

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Father Marino Regan, an Italian, has received honorary citizenship for his selfless contribution towards the people of Bangladesh.

Marino, born in 1925, now residing in Shelabunia village near the Sundarbans is mostly acclaimed for translating Bengali literary works into Italian, actively helping the

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Israeli warplanes strike mosque, school; 20 die

Israeli ground troops enter Gaza Strip

AFP, AP, Gaza City

Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 20 people yesterday, including two Hamas military commanders, as they targeted a mosque, school and the city's port, Palestinian sources said.

Israeli ground forces crossed the Gaza border in an escalation of Israel's week-old offensive against the territory's militant Hamas rulers, reported AP.

"Large numbers of forces are taking part in this stage of the operation including infantry, tanks, engineering forces, artillery and intelligence," a military spokesman said.

Tanks opened fire before entering the northern Gaza Strip and Hamas forces replied with mortar fire, witnesses told AFP.

At least 16 Palestinians were killed on Saturday when an Israeli air raid struck a mosque during prayers in the northern town of Jabalyia, medics and witnesses

said.

The bodies were pulled from the rubble of the Ibrahim al-Maqadna mosque after it was struck by a missile, they said.

More than 200 people were inside the mosque praying when it was struck, witnesses said.

The Israeli military has destroyed several mosques during its week-long offensive on Hamas targets in its Gaza stronghold, saying the Islamists used the houses of worship to store weapons.

An overnight raid killed Mohammad al-Jammal, 40, who sources in Gaza said was a local commander of Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades.

The Israeli military said Jammal was responsible "for the entire rocket launching enterprise in all of Gaza City."

A raid on a car near the southern city of Khan Yunis killed two men, including Mohammed Ma'aruf, senior Hamas military commander in southern Gaza,

according to medics and security sources.

The army confirmed it had targeted Ma'aruf, and said a second Hamas operative was in the car with him.

East of Khan Yunis, a missile narrowly missed a car carrying militants who escaped unharmed, witnesses said.

A guard was killed when a missile struck and demolished a school in the northern town of Beit Lahiya, medics said.

The Israeli military said it had targeted "a college used as a base for firing a large number of rockets."

The establishment, called the American School, has no links to the United States and all of the staff and students were Palestinian.

Air strikes also hit Gaza's port without causing casualties, and warplanes and naval vessels targeted areas around Gaza City and in the north, witnesses said.

Israel unleashed "Operation Cast

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Female RMG workers sought in Romania

Strike, contract violation by Bangladeshi male workers irk employers

PORIMOL PALMA

Irked by Bangladeshi male workers' strike and leaving jobs violating contracts, employers in Romania are now interested in recruiting skilled female workers from the readymade garment sector in Bangladesh.

They even agreed to pay the airfare for the female workers as they might not be able to pay the high cost of moving to that country, Kefayet Ullah, deputy secretary of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, told The Daily Star after his recent visit to Romania.

Kefayet Ullah and Masudul Kabir, commercial councillor of Bangladesh Embassy in France, visited Romania between November 30 and December 4 to see how the Bangladeshi workers are doing there.

Recently, around 200 Bangladeshi workers of a garment factory in Romania went on a one-week strike demanding pay hike. Earlier, many workers left their jobs and went to nearby European countries violating their job contracts. This irritated their employers.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Biman back in the black

SOHEL PARVEZ

Biman Bangladesh Airlines returned to the black in fiscal 2007-08 with a Tk 19 crore profit after four years, as the national flag carrier improved its overall efficiency, said a top government functionary yesterday.

"We have been able to bring back Biman to the black. The main thing behind the profitability is improvement in its management," said Mahbub Jamil, special assistant to the Chief Adviser for the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

(MORE IN STAR BUSINESS)

SECOND TEST Dilshan keeps Tigers at bay

BISHWAJIT ROY in Chittagong

Tillakaratne Dilshan celebrated his fiftieth Test with a blazing hundred as Sri Lanka wrested away the Tigers' early initiative to dominate the first day's play of the second and final Test at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Dilshan produced a counterattack to ease the pressure, and got perfect support from Malinda Warnapura and the unbeaten Chamara Kapugedara to help the Lankans post 371 for six wickets before stumps were drawn for the day.

That had looked unlikely when pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza served initial blows by taking two quick wickets after Mahela Jayawardene had decided to bat first on a batting haven.

Shakib Al Hasan and Shahadat Hossain followed suit, grabbing one each as the visitors were reduced to 75 for 4.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

ANDAMAN TRAGEDY 67 survivors to be back in a week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India is likely to repatriate in a week, 67 people who claim to be Bangladeshis following their rescue by the Indian coast guard after they had jumped off a drifting boat in the Bay of Bengal in late December of last year.

Around 300 others who were missing might be dead in the bay, as the Indian coast guard who has been continuing the rescue operation for the last few days have yet to find any of them, a Bangladesh foreign ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Around 400 people thought to be Bangladeshis and Myanmar started for Malaysia around 45 days ago on six wooden boats, but as they ran short of food and water, they jumped off the boats and tried to swim ashore.

On December 28, the Indian coast guard rescued around 100 of those migrants near Little Andaman Island, about 90 kilometers south of the island's capital, Port Blair. They are now sheltered by the Indian authorities in that city.

Bangladesh foreign ministry last Tuesday instructed Bangladesh deputy high commissioner in Kolkata to make arrangements for repatriating the rescued people, if they are identified as Bangladeshis.

"The Indian authorities have already sent a list of 67 people who identified themselves as Bangladeshi nationals," said a Bangladesh foreign ministry official. The remaining might be of other nationals, he added.

The foreign ministry already forwarded the list to the home ministry for verification of the identities of the rescued 67 who gave their addresses mostly in Cox's Bazar.

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PHOTO: COURTESY AWAMI LEAGUE

MPs-elect of the grand alliance led by Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina take oath as lawmakers yesterday in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

71 injured as post-election clashes on

STAR REPORT

At least 71 people were wounded in post-election clashes between the supporters of Awami League (AL) and BNP and its front organisations over the last two days as more reports pour in of violence across the country.

Fifty people were injured in Netrakona, eight in Rangamati, 10 in Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (Ruet), one in Savar and two in Laxmipur and

Meanwhile, leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) -- the student wing of AL -- has taken

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Rice prices start to fall in North

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Rice prices in the northern districts took a nosedive in the last few days as the hoarders began to release their stocks in the open market in fear of further drop in prices.

During a visit to the wholesale market of Rajabazar in Bogra, it was found that the quality coarse rice was selling

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Prayer Timing		
January 4		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-30	5-35
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

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