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Worst Australian wildfires kill 96

AFP, Kinglake

At least 96 people were killed and entire towns razed in the worst wildfire disaster in Australian history, described by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd yesterday as "hell in all its fury."

People died in their cars as they attempted to escape the inferno -- smoldering wrecks on roads outside this town told a tale of horror -- while others were burnt to death in their homes.

While the deadly fires and a heatwave raged in southeast Australia, floods from torrential rains claimed lives in the north, with one victim a five-year-old boy feared snatched by a crocodile as he walked his dog.

The death toll from the fires jumped from 84 to 96 early Monday, the Australian Associated Press said, quoting police.

But there were fears it could rise yet further as medics treated badly burned survivors and emergency crews made it

through to more than 700 houses destroyed by the fires, some of which have been blamed on arsonists.

Thousands of survivors jammed community halls, schools and other makeshift accommodation as troops and firefighters battled to control huge blazes fed by tinder-box conditions after a once-in-a-century heatwave.

Twenty-six fires were still burning in Victoria Sunday, with another 53 blazing throughout neighbouring New South Wales.

The devastating fires have affected around 3,000 square kilometres (1,200 square miles) -- an area larger than Luxembourg or nearly three times the size of Hong Kong.

"Hell in all its fury has visited the good people of Victoria in the last 24 hours. Many good people lie dead, many injured," Rudd told reporters, deploying army units to help 3,000 firefighters battling the flames.

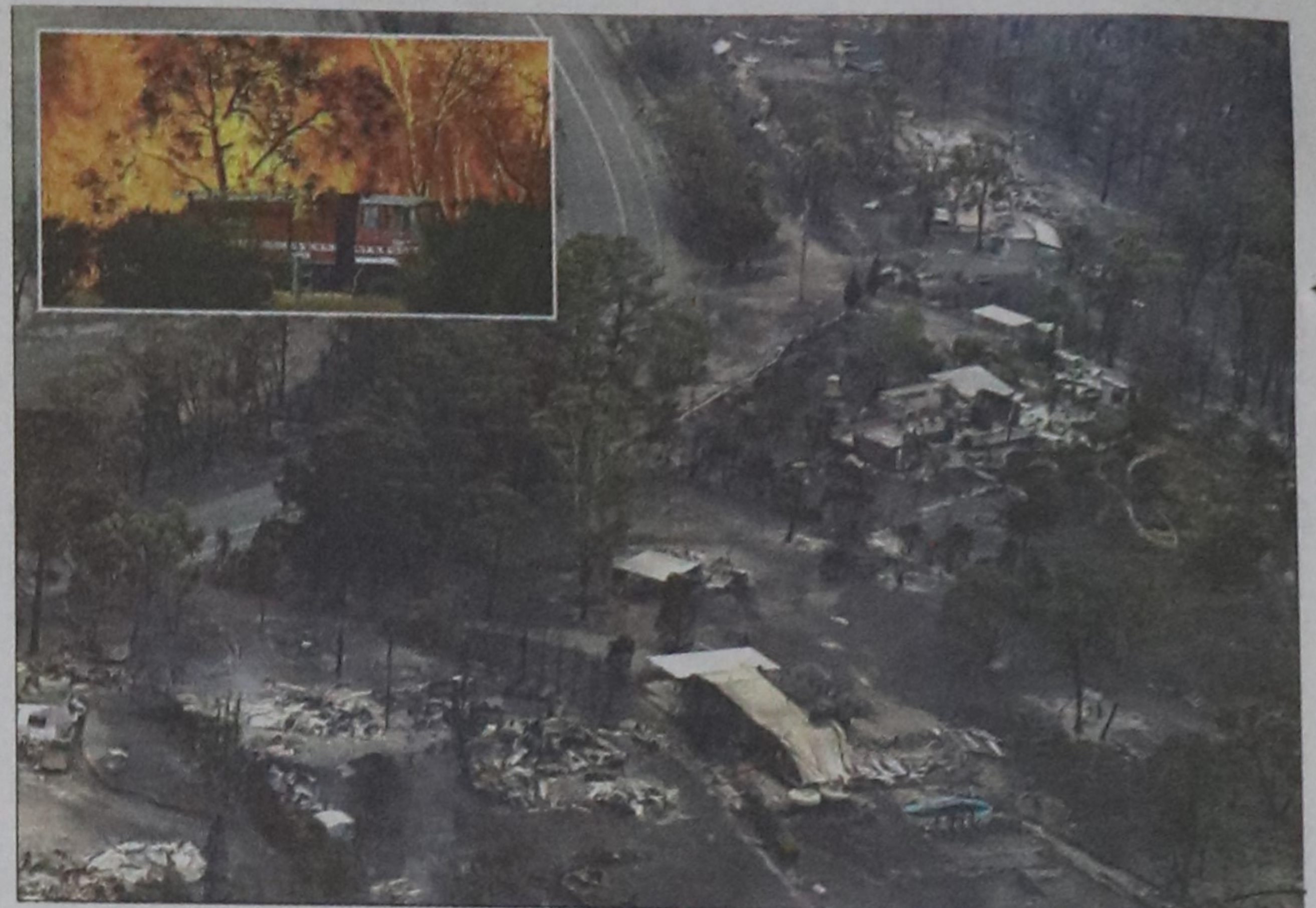
The number of dead rose steadily throughout Sunday as rescue crews reached townships that bore the brunt of the most intense firestorm northwest of Melbourne, which survivors likened to a nuclear bomb.

The previous highest death toll in Australian wildfires was 75 people killed in Victoria and neighbouring South Australia in 1983 on what became known as Ash Wednesday.

The latest fires in Australia's southeast flared on Saturday, fanned by high winds after a heatwave sent temperatures soaring to 46 C (115 F), and continued to burn out of control Sunday.

They wiped out the pretty resort village of Marysville and largely destroyed the town of Kinglake, north of Melbourne, with houses, shops, petrol stations and schools razed to the ground.

Marie Jones said she was staying at a friend's house in Kinglake, where at least



Buildings between Kinglake and Healesville that were destroyed by fire are viewed in this aerial shot. Entire towns were razed in the worst wildfires in Australian history. Inset, a fire engine moves away from out-of-control flames in the Bunyip State Forest near the township of Tonimbuk, 125km west of Melbourne.

Fair premises extended

Space for 10 more stalls

RAKIB AHAMMED

The arena of Ekushey Boi Mela was further extended yesterday with the decision to allocate space for 10 more stalls.

With this, Bangla Academy has allocated space for a total of 24 extra stalls since the fair began on February 1.

New stalls will be set up along the road outside the academy premises, which connect it to the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) and Curzon Hall on the Dhaka University campus.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Policemen deployed at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela take a break from duty yesterday and thumb through some children's books.

President appoints 26 DAGs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-six Supreme Court (SC) lawyers were appointed deputy attorney general (DAG) yesterday for dealing with cases on behalf of the state in the Appellate and High Court divisions of the SC.

President Iajuddin Ahmed appointed them as per section 3 (2) of Bangladesh Law Officers Order-1972.

The new law officers joined the office yesterday afternoon.

The newly appointed DAGs are Md Nuruzzaman (Nani), Abdus Salam Mondal, Akram Hossain Chowdhury, Shakila Rawshan, Farhad Ahmed,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

JCD fights over age

Junior leaders call for age limit, voting rights

NAIMUL ALAM NOBIN and RAKIB AHAMMED

A row has erupted within the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) over whether to impose an age limit on its leaders ahead of reshuffling the central committee.

While younger members favour an injection of fresh leadership into the BNP student wing, the majority of senior JCD leaders, who are mostly into their early forties, are not keen on upsetting the status quo.

It became a divisive issue when last week BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia met senior JCD leaders as well as the rank and file to learn their views before forming a new committee.

Senior leaders urged her to set up a convening committee for the time being and then go for a new committee with 'experienced' leaders within six months. On the other hand, a few junior leaders were keen on having voting rights to elect a new leadership.

JCD sources said electing committees of all of the 88 organisational units has long been overdue. Although the tenure of the current central committee with Azizul Bari Helal as president and Shafiqul Bari Babu as general secretary has elapsed, yet it has remained unresolved for the last two years.

Some fresh student leaders even submitted a letter to members of the BNP high command including MK Anwar, Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain outlining their reasons to introduce dynamic leadership, JCD sources said.

In the letter they stated that the present JCD leadership has failed to inspire the student wing in different movements as they distance themselves from current students. Some even blasted the body for turning into a 'family of uncles'.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

10 hurt in police action in Gazipur

Clash with RMG workers over arrears

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

At least 10 people were injured, one of them with rubber bullet, in a clash between police and garment workers at Bhogra in Sadar upazila yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the clash ensued at about 12:00 noon when the agitating workers locked in a brawl with the staffs of the factory demanding their salary arrears.

The brawl turned into clashes when the police interfered in the matter by charging batons on the agitating workers.

At one stage, Sub-Inspector (SI) Sajib Dutta fired rubber bullets at the workers leaving Nayeem injured.

Nine others including SI Sajib were also wounded during the clash.

"The agitated workers severely beat up the SI and an officer of the factory," says a spot account.

Nayeem was rushed to the Orthopaedic Hospital, Dhaka and

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



Students of Khulna Polytechnic College yesterday clash with police as the law enforcers tried to resist the unruly students who were protesting against reforms in their examination system. Policemen charge truncheons to disperse the demonstrating students.

Khulna students clash with cops: 30 injured

Police action on students demonstrating against new polytechnic exam rules

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Clashes between police and students of Khulna Polytechnic Institute (KPI) at Khalishpur left at least 30 people, including three policemen, injured on the campus yesterday.

Police swung into action as over 300 students of the institute went on rampage on the campus at about 10:30am demanding cancellation of new examination rules of the Technical Education Board, which say that no student is entitled to appear at the 'referred examination' more than once.

Police lobbed at least 50 teargas shells and charged batons on the students indiscriminately while agitated students hurled stones and bricks at the policemen during the four-hour clash, leaving 30 injured.

Vehicular movement on Khulna-Jessore highway remained disrupted for about three hours as the students put up barricades at several points.

The agitated students damaged furniture, doors and windows of the academic and administrative buildings, many roadside shops

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



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RU acting VC resigns

RU CORRESPONDENT

Acting vice chancellor of Rajshahi University (RU) Prof Mammunul Keramat resigned yesterday in the wake of demonstration by pro-Awami League students' and teachers' organisations.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Jagannath students demonstrate to free dorms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred students of Jagannath University (JNU) yesterday staged a demonstration to press home their eight-point demand including freeing their halls from illegal occupants.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Babar allowed to go abroad for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday asked the government to permit former BNP state minister for home Iutfozzaman Babar to go abroad for medical treatment.

Upon an application filed

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Lanka hunts for LTTE chief

Navy sinks two Tiger boats

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan troops have smashed the Tamil Tigers' mini-state and cornered the remaining rebels, but officials say they must catch their elusive leader to declare final victory.

The air force carried out a series of raids on locations where Velupillai Prabhakaran, 54, was suspected to have sheltered over the weekend, but there had been no word about his whereabouts, the military said.

Security forces in a two-year-long drive have taken both the political and military headquarters of the Tigers, once regarded as the world's most ruthlessly effective guerrilla outfit.

President Mahinda Rajapakse on Saturday asked the Tigers to surrender.

Earlier, he declared that Prabhakaran's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would be defeated in days, raising questions on what to do with Prabhakaran, if he were to be taken alive.

The Tiger supreme is a fugitive from justice in Sri Lanka. He was sentenced in absentia to 200 years in jail for his involvement in the January 1996 bombing of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and killing 91 people.

He is also wanted in neighbouring India for the 1991 assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi. There is an Interpol warrant for his arrest and also a pending request from India to extradite him from Sri Lanka.

"He has to face justice here," said Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse in a nationally televised television interview last month. "He has to be tried and then hanged for his crimes."

Sri Lankan troops have already captured several underground bunkers where Prabhakaran was believed to have lived.

Army chief Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka speculated last month that Prabhakaran may have slipped out. Prabhakaran's chief ideologue, the late Anton Balasingham, fled

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Prayer Timing

February 9

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-52	5-56
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

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