

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 Zaatara.

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.

ASSEMBLY POLLS

BJP to win big in Tripura

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. Polls across 60 assembly seats in Tripura concluded on February 16.

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.

Use of lethal force

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They noted that at least four protesters died while many were injured, including BNP leader Tabith Awal.

They said that this is a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT).

The letter was also signed by the special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

"Failure to take all precautions practically possible in the planning, preparation and conduct of law enforcement operations with a view to avoiding unnecessary, excessive or otherwise unlawful use of force contravenes a state's obligation to prevent acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment within its jurisdiction," read the letter.

The letter also noted that activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League attacked protesters of Bangladesh Chhatra Odhikar Parishad while they were holding a vigil remembering slain Buet student Abrar Fahad.

"We are also concerned that supporters of one political party have been able to attack members of another political party... without police intervening to protect the individuals

or to investigate potential criminal liability," said the letter.

"Law enforcement has a responsibility to prevent harm to others, and failing to do so is a contravention of a state's obligation of due diligence to protect citizens from harm," it added.

The letter also addressed how BNP activists have been facing arbitrary arrests, detention, and cases.

The UN is concerned by the "allegations of arbitrary arrests and detention of individuals, and the use of false charges, including against opposition political leaders and independent civil society groups, in relation to their participation in peaceful protests and their membership in an association."

"We are further troubled by reports that individuals faced physical violence from the authorities while in detention, and were also denied medical treatment," read the letter.

All of this will negatively impact Bangladesh's ability to provide free and fair elections in 2023, said the letter.

They urged the government to halt such violations and initiate investigations. The letter was also signed by the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and the working group on arbitrary detention.

US warns China

FROM PAGE 12

Kyiv is eyeing a counter-offensive with advanced Western weapons, including battle tanks, pledged over the coming months.

CIA Director William Burns said at the weekend the US intelligence agency

believed Beijing was considering military aid to Russia though it had not reached a final decision.

"If it goes down that road it will come at real costs to China," US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN on Sunday.

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