

# Israel policy splits Palestinian families

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's restrictions on Palestinian movement between Gaza and the West Bank is separating relatives and making family life impossible for tens of thousands of people, an Israeli human rights report said yesterday.

Jointly published by rights watchdogs B'Tselem and HaMoked, the 42-page report documents the impact of Israel's policy of tightly restricting Palestinian movement into and out of the Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

"Israel's declared policy of isolating the Gaza Strip severely violates the right to family life of tens of thousands of Palestinians living in split families, divided between Gaza and Israel, or between Gaza and the West Bank," it said.

Current Israeli policy bars Gazans from travelling to the West Bank except in extremely rare circumstances. And although West Bank residents are permitted to go to Gaza, they have to commit to stay there, the report said.

"Israel prohibits all passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, except in very few exceptional humanitarian cases of first-degree relatives involving serious illness, death or a wedding," it said.

Even then, not all requests are accepted, or are granted too late.

After the 1967 Six Day War when Israel

seized Gaza and the West Bank, it allowed Palestinians relative freedom of movement between the two territories, but during the first uprising (1987-1993), restrictions were stepped up, ostensibly for security reasons.

The policy changed in 2006 when Israel first imposed a blockade on Gaza after militants there seized an Israeli soldier, and was tightened again a year later after Hamas forcibly took control.

Women were particularly affected, the report said, noting that marriage meant a woman was expected to leave her family and move into her husband's home.

"Israel's policy ... is especially detrimental to women ... as the restrictions on their freedom of movement effectively sever them from their families of origin," the organisations said.

The report urged the Israeli government to "respect the rights of all Palestinian residents to family life and freedom of movement."

In response, Israel's justice ministry acknowledged the "hardship" the policy was causing, but said it was necessary for security reasons.

The Gaza Strip is "a hostile territory controlled by a murderous terrorist organisation (Hamas) that routinely operates against a civilian population and whose self-declared goal is the annihilation of the State of Israel," it said.

# Mexico disarms 1,200 police accused of gang ties

AFP, Morelia

Mexico has disarmed more than 1,200 local police officers suspected of colluding with drug traffickers in Michoacan state and arrested 38 members of the notorious Knights Templar drug cartel active in the region.

Among those arrested was Jesus Vasquez Macias, 37, who goes by the alias "El Toro," a leading figure in the cartel, Monte Alejandro Rubido Garcia, a top federal security official, announced late Sunday.

Garcia said federal forces have taken control of 27 municipalities in the western Mexico state and disarmed 1,209 of the local police officers.

The officers will undergo investigations, Garcia said.

They are accused of colluding with gangs by the vigilante militias that have taken up arms in recent months in restive Michoacan state.

The self-defense groups, made up of farmers and other local people, aimed to take over from local police to oust the Knights Templar from the region to stop the group's violence, kidnapping and extortion rackets.

Since February 2013, the self-defense groups have taken control over some 20 towns.

In recent days, federal forces launched a major operation in the state and tried to disarm the vigilantes as well as flush out the Knights Templar gang.

The capture of Vasquez Macias and other Knights Templar leaders was among the conditions the vigilante groups demanded before giving in to government demands they turn over their own weapons.

Vasquez Macias, who was picked up in the port city of Lazaro Cardenas, was charged with offenses related to organized crime, Rubido Garcia said.

# BD Foods boss

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exempted Momin from charges of the case, as police in their final report could not substantiate his involvement in smuggling.

Yesterday, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetullah and Justice Mohammad Ullah issued a rule upon Momin, the special judge's court and the government to explain in eight weeks why the exemption of Momin should not be cancelled and why he should not be retried.

# Sun slowing down?

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"If you want to go back to see when the Sun was this inactive... you've got to go back about 100 years," he said.

Some scientists are even hinting the slow-down could be as bad as in the 17th century in a solar time known as the Maunder Minimum, when bitter, freezing cold swept through Europe.

The River Thames froze and there were bitterly cold winters during that time.

The Sun's slowdown is really leaving scientists confused. Photo: NASA

"It would feel like the Sun is asleep... a very

dormant ball of gas at the centre of our Solar System," University College London's Mullard Space Science Laboratory's Dr Lucy Green said.

"There is a very strong hint that the Sun is acting in the same way now as it did in the run-up to the Maunder Minimum."

But what is particularly unusual about the Sun's low level of activity is that the star is currently at its solar maximum, a point in an 11-year cycle where it's supposed to be at its most active.

The sudden shift has really left scientists stumped.

"It's completely taken me and many other solar scientists by surprise," Dr Green said.

# KL crackdown starts today

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But around 30,000 Bangladeshis failed to come under that amnesty, said the labour counsellor. Some of them had returned home and the rest were staying in Malaysia.

On January 10 this year, Malaysian Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said the costs of deporting illegal immigrants to their countries of origin would be borne by the immigrants themselves, their employers or the missions of those nations.

"The Malaysian government will not use public funds to deport them. We have dis-

cussed this with the respective foreign missions," Malaysian newspaper The Star reported quoting Hamidi.

Around 10,000 personnel from the police, armed forces, civil defence, national registration department and local councils with the immigration department would take part in the operation, The Star mentioned.

But there is no mention of tenure of the operation in the report.

In August 2013, the Malaysian government also ran a crackdown against the illegal expatriates and then over 500 Bangladeshis were detained.

# 50pc salary hike

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sub-committee on raising the salaries and allowances of the judges of the Appellate and High Court divisions.

The parliamentary sub-committee had recommended Tk 1.52 lakh as monthly salary for the chief justice, Tk 1.20 lakh for an appellate judge, and Tk 1.08 lakh for an HC judge.

The cabinet also approved in principle the draft of the Youth Organisation (Registration and Control) Act-2013 with a provision of maximum six months jail or Tk 50,000 fine or both if any youth organisation violates the conditions of registration or provides false information.

Musharraf said there are some 14,000 youth organisations listed in the country. A national youth council and an advisory council will be formed to promote and support the activities of the organisations.

He also said the cabinet expressed satisfaction over the implementation of the decisions it took during the past tenure of the Hasina-led government.

# HK police arrest employer of 'tortured' Indonesian maid

AFP, Hong Kong

Police at Hong Kong airport yesterday arrested a woman who allegedly tortured two Indonesian domestic helpers, a day after thousands staged a march to call for better migrant worker rights in the city.

The unnamed woman, a 44-year-old housewife alleged to have beaten domestic helper Erwiana Sulistyansih and another maid, was arrested at the city's Chek Lap Kok airport as she attempted to board a flight to Thailand.

"At about 4 o'clock today, Hong Kong police arrested a housewife of age 44. She is believed to be (involved) in connection with Erwiana's case and another abuse on an Indonesian domestic helper in Hong Kong," police officer Chan Wai-man told reporters some five hours after police detained the woman.

"She was trying to leave Hong Kong for Thailand," he added.

# Sayedee unrest

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to snatch Saiful from police custody. Reazul Islam said Saiful got caught in the line of fire and died.

He said they had recovered a firearm, five crude bombs and six bullets from the scene.

Saiful, son of former Meherpur Jamaat chief Samir Uddin, had eight criminal cases filed against him, including two for fights with police last year in which two Jamaat activists had been killed, said police.

His father Samir fled the country allegedly after leading the torching of around 100 shops in Meherpur town in January last year.

Meanwhile, during his tenure as Islami Chhatra Shibir district unit president between 2009 and 2011, Saiful had five cases filed against him for attacking law enforcers and activists of pro-ruling party student body Bangladesh Chhatra League.

"Taking over the post [of district Jamaat assistant secretary general in February 2013], he had organised an armed wing of the party," claimed AKM Nahidul Islam, superintendent of Meherpur police.

Police sources said Saiful's cohort Abdul Jabbar, 55, a ward-level Jamaat leader of Meherpur, was also killed in a "crossfire" during a "shootout" between Jamaat men and a team of joint forces on December 30.

# Seven accused

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will fall," the activists quoted the seven Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists expelled by JU as saying.

The two, Syed Nazmul Hossain of physics and Razibul Islam of the Institute of Business Administration, are organisers of the platform and had gone to the court to attend the hearing.

The seven are Khandaker Ashikul Islam alias Ashik, Khan Mohammad Rois, Zahid Hasan, Rashidul Islam, Ishtiaq Mehbub (Arup), Mahabub Akram and Najmus Sakib Topu, said the activists.

"The killers must be handed down exemplary punishment," said the activists, adding that a general dairy had been filed with Kotwali police.

Proctor Prof Muzibur Rahman said measures would also be taken on behalf of the university.

Zubair, an honours final year student of English and a BCL activist, was tortured and stabbed by the accused on January 8, 2012 and he succumbed to his injuries the next day.

# Another accused

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Khatun alleged detectives picked up her son on the night of January 14 from a relative's house in Tangail, where he had been hiding to avoid arrest.

Police also detained one of Atiq's cousins, Mohidul Islam, from the house on the night, she said, adding that Mohidul was still missing.

Firoz Kabir said Atiq, JCD general secretary of Tupamari union unit, was also an accused in the Khorshed Alam Chowdhury murder case.

Khorshed, president of Tupamari union Krishak League, is one of the five people killed in the attack on Noor's convoy on December 14 last year.

Jamaat-Shibir men attacked the motorcade of Noor, also a noted actor and now the cultural affairs minister, on his way to Nilphamari, his hometown.

Soon before the attack, Noor visited several villages where Jamaat activists torched belongings of Hindus and AL supporters two days ago.

# Inqilab reporter

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news editor and the deputy chief reporter.

Metropolitan Magistrate SM Ashiqur Rahman granted the remand for Atique after KM Firoz Al Zaman, an inspector of Detective Branch of police and also the investigation officer of the case, produced the accused before his court and sought a five-day remand.

During the hearing, Sayeed Ahmed Gazi, a counsel for the accused, said the content of the news item was taken from different online reports. So, his clients should be granted bail.

On January 16, Sub-Inspector of Wari Police Station, Jahangir Alam, filed the case under the Information and Communication Technology Act and the Penal Code accusing Inqilab Editor AMM Bahauddin and the three journalists for running the report.

The report claimed that Indian forces had taken part in operations in Sathkira ahead of the January 5 parliamentary polls.

Hours after filing of the case, detectives on Thursday night raided the Inqilab office in the capital's RK Mission Road, rounded up the three newsmen, seized three computers and sealed off the press, plate-making and server rooms.

# Khaleda slams jt force actions

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Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir dominated the 18-party rallies.

Jamaat sources said the party had made thousands of T-shirts, caps, banners and festoons for the rally, announced on January 15 by Khaleda Zia, also the 18-party chief.

However, some Jamaat-Shibir activists, without any banner or festoons, were seen in the crowd.

The secretary general of an 18-party component told The Daily Star yesterday, "We heard that the Dhaka Metropolitan Police had told the BNP the rally that would not be allowed if Jamaat men participated in it."

Besides, the BNP had been under serious pressure from diplomats to cut relation with Jamaat, added the leader.

This was the first rally of BNP after the national election, which the 18-party boycotted. Rallies were also held in many other districts and upazilas and interestingly they were under the 18-party banner.

Khaleda Zia, who arrived at the venue at 4:00pm and took the podium at 4:10pm, lambasted the joint force's drives against violence, reportedly spearheaded by Jamaat and Shibir.

She alleged Awami League men along with the joint force were carrying out oppression and torture, resulting in killing and forced disappearance of opposition leaders and activists.

