

# Kyrgyz ethnic violence death toll hits 124

Uzbekistan shuts border, calls for international aid, refugees say Kyrgyz forces aided ethnic attacks

AFP, IANS, Bishkek/ Osh/ New Delhi/ Islamabad

At least 124 people have been killed and more than 1,685 wounded in spiralling ethnic violence in the south of the ex-Soviet state of Kyrgyzstan, the health ministry said yesterday.

The previous death toll stood at 117. "The death toll as a result of the events in the Jalalabad and Osh regions has reached 124 people" since Thursday in running street battles between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, the ministry said.

Another 1,685 have been wounded in the violence, it added.

Officials in neighbouring Uzbekistan said tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbek refugees had fled across the border from Kyrgyzstan to escape the violence.

Some officials put the number at well over 100,000.

The provisional Kyrgyz government, which seized power in April riots, has so far failed to quell the violence.

It has given shoot-to-kill orders to police and military and called up all reservists in its efforts to stem bloodshed but is also begging for military help from Russia amid the spiralling violence.

Uzbekistan on Monday ordered its frontier closed to a mass exodus of refugees fleeing clashes between rival groups in Kyrgyzstan where government forces were accused of helping the slaughter of ethnic Uzbeks.

Gunfire rang out across the southern Kyrgyzstan city of Osh, where bodies littered the streets. More fighting was reported in the nearby city of Jalalabad. Scores are reported killed in three days of clashes.

With estimates of up to 100,000 people already inside Uzbekistan, the Central Asian state's Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Aripov said the border would be closed.

"Today we will stop accepting refugees from the Kyrgyz side because we have no place to accommodate them and no capacity to cope with them," he said.

He said Uzbekistan has registered 45,000 adult refugees from Kyrgyzstan and needs international humanitarian aid to cope. "If we have the ability to help them and to treat them of course we will open the border" again, he added.

**KYRGYZ FORCES AIDED CLASHES** Uniformed Kyrgyz troops gave armed support to mobs attacking ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, according to refugees who

fled the violence.

Bakhtiyor Sharipov, a 30-year-old officer in Kyrgyzstan's army, said he deserted his armoured unit in revulsion after watching his own troops gun down ethnic Uzbek civilians in the southern city of Osh.

"What I saw was not an army," Sharipov recounted to AFP at this Uzbek border post where he joined tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbeks who fled the bloodshed and poured into Uzbekistan.

"They were shooting at civilians of the Uzbek diaspora, working together with criminals. I left for that reason and crossed the border," said Sharipov, himself an ethnic Uzbek.

"The Kyrgyz defence ministry ordered us not to fire on civilians. But in Osh, military and police in uniform ignored this order and helped bandits to kill Uzbeks," he said.

Sharipov specifically charged that his commanding officer, a colonel in the Kyrgyzstan army whom he named as Kursand Asanov, allowed the troops to shoot.

Panicked refugees, who arrived by the hundreds every hour on Monday at this Uzbek border post, painted a terrifying picture of the killings in southern Kyrgyzstan.



An Ethnic Uzbek holds his head in his hands as he stands beside the wreckage of his burned out home in Osh yesterday. Deadly gun battles raged in the Kyrgyzstan city of Osh where bodies littered the streets as ethnic violence escalated and Uzbekistan raced to cope with a massive refugee influx.

PHOTO: AFP

## Hayabusa capsule recovery begins

BBC ONLINE

Japanese scientists began the process yesterday of retrieving the Hayabusa capsule from the Australian Outback.

The canister and its delivery spacecraft fell to Earth during the night, the culmination of a seven-year round trip to asteroid Itokawa.

The first photo of the capsule, which landed in the Woomera Prohibited Area, shows it still attached to a parachute.

The researchers will prepare the canister for evacuation to Japan. They will hope it holds samples of Itokawa.

If that is confirmed, it would be the first time fragments of rock had been picked up off the surface of an asteroid and returned to Earth.

But scientists caution it could be some weeks before they are able to confirm the presence of Itokawa dust. For the moment, the Japanese space agency (Jaxa) is simply celebrating the success of bringing Hayabusa home.

The re-entry produced a remarkable fireball in the Australian sky. The main spacecraft broke apart in a shower of light. As these bright streaks faded, a single point could be seen heading to the ground. This was the capsule protected against the intense heat generated in the fall by its carbon shield.

## ICRC says Israel's Gaza blockade breaks law

'Health system at all-time low'

BBC ONLINE, AFP, REUTERS, Jerusalem/ Luxembourg/ Tehran

Israel's blockade of Gaza is a clear violation of international humanitarian law, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has said.

In a statement, the ICRC describes the situation in Gaza as dire, saying the only sustainable solution is a lifting of the blockade.

It says Israel is punishing the whole civilian population of Gaza.

The ICRC, a traditionally neutral organisation, paints a bleak picture of conditions in Gaza: hospitals short of equipment, power cuts lasting hours each day, drinking water unfit for consumption.

"The dire situation in Gaza cannot be resolved by providing humanitarian aid," it said in a statement that faulted both the Israeli blockade and poor coordination between rival Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and Gaza.

The report by the Geneva-based group came as Israel mullied its four-year blockade of the Hamas-ruled territory amid international pressure on the Jewish state to ease restrictions following its deadly seizure of a Gaza-bound aid fleet last month.

The Red Cross said power cuts of around seven hours a day "pose a serious risk to the treatment of patients," as it takes several minutes for generators to begin operating. It also said 110 out of 470 essential medicines, including chemotherapy and haemophilia drugs, were unavailable in Gaza because of a lack of coordination between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

**ISRAEL SETS UP RAID INQUIRY**

Israel has set up an internal inquiry into its deadly raid last month on a convoy of Gaza-bound aid ships.

Israel earlier rejected a UN proposal for an

international probe, but has now agreed to include two foreign observers in its own inquiry.

Nine Turkish activists were killed when Israeli commandos stormed the ships in international waters on 31 May.

**'TRANSPARENT INVESTIGATION'**

Last month's clashes came after six ships carrying campaigners and 10,000 tonnes of aid sailed from Cyprus in an attempt to break Israel's three-year blockade of the Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

Israel says its troops acted in self-defence when activists attacked commandos trying to board the main vessel in the flotilla. The campaigners say the soldiers opened fire without any provocation.

**E.U. PUSH ISRAEL ON BLOCKADE**

EU foreign ministers sought yesterday to push Israel to end its blockade of Gaza, two weeks after a deadly commando attack on an aid flotilla, with diplomats saying the pressure is working.

Israel is showing willingness to significantly ease the blockade following international concern over the attack on the high seas two weeks ago which left nine Turkish activists dead, one European diplomat said.

**IRANIAN AID SHIPS HEAD FOR GAZA**

Iran is sending aid ships to blockaded Gaza, state radio said yesterday-- a move likely to be considered provocative by Israel which accuses Tehran of arming the Palestinian enclave's Islamist rulers, Hamas.

One ship left port Sunday and another will depart by Friday, loaded with food, construction material and toys, the report said. The boats would be part of international efforts to break Israel's isolation of the Gaza Strip.

"Until the end of the Gaza blockade, Iran will continue to ship aid," said an official at Iran's Society for the Defence of the Palestinian Nation.

## Two Koreas to address UN over ship sinking

SEOUL, REUTERS

North and South Korea will address the UN Security Council separately over the deadly sinking of a South Korean naval ship in March that has raised tension on the Korean peninsula, an official said yesterday.

South Korea had been expected to brief the Security Council some time this week on an international investigation into the sinking of the corvette Cheonan on March 26 that killed 46 sailors. Seoul has accused North Korea of torpedoing the ship.

North Korea, which denies responsibility and accuses the South of fabricating the attack, asked Mexico's Claude Heller, the Security Council's rotating president, for a separate briefing session. South Korea's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Kim Young-sun, told a briefing in Seoul.

"It's our understanding that such an opportunity has been granted," Kim said.

Mounting antagonism between the Koreas has worried investors, concerned about armed conflict breaking out in the region, and set off a diplomatic scramble on all sides to cool tensions.

Many analysts say neither side is ready to go to war, despite frequent threats of all-out war from the North, but see the possibility of more skirmishes in a disputed sea border off the west coast or along their heavily armed border.

South Korea accused the North of violating the spirit of a landmark joint declaration struck by then South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il 10 years ago pledging peace.

## EU invites Iran for nuke talks

AFP, Luxembourg/ Tehran

EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton has written to Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili inviting him to talks as Europe plans new sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear programme.

"I have written to Jalili... inviting him to meet with me to now discuss nuclear weapons issues and to take forward the twin-track approach," the carrot of dialogue and the stick of sanctions, Ashton said as she arrived for talks in Luxembourg with EU foreign ministers.

Tehran has long said that it accepts in principle to hold such a meeting between Jalili and Ashton.

Ashton wrote her letter as the European Union considers going further than the new sanctions metered out on Iran by the UN Security Council, particularly in the key sector of the oil industry, with prohibition of new investment, transfers of technologies, equipment and services.

The assembled EU ministers were set to agree Monday on exactly what areas should be hit, so that EU heads of state and government can formally endorse them at a summit in Brussels on Thursday.

## Rivals gear up

FROM PAGE 1

Enforce the electoral code of conduct. They can arrest anybody without warrants within 400 yards of polling stations on election day in connection with violating electoral laws.

Meanwhile, all indicators point to a close fight between two main mayoral candidates. One backed by the ruling Awami League and the other by main opposition BNP.

Former mayor and Awami League-backed candidate ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury and his rival BNP-backed Mohammad Manjur Alam are facing severe internal feud in the parties providing them backing.

However, intervention and participation of central leaders in the electoral campaign did much in pacifying the intra-party feud and grievances of public.

