

# Regime forces launches new blitz on Homs

## UN condemns 'appalling brutality' as 61 killed

AFP, Damascus

Regime forces launched a new blitz on the Syrian city of Homs yesterday, killing more than 60 people, activists said, as the UN weighed a joint mission with the Arab League to end the violence.

Shelling erupted at daybreak, killing 52 civilians in the besieged central city and burning some bodies beyond recognition, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

At least 400 people have died in Homs in a relentless six-day onslaught as government troops attempt to crush opponents of President Bashar al-Assad, activists say.

"The shells are raining down on us and regime forces are using heavy

artillery," said Ali Hazuri, a doctor in the Baba Amr district reached by telephone from Beirut.

Elsewhere, an army colonel and seven security forces members died when rebels ambushed two buses near the southern town of Daraa, cradle of

the revolt, said the Britain-based Observatory.

In addition to this, 61 people were killed across the country, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon said on Wednesday the "appalling brutality" of the assault on Homs "is a grim harbinger of worse to come."

He launched the idea of sending a joint observer mission with the Arab League as he bemoaned the UN Security Council's failure to agree a resolution on the crisis.

The UN chief said consultations would be held with the Arab League and Security Council members in coming days "before fleshing out the details."

Ban hit out at Russia and China for their steadfast refusal to back UN resolutions condemning the violence in Syria, saying this had encouraged Assad's regime to continue its repression.

Moscow, a staunch ally of the regime in Damascus, has insisted any solution to end nearly one year of bloodshed must come from within Syria.

## CONTEMPT CHARGES Court adjourns Gilani's appeal

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's top court yesterday adjourned an appeal from the prime minister for a day against a summons for indictment for contempt, dragging out a saga that could force his government into early polls.

The Supreme Court summoned the embattled Gilani to appear next Monday to face indictment over the government's two-year refusal to ask Swiss authorities to re-open graft cases against President Zardari.

Zardari and his late wife, Benazir Bhutto, were suspected of using Swiss bank accounts to launder about \$12 million in alleged bribes paid by companies seeking customs inspection contracts in Pakistan in the 1990s.

## Work will win hearts

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Another newly appointed Election Commissioner Mohammad Shahnewaz did not take his oath yesterday, as the tenure of one of the outgoing election commissioners, Brig Gen (ret) M Shakhawat Hossain, has yet to expire.

Shahnewaz might take his oath shortly after Shakhawat's tenure expires on February 14.

After taking the oaths, the CEC and the three election commissioners went to the chief justice's office room, and spent a few moments there before coming out to talk to the media briefly.

The CEC, who had a very illustrious career in the civil service, said, "Election is a continuous process. Free, fair and neutral election is our fundamental right. Not only ours, it also remains in

the universal declaration of human rights. It exists everywhere, in every country. Our target is also the same."

Replying to a query about how they will win the confidence of the main opposition BNP since it termed the formation of the new EC illegal, Rakibuddin said, "Politics is a continuous process. Different political parties have their individual ideologies and strategies. But, we think we will try to satisfy all political parties, the people, and other stakeholders through our work."

"We have just started our journey. We will try our level best to present free, fair and neutral elections one after another," he said.

The new CEC said if due process is followed, elections can be held freely and fairly.

Finishing the formalities at the Supreme Court the members of the new EC went to their secretariat at Sher-e-Banglanagar, where the EC Secretariat officials welcomed them with bouquets. They did not go to their own rooms and instead went to the seminar room where they got introduced to the secretariat staff. The CEC also briefly talked to the media there one more time.

President Zillur Rahman on Wednesday formed the new five-member EC amid rejection by BNP. The new EC will have a five-year tenure, and will hold the next parliamentary election scheduled for early 2014.

The Cabinet Division published a relevant gazette notification hours after the president formed the new EC.

## Toxic liquor kills 30 in India

AFP, Bhubaneswar

At least 30 people died after consuming toxic home-made liquor in eastern India, officials said yesterday, warning that the toll could rise with more victims in hospitals.

The deaths -- just the latest from dangerous bootleg liquor in India -- were reported from several villages near Cuttack city, 30 kilometres north of the capital of Orissa state, Bhubaneswar.

"At least 30 people are confirmed dead," district administrator of Cuttack, Girish S.N., told AFP.

As many as 100 people are believed to have drunk from the same batch of poisonous liquor on Monday night.

The state administration rushed emergency medicine and doctors to the government-run SCB Medical College and Hospital, in Cuttack.

An officer at the hospital, Dr B Maharana, said 61 patients were being treated and five were in a critical condition. Most were labourers.

## BSF keeps on firing at border

FROM PAGE 20  
his troops must take steps to stop the offenders.

The injured, Yakub Ali, 25, son of Daud Ali of Keragachhi village, and Abdul Hamil, 30, son of Abdul Karim Sardar of Sharsha upazila in Jessore, were rescued by locals and later sent to a private clinic at Kalaroa.

Talking to The Daily Star, Lt Col Abu Basit, commanding officer of 38 Battalion of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), said BSF men of Tarali camp opened fire on the two around 12:55am when they were waiting on

Bangladesh side of the border to receive a consignment of cattle from Indian traders.

Following the shooting incident, a commander-level flag meeting was held between BGB and its Indian counterpart yesterday afternoon at zero point on the border where BGB officials sought an explanation from the BSF representatives for the firing, reports our Sathkira correspondent.

In response, BSF officials assured the BGB representatives of investigating the incident and taking steps against the persons respon-

sible, said Lt Col Basit.

Lt Col Basit led the BGB team while Commandant RK Singh of 152 BSF Battalion led the BSF side at the meeting.

In another incident, BSF members of Monaganj camp detained four Bangladeshi cattle traders when they went to Murshidabad of Paschimanga crossing the border at Benipur in Jibonagar upazila of Chuadanga district Tuesday afternoon, reports our Kushtia correspondent.

Later, the BSF troops handed over the detainees to Monaganj Police Station.

The detainees are Khairul Islam, 23, Suman Ali, 22, Rakibul Islam Laitu, 25, and Saiful Islam, 26. They are from different villages in the upazila.

Lt Col Sultan Ahmed, commanding officer of 35 BGB Battalion, said BSF men captured them after they entered into Indian territory crossing the border around 4:00pm.

Havilar Rezaul Karim, commander of BGB Kusumpur Camp, told The Daily Star they sent a letter to the Monaganj BSF camp requesting them for holding a flag meeting.

## EC formed on consensus: PM

FROM PAGE 1

"Never before in Bangladesh was the Election Commission formed in such a liberal way," she said while exchanging views at her official residence Gono Bhaban with Awami League's grassroots leaders from Chittagong.

The president had dialogues with the political parties before appointing the chief election commissioners and other commissioners, Hasina, also the ruling AL chief, mentioned

at the meet.

"It was the suggestion of most of the political parties that took part in the president's dialogue to form a search committee to recommend names for appointment as election commissioners."

She recalled the formation of the EC during the BNP-Jamaat rule. "At that time, you [BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia] had formed the Election Commission to rig votes... the chief election

commissioner helped you put 1.23 crore fake voters on the voter list."

On the recently concluded Comilla City Corporation election, the prime minister said the BNP boycotted it opposing the use of electronic voting machine (EVM). "But its candidate participated and won the election, and the BNP chairperson welcomed him with bouquets."

"Although they have taken a strong stance against

the next national election, they will ultimately participate in it."

On BNP's demand for restoration of the caretaker government system, she said, "Have you [Khaleda] forgotten the experience during the two years of the last caretaker government?"

Hasina asked the BNP chief to have confidence in people and not to engage in destructive activities.

Talking about the ongoing trial for crimes against

humanity committed during the Liberation War, the prime minister warned the opposition leader that people will never accept any move to protect the war criminals.

"Those, who do not believe in democracy and the constitution, are trying to save the war criminals," she alleged.

The prime minister urged all the patriotic and democracy-loving people to come forward to resist the conspir-

acy aimed at protecting the war criminals. "We have to unite so that they cannot evoke anti-liberation sentiment."

Members of AL Central Working Committee, lawmakers and leaders of the party's district, upazila, municipality and union units of Chittagong, heads of its associate bodies and the party-backed upazila chairmen and vice-chairmen of the district attended the meeting.

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