

## Palestinians count cost of Israeli reprisals

Dozens of cars, homes set ablaze in West Bank overnight after two settlers were killed

AFP, Huwara

Palestinians in the occupied West Bank yesterday counted the cost of deadly violence and arson by Israeli settlers targeting a town where two Israeli brothers were killed.

Dozens of Israeli settlers set homes and cars ablaze in the northern town of Huwara overnight, after a day of Israeli-Palestinian talks in neighbouring Jordan aimed at quelling a surge in violence in the Palestinian territory.

More than 350 Palestinians were injured, most suffering from tear gas inhalation, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said.

The Palestinian health ministry said Sameh Aqtash, 37, was shot dead during an attack by Israeli forces and settlers on the nearby village of Zaatar.

The violence came hours after two Israeli settlers — brothers Yagel Yaniv, 20, and Hallel Yaniv, 22 — were shot dead Sunday as they drove through Huwara.

Yesterday, an AFP photographer saw damaged homes blackened by fire, long lines of charred cars, burned trees and smashed windows in the town.

"They burned the cars and the houses and destroyed everything," Huwara resident Diaa Odeh said.

"Whenever we started to push the settlers back, the army was firing tear gas at us," added the 25-year-old.

Wajeh Odeh, a member of the town's municipality, said 30 houses were burned and damaged while more than 100 cars were torched.

Abdel Moneim Aqtash said he and his brother were standing outside a blacksmith's workshop when they were attacked by Israeli settlers.

"They left the area and then came back with the occupation (Israeli) army... The army shot my brother, not the settlers," he told AFP.

The military told AFP that Aqtash "was not shot by an Israeli soldier".

Yoav Gallant, defence minister in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new right-wing coalition government, said he expected "difficult days ahead" and had ordered troops to be reinforced.

"With this being said, I call on everyone to restore calm... We cannot allow a situation in which citizens take the law into their (own) hands," he said.

The Israeli military told AFP no-one had been arrested over the arson or killing of Aqtash.

The search for the gunmen who fired on the two brothers was ongoing.



PHOTO: AFP

Rescuers carry on search operations among the rubble of collapsed buildings in the Yesilyurt district of Malatya yesterday, after a 5.6 magnitude earthquake hit eastern Turkey, killing one person and wounding dozens others while causing some damaged buildings to collapse, the government's disaster agency said.

### ITALY SHIPWRECK

## Death toll rises to 62

AFP, Cutro

Italy's coastguard yesterday searched the sea and beaches for bodies following a shipwreck off Calabria, as the death toll rose to 62 and charities cared for children who witnessed loved ones drowning.

The overloaded wooden boat broke up and sank early Sunday in stormy seas off Italy's southern coast.

The death toll rose to 62, a coast guard official told AFP — and that number looked likely to increase.

Sergio di Dato, head of the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) team, said there were cases of children orphaned in the disaster.

### NEPAL PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

## Communist rift plunges coalition into crisis

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Splits within Nepal's communist-dominated coalition plunged the Himalayan nation into crisis yesterday as a Marxist-Leninist party said it would withdraw support after the Maoist prime minister backed an opposition candidate for the presidency.

Nestled between China and India, Nepal has had 11 governments since it abolished its 239-year monarchy in 2008 and became a republic. The current prime minister, a former Maoist guerrilla leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal has held the post three times.

Elected in December, the prime minister, who still goes by his nom de guerre Prachanda, formed a seven-party coalition comprised of his own Maoist Centre party, the Communist

Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party and five other smaller groups.

Last week, Prachanda infuriated the UML by pledging support for the opposition Nepali Congress party's presidential candidate, Ram Chandra Paudel.

Prachanda had earlier agreed to support a UML candidate for the presidency, according to politicians in the coalition.

Members of both houses of parliament and members of seven provincial assemblies will cast their votes on March 9 to elect the president.

Bishnu Paudel, deputy prime minister in charge of finance, and a senior UML leader, said he and all eight ministers of his party will resign as Prachanda failed to "honour the consensus" that was reached while forming the government.

## UK, EU reach deal on N Ireland post-Brexit trade

REUTERS, London

Britain and the European Union have reached an agreement over post-Brexit trading arrangements in Northern Ireland, a government source said yesterday. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was expected to announce the deal later yesterday after a meeting with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The deal seeks to resolve tensions caused by the 2020 post-Brexit arrangements governing Northern Ireland, a British province, and its open border with EU member Ireland. It remains to be seen, though, whether it will go far enough to end political deadlock in Northern Ireland and satisfy critics in Britain and the province. The new agreement is expected to ease physical checks on goods flowing from Britain to Northern Ireland and give the British province a say over the EU rules it has to implement under the complicated terms of Britain's exit from the bloc. It could also allow London to set some tax and state aid rules. The protocol has faced staunch opposition from the Democratic Unionist Party, who argue it threatens the province's place within the UK.

### ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

## BJP to win big in Tripura, Nagaland Show exit polls

AGENCIES

The BJP will easily gain majority in Tripura and its alliance government will come to power in Nagaland, according to exit polls. The BJP, according to India Today, will win between 36 to 45 seats in Tripura. The majority mark in the 60 seat assembly is 31. Zee News-Matrise has predicted the BJP-NDPP alliance will win 35-43 of Nagaland's 60 seats. In Meghalaya, Conrad Sangma's NPP is likely to emerge as the single largest party, predicted Zee News-Matrise. Elections across the 60 assembly seats in Tripura concluded on February 16 peacefully. According to the EC, nearly 90 percent voting was recorded in the North Eastern State. In the 2018 assembly elections, Tripura registered 89.38 percent voting. The counting of votes for all three states will take place on Thursday.

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