

## INTERNATