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Twin blasts kill 103 in Iran

Tehran vows to track down 'terrorists' as explosions target people commemorating revered commander killed by US

AFP, Tehran

At least 103 people were killed in Iran yesterday as two bombs in quick succession struck a crowd commemorating slain general Qasem Soleimani on the anniversary of his killing, state media reported.

The blasts, which state television called a "terrorist attack", came with tensions running high in the Middle East a day after Hamas number two Saleh al-Aruri – an Iran ally – was killed in a drone attack on a Beirut southern suburb which Lebanese officials blamed on Israel.

The blasts struck near the Saheb al-Zaman Mosque in Kerman, Soleimani's southern hometown where he is buried, as supporters gathered to mark the fourth anniversary of his killing in a US drone strike just outside Baghdad airport.

Kerman's deputy governor, Rahman Jalali, said the explosions were a "terrorist attack".

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

"The number of people killed rose to 103 following the death of people injured during the terrorist explosions," said official IRNA news agency, which earlier reported 73 deaths.

Another 141 people were wounded in the bombings, SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Iranian emergency services arrive at the site where two explosions in quick succession struck a crowd marking the anniversary of the 2020 killing of Guards general Qasem Soleimani, near the Saheb al-Zaman Mosque in the southern Iranian city of Kerman yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Don't want polls that'll push country into a crisis

Says Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana has said the Election Commission does not want to hold an election that would plunge the country into a crisis.

The government formed through the election should be a stable one, she told reporters at her EC office yesterday.

"If the government becomes unstable, the country will be in danger," she added. The 12th parliamentary polls are set to be held on January 7.

Rashida said international pressure is not an issue. "There is no pressure from any side. The election will be free and fair and there will be recognition of the polls from all quarters."

She said the election atmosphere is under control of the EC and the January 7 election will be a "festive one".

The election commissioner said the EC will take tough actions against those who would commit irregularities on election day.

Flawed polls may deepen political strife

Says a report by Int'l Crisis Group

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A flawed election on January 7 could worsen the conflict between the political parties in Bangladesh and raise the spectre of violence in the aftermath, said a new report of the International Crisis Group (ICG) released yesterday.

"The BNP is likely to continue its blockades and may also work with leftist, centrist and Islamist parties to launch a new round of protests after the elections, possibly provoking a repressive response from security forces and Awami League supporters," said the report titled "Beyond the Election: Breaking Bangladesh's Political Deadlock".

The 43-page report was based on interviews with representatives from the AL and the BNP, civil servants, journalists, civil society leaders, UN officials, diplomats, and independent experts between June and October 2023.

The BNP and its allies have been demanding a caretaker government for polls but the AL rejected it. Amid the deadlock, the AL is going for the polls. The BNP has been calling strikes and blockades in the months following October 28 when the government foiled a BNP rally. Law enforcers have arrested an estimated 20,000 BNP leaders since then.

The BNP, Jamaat, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, the Democratic Left Alliance and dozens of other parties will not take

part in the polls. The main opposition is now considering uniting all these parties into a single platform and organise demonstrations and rallies calling for the government's resignation, the ICG said.

The BNP is likely to continue its blockades and may also work with leftist, centrist and Islamist parties to launch a new round of protests after the elections, possibly provoking a repressive response from security forces and Awami League supporters.

It says the turnout in the polls is likely to be low, and the AL and local officials may fall back on ballot box stuffing, not to change the results, but to generate the sense of a higher participation rate, as had occurred in two recent by-elections, the report said.

Meanwhile, the AL's internal unity SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

14 injured in pre-election violence

STAR REPORT

At least 14 people were injured and two election camps vandalised in pre-polls violence in four districts since Tuesday night.

In Narsingdi-3, four supporters of independent candidate Sirazul Islam Mollah were hurt in an attack allegedly by followers of AL nominee Fazla Rabbi Khan in Shibpur upazila's Matikata area yesterday noon.

"We were preparing to hold an election-related meeting around 1:00pm. Suddenly, some supporters of the boat symbol [Awami League's electoral symbol] arrived in two minibuses and started beating us with sticks," said Imran Hossain, who was injured in the attack.

Sirazul Islam alleged that AL supporters are unleashing terror "sensing their defeat".

Fazla Rabbi Khan could not be reached over the phone for comments, despite repeated attempts.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. They are investigating the incident, said Shibpur Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Farid Uddin.

In Faridpur-4, election camp of AL-nominated candidate Kazi Zafarullah was torched allegedly by supporters of independent Mujibur Rahman

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Killing of Hamas leader raises fears of wider conflict

Israel says it's ready 'for any scenario' as strike kills Hamas deputy in Lebanon; bombing of the enclave continues

AGENCIES

Israeli forces intensified their bombing of the Gaza Strip yesterday and told civilians to leave a refugee camp in the north of the Palestinian enclave after the offensive stretched into Lebanon with the killing in Beirut of the Hamas deputy leader.

Israel has neither confirmed nor denied that it killed Saleh al-Arouri in a drone strike in the Lebanese capital on Tuesday. But military spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said Israeli forces were in a high state of readiness and prepared for any scenario.

The military was in "very high state of readiness in all arenas, in defence and offence. We are highly prepared for any scenario," Hagari said.

The assassination of Arouri was a further sign that the nearly three-month conflict between Israel and Hamas was spreading across the region, drawing in the occupied West Bank, Hezbollah forces on the Lebanon-Israel border, and even Red Sea shipping lanes.

Hamas politburo member Hossam Badran said in a eulogy for Arouri: "We say to the criminal occupation (Israel) that the battle between us is open."

Following Arouri's killing, the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon said it was deeply concerned about the possibility of an escalation "that could have devastating consequences for people on both sides of the border".

In Gaza itself, Israeli forces bombed Al-

- Israel strikes hit Al-Nusseirat, Al-Bureij refugee camps in Gaza
- Gaza death toll rises to 22,313
- 128 Palestinians killed, 261 injured in 24 hours



Nusseirat refugee camp in the northern part of the Hamas-ruled enclave overnight and into yesterday, destroying several multi-floor buildings, residents and Palestinian media said.

Israeli planes dropped leaflets on Al-Nusseirat ordering people to leave seven districts. War planes and tanks also stepped up attacks on the Al-Bureij refugee camp, reports Reuters.

Israel says it tries to avoid harm to civilians. SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

BUSINESS

Energy sector woes to linger

The severe US dollar crunch hurt the power sector most in 2023 as demand outpaced generation owing to lower imports of liquefied natural gas and coal, leaving households and factories without electricity for hours during many summer days.

Although the country bid farewell to 2023, the bad news is that the crisis in the energy sector is unlikely to disappear in 2024 since the underlying factors behind the current scenario are still at play.

STORY ON B1



With a mild to moderate cold wave sweeping through the country, people flocked the roadside shops selling winter clothes at low prices in the capital's New Market yesterday. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Dinosaurs may be reason why humans age fast

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Human ageing and lifespan are likely influenced by millions of years of domination by dinosaurs, a new theory suggests.

While some reptiles and amphibians do not show any significant signs of ageing before they die, all mammals – including humans – show marked developments in their appearance as they get older.

A new theory, dubbed the "longevity bottleneck hypothesis," suggests mammals faced persistent pressure for rapid reproduction during the era of dinosaurs.

Over 100 million years, this likely led to the inactivation or loss of genes linked to long life playing roles in tissue regeneration and DNA repair, according to the study published in the journal *BioEssays*.

"While humans are among the longest-living animals, there are many reptiles and other animals that have a much slower aging process and show minimal signs of senescence over their lives," study author Joao Pedro de Magalhaes from the University of Birmingham said.

"The 'longevity bottleneck hypothesis' may shed light on evolutionary forces that have shaped mammalian aging over millions of years," Dr Magalhaes said.