About 2 lakh minority voters may play a vital role in the race. The two are vigorously campaigning for these votes, a clear indication of a tough fight.

ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury was elected for the third time when he defeated BNP-backed Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin by a large margin on May 09, 2005.

His popularity, however, dropped due to feuds he was involved in with local leaders as well as minority community leaders and unilateral decisions he made in carrying out development activities defying opinions of other public representatives.

Mohiuddin, nominated by Nagarik Committee, is yet to ensure sincere involvement of the aggrieved leaders in the electoral campaign.

On the other hand, despite being little known as a mayoral candidate backed by the BNP, Mohammad Manjur Alam has emerged as the main rival of Mohiuddin.

Internal grouping in Chittagong BNP, particularly between the factions loyal to Vice-Chairman Abdullah Al Noman and BNP Chittagong City unit president Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, was feared to mar

the prospect of Manjur until the central leaders stepped in to calm things down.

Noman alongside BNP Standing Committee Member Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, Vice-Chairman M Morshed Khan, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury is campaigning for Manjur.

Instructed by central leaders Noman, Khasru, SQ Chowdhury, Mir Nasir sat in a meeting with Manjur yesterday afternoon at Khasru's Mehediabagh home.

The leaders in the meeting placed emphasis on working unitedly for Manjur, nominated by Chattagram Unnayan Andolan.

However, BNP insiders are still unsure if Noman and his men would continue their support for Manjur or the long-drawn rivalry between Noman and Khasru would ignite again ahead of the polls.

Manjur is also expected to benefit from Mohiuddin's strained relationship with minority Hindu leaders over a disputed piece of land. But the Jamaat-Islami-backed candidate's withdrawal and support for Manjur has diminished Manjur's hope for getting a large chunk of Hindu minority votes, sources said.

Election campaign was hampered due to downpours in the port city yesterday that caused waterlogging in different areas.

Manjur along with Noman and Mir Nasir went for mass contact campaign at Chittagong Court Building, KC Dey Road, Loyal Road and Golpar. He also had campaign programmes at Hamjerbagh, Hill View Residential Area, Amin Jute Mill's adjoining areas, Panchlaish, Hasan Bazar, Hazipara, and Wazedia where M Morshed Khan, Kazi Belal and Abu Sifian accompanied him.

Mohiuddin went for mass contact campaign seeking votes in different areas including Sarder Bahadur Nagar Bihari Colony, Jhautola.

## DIFFERENT bites

'Zardari, a US national, suffers from depression'

ANI, Washington

In what could probably add to Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari's string of troubles, a US database website has declared him as an American national.

The website- Notable Names Database (NNDB), which claims to contain details of over 35,000 prominent world personalities described Zardari as a US civilian of Asian/Indian race.

Apart from his family background and other details, the website also claimed that the Pakistan President suffers from diabetes and is a patient of depression.

Interestingly, the same database website describes former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, Zardari's wife, as a Pakistani civilian of Asian ethnicity.

The website mentions that it judges the 'nationality' of a person with which he or she is most associated with.

"Nationality is the country with which the person is most associated with-particularly at the time that person flourished at his or her peak. It is not necessarily the country of birth, the country of death, or citizenship. We will illustrate with some examples- Jesus Christ was born in Palestine.

## BP presents oil containment plan

AFP, Washington

Energy giant BP has presented a new plan to contain more than 50,000 barrels a day of oil gushing from a ruptured Gulf of Mexico well by the end of June, an administration official said yesterday.

"After being directed by the administration to move more quickly, BP is now stepping up its efforts to contain the leaking oil," the official said on condition of anonymity.

"They have now outlined a path to contain more than 50,000 barrels of oil per day by the end of June, two weeks earlier than they originally suggested," the official said.

The oil company is currently siphoning up about 15,000 barrels of oil a day to a ship on the surface, about half of the 25,000 to 30,000 barrels believed to be streaming into the Gulf.

In a letter, BP outlined plans to bring a vessel for producing and storing oil from South America, two additional lightering tankers from Europe and a 3,800-foot, six-inch flexible pipe from Brazil to reinforce the existing efforts to suck up crude from the leaking well.


The outlines of the plan were produced as President Barack Obama was to depart on his fourth visit to the Gulf since an April 20 explosion destroyed a BP-leased deep-water rig, unleashing the worst oil spill in US history.

Obama is to address the nation in a speech from the Oval Office on his return from the Gulf on Tuesday, the official said.



PHOTO: AFP

US President Barack Obama steps off Marine One on his way to board Air Force One yesterday at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. Obama is heading to the Gulf of Mexico to tour the areas stricken by the BP oil leak. He will spend two days on the Gulf Coast dealing with the BP oil spill.



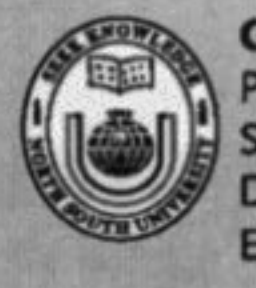
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