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SHAH CEMENT

'Drop in the ocean'

First aid convoy reaches Gaza after overnight Israeli air strikes

REUTERS, Gaza/Jerusalem

Twenty trucks carrying aid crossed into Gaza yesterday, the first convoy of humanitarian supplies since Israel began a devastating siege 12 days ago and after further heavy Israeli bombardment overnight that killed dozens of Palestinians.

The flatbed trucks, flying white flags and honking their horns, exited the crossing after checks and headed into Gaza's southern area which includes the major towns of Rafah and Khan Younis where hundreds of thousands of people made homeless by Israel's unrelenting air war are sheltering.

Palestinian officials were disappointed that fuel supplies were not included in the consignment of food, water, and medical supplies and added that the aid was only 3% of what used to get into Gaza before the crisis.

"Excluding the fuel from the humanitarian aid means the lives of patients and injured will remain at risk. Gaza hospitals are running out of the basic requirements to pursue medical interventions," the Gaza health ministry said.

'DROP IN THE OCEAN'

Most of Gaza's inhabitants depend on humanitarian aid. The heavily urbanised and widely impoverished territory has been under Israeli and Egyptian blockade since Israel unilaterally withdrew from the enclave in 2005.

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A view of residential buildings destroyed in Israeli strikes in Zahra in southern Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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Ex-PM Sharif returns to Pakistan

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif arrived home yesterday from four years of self-imposed exile in London, aiming to kick start his party's campaign for next year's election and targeting former premier Imran Khan as the biggest rival.



The 73-year-old veteran politician returned to his eastern hometown of Lahore, where he will lead a rally hours after his chartered plane landed in Islamabad carrying more than 150 people from his party and media organisations, the party and sources said.

Local TV news channels showed Sharif disembarking from a helicopter at a helipad close to the Minar-e-Pakistan monument where thousands of his supporters were waiting for his address.

During a brief stay in the Islamabad

Bangladesh, EU 'heading for strategic ties'

PM flies to Brussels on Tuesday to attend Global Gateway Forum

PORIMOL PALMA



Bangladesh and the EU are moving towards a strategic and political partnership and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina attending the first Global Gateway Forum on October 25-26 in Brussels is a definitive step towards that end, said foreign ministry officials.

Launched in 2021, the Global Gateway is the EU's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative and is aimed at mobilising funding for infrastructure building in developing countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Hasina is one of the 20 heads of state -- along with those of Senegal, Namibia and Moldova -- invited to the two-day event, which will bring together representatives of governments from the EU and from around the world with the private sector, civil society, leading thinkers, financing institutions and international organisations.

Under the Global Gateway initiative, the two partners would work on infrastructure and connectivity, migration, green energy, climate change, blue economy, maritime cooperation, security and regional and global strategic issues of mutual interest, said Charles Whiteley, the EU ambassador to Bangladesh.

"The Global Gateway will be a different vision for connectivity. There are big global actors who have funded infrastructure projects but those have not always been

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Disputed polls may result in fierce protests

Warns Int'l Crisis Group about Bangladesh, says country's dependence on India, China may increase

STAR REPORT

A rigged or disputed election in Bangladesh could trigger fierce anti-government protests, the International Crisis Group has said.

"It could also cause the government to increase its dependence on India and China, as the US [and potentially other Western countries] will probably respond with sanctions, such as visa bans on top officials," according to the October 2023-March 2024 edition of "On the Horizon" report of the Crisis Group, reports UNB.

The International Crisis Group, an independent organisation, is working to prevent wars and shape policies aiming for a more peaceful world.

The BNP will hold a grand rally in the capital October 28 as part of its one-point movement demanding resignation of the government and general election under a neutral non-party administration. The ruling Awami League, however, says BNP's downfall will start that day.

Election-related activities, such as campaigning and voting, could

become flashpoints for violent attacks; spillover could also increase from restive states in India's northeast, the report said.

COMING WEEKS, MONTHS?

The group predicts that the January 2024 election will be potentially violent and stakes will be high.

The AL is expected to ignore calls for it to step down and hand power to a caretaker government that would oversee the election.

Rival supporters could clash in street battles or attack party offices or candidates.

Islamist groups could become more active in opposing the government.

Facing the prospect of a disputed election, the opposition will probably boycott the election and could become radicalised, adopting more violent tactics.

Lack of hope, insecurity and poverty threaten to create a vicious cycle in which desperate Rohingyas, particularly young men, could join criminal gangs and armed groups, further fuelling the violence.

the BUSINESS

Digital banks may get BB nod today

Bangladesh Bank is likely to give primary approval today for the formation of digital banks in the country.

The central bank has already created a shortlist from applications that have sought permission to set up 52 digital banks.

The shortlist will be placed at a meeting of the BB's board of directors today. Mustafa K Mujeri, a former chief economist of the BB, said that it would be wise to give the approval after the upcoming parliamentary elections considering the country's overall situation.

STORY ON BI

Final JS session begins as politics heats up

RASHDUL HASAN

The 11th Jatiya Sangsad goes into its final session today. The last session of this parliament begins at a time when the country's two major political parties -- the Awami League and the BNP -- are on the streets to establish supremacy ahead of the upcoming general election.

The BNP, whose seven MPs resigned from parliament in December last year, is now planning to launch its "final push" to bring down the government. The party is waging a movement demanding the government resign and the next general election be held under a non-party neutral administration.

The 25th session of the incumbent parliament is scheduled to begin at 4:00pm today, according to the parliament secretariat.

Prior to the start of the session, the business advisory committee of parliament will hold a meeting, with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair, to fix the duration and businesses of the session.

According to sources at the parliament secretariat, the final session of the JS may continue for about a week.

The present parliament is unlikely to go into any session after October 31, as the countdown for the next election will begin on November 1.

The last session of parliament, which had nine working days, was prorogued on September 14.

According to the constitution, the gap between the end of a JS session and the first sitting of the next session shall not exceed a period of 60 days.

Parliament sources said several bills are likely to be passed by the House in this session. Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbub Alam Hanif told The Daily Star, "We will create public opinion in and outside parliament against the BNP's

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AL pardons ex-GCC mayor Zahangir again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Bangladesh Awami League yesterday pardoned the former mayor of Gazipur City Corporation Mohammad Zahangir Alam again.



A letter, signed by AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, has been sent to him in this regard.

He has been reinstated in the party on the condition that he won't engage in any activities that go against the party's interest and organisational discipline.

The letter also mentions that any further violation of the organisation's rules will be deemed unforgivable.

"I have received the letter," Zahangir told our Gazipur correspondent.

"Victory is guaranteed to those who remain loyal to the party. This has been proven again," he said.

Thanking Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, he vowed to serve the people as a loyal member of the Awami League.

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A priest performs early morning aarti to Goddess Durga on the occasion of Maha Saptami yesterday at the Jagannath Temple near Sadar Road in Barishal.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Green couple embraces garbage wedding shoot



AFP, Nantou County

A Taiwanese couple decked out in a tux and gown embrace in front of a mountain of trash in an unorthodox wedding photo -- one the environment-conscious bride hopes will discourage her guests from generating unnecessary garbage.

Greenpeace campaigner Iris Hsueh and her fiancé are having their "environmentally friendly wedding" in January, and have asked guests to bring their own containers for taking home leftovers.

Deciding that showing -- not telling -- was a more effective communication method, the Taipei-based couple travelled three hours south for a photo shoot in Nantou county's Puli township, where the amount of trash brought to a local dump has steadily risen over the years.