"People have doubt whether it was the joint force that conducted the operation in a small area like Sathkira. People have much doubt about it," she said.

"People cannot believe that Bangladesh's force -- police or other law enforcement agency -- can act so brutally, bulldoze houses and torture mothers and sisters."

Khaleda claimed similar incidents also took place in Gaibandha and demanded the government stop the operations immediately.

The former prime minister also slammed the government for "closing down" daily Inqilab.

Referring to a news item published in the newspaper about "involvement" of Indian troops in quelling violence in Sathkira, she said different websites had published the report much earlier before Inqilab.

The Daily Star has learnt that the report was based on documents collected from the Internet and not verified by the newspaper.

Before the Inqilab, Facebook page Basherella, popular among the Jamaat and Shibir, picked up the news early last week from its like-minded news portals.

They claimed to have found two pages of fax and an email that "prove" the Awami League government had sought Indian army interven-

tion in Sathkira.

On Friday, detectives raided Inqilab office, picked up four journalists, sealed off the press, plate-making and server rooms and seized three computers.

Without going into these details, Khaleda Zia went on, "Before taking action against the newspaper, the government should have explained whether the news report was true or not. But the administration is closing down newspaper one after another."

She warned the government: "Stop such activities. Otherwise, you will have to face dire consequences."

Claiming that Bangladesh was going to lose its sovereignty, Khaleda said, "We want to know whether Bangladesh's sovereignty still exists or has been sold out. It appears from the government's activities that Bangladesh's sovereignty and independence are not intact at present."

She called upon those who took part in the 1971 Liberation War to rise again to protect the country and its democracy.

Also at the rally, top leaders of Liberal Democratic Party, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, Jatiya Gonotantrik Party, Bangladesh Kalyan Party, Bangladesh NAP and Bangladesh Labour Party were present.

Kalyan Party Chairman Syed Mohammad Ibrahim, Gonotantrik Party President Saiful Alam Pradhan, Liberal Democratic Party Chairman Oli Ahmed and BJP Chairman Andaleev Rahman Partha addressed the gathering.

# EU agrees rare military mission to help C.Africa

AFP, Brussels

European Union ministers agreed yesterday to send hundreds of troops to the Central African Republic in a rare joint military mission aimed at ending months of sectarian violence.

An EU statement said foreign ministers gave "political approval" to a military operation expected to involve the rapid deployment of a force numbering anywhere between 400 and 1,000 to help back French and African soldiers already on the ground in the impoverished nation.

"The operation will contribute, by lending temporary support, for a period of up to six months, to the establishment of a secure environment in the region of Bangui (the capital), in order to hand over to the African Union," the statement said.

Also in Brussels, international donors pledged \$496 million (365 million euros) in aid to the country this year, where almost one million people, or 20 percent of the population, have been displaced by fighting.

# Govt illegal, isolated

FROM PAGE 1

BNP policymakers also requested its alliance partners Khelafat Majlish, Islami Oikya Jote and Jamiate Olamaye Islam -- all three Islamist parties -- not to attend the rally, according to party insiders.

However, top leaders of Liberal Democratic Party, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, Jatiya Gonotantrik Party, Bangladesh Kalyan Party, Bangladesh NAP and Bangladesh Labour Party, among other allies, were present.

Chiefs of the LDP, the BJP, the BKP and the Jappa urged Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to create an atmosphere conducive to resolving the political crisis through talks and holding a free and fair election under a neutral administration.

The BNP chief said their major task at hand is to save the country from the "clutches of the current autocratic and illegal regime, and restore democracy."

She also came down heavily on Jatiya Party Chief HM Ershad. "If Ershad had really been detained, he would not have gone to the combined military hospital and played golf. It was all a drama."

Referring to a speech by Awami League chief Hasina at Laldighi Maidan in Chittagong in 1986, she said Hasina there had announced her party wouldn't join any polls under the Ershad regime, and if any party did so, it would be considered a traitor.

But, Khaleda added, the AL contested the election along with the Jamaat. "And Ershad finally returned Hasina a favour by joining the January 5 polls and the cabinet."

She also said, "The two autocrats have joined hands to swallow up the country and plunder its wealth."

Terming Hasina a traitor, the BNP chief said a traitor is always a traitor and can never be a patriot.

She alleged that the present government has resorted to repression, killing and forced disappearance to subdue the opposition.

"They are going to sit in parliament without the opposition ... And some clowns, who are not even elected by the people, will be there."

The BNP chief said the government would-

n't be able to cling to power forever no matter what tricks it played. "Arrange fresh polls soon upon holding talks."

Pointing at Hasina's comment that she wouldn't budge even an inch from the constitutional framework, Khaleda alleged that the AL chief herself had blatantly violated the constitution.

"The nation is going through a very critical time with the government continuing its repression. People are now fed up and they will oust this repressive government from power very soon," Khaleda said.

The country is in a bad shape due to the government's unbridled corruption and misrule over the last five years, Khaleda said.

Khaleda said the BNP, not the AL, is the party of real freedom fighters. "You [the AL men] just crossed the [Indian] border. You didn't take part in the war."

She also termed completely false the AL's claim that militancy would be on the rise if the BNP comes to power.

"It was during your [Sheikh Hasina] government's tenure when militancy was created in the country. They [the AL] carry out militant activities and then have news reports published saying the BNP are involved in those."

Khaleda also mentioned the incidents of bomb blasts, including the ones at Ramna Batamul, at an Udichi programme in Jessore and at a church in Gopalganj.

She said militancy would be rooted out and peace would prevail if the AL quits power.

Blaming the AL for the recent spate of violence against the Hindus, she claimed the government carried out the attacks on minorities to divert people's attention from the "farical" election.

She alleged that those involved in the attacks haven't been arrested since they belong to the ruling party.

"The government has failed to ensure their security and bring the attackers to book."

The BNP yesterday held its first rally since the January 5 election. The party also organised rallies in divisional, district and upazila headquarters.

# CHT wildlife

FROM PAGE 2

Bank-funded Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Wildlife Conservation Project (SRCWP), has said the logging is the main reason behind the wildlife extinction.

He has also pointed out that the patrolling by forest department is not adequate.

Following a recent visit to Rangamati, he told The Daily Star: "I saw some people living near the reserve forests. They are basically dependent on the forest for livelihoods through illegal logging."

There are nearly three lakh acres of natural forests and seven lakh acres of reserve forests in the three hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban, according to forest department.

But the vast tracts of forests are getting destroyed, contributing to the extinction of the wildlife species.

Poachers are often seen chasing wild animals in the reserve forests of two wildlife sanctuaries -- Kaptai National Park and Pabla Khali Wildlife Sanctuary -- in absence of proper monitoring by the concerned department.

Locals have alleged that the poaching and

logging in the CHT go unabated in cohorts with a section of forest employees.

Some of the rare animals recovered from the poachers and people are put in a mini zoo run by the Rangamati Hill District Council to save them from extinction.

Md Rezaul Sikder, conservator of forests (CF) in Rangamati, admitted the depletion of wildlife, but passed the blame onto the increased practice of jhum cultivation and more human habitation in the hills.

He admitted that there might be a nexus between some forest officials and loggers, but cited manpower shortage in the forest department in the CHT a major problem.

"At least 40 percent posts remain vacant. Therefore, we cannot put whole effort to patrol the forests," Rezaul Sikder said.

Dr Monirul suggested creating alternative livelihood for the locals through eco-tourism to save the forests and wildlife.

Forest department officials said they had been working under two projects -- SRCWP and Climate Change Resilience Livelihood Project - - to outline strategies to conserve the biodiversity of the CHT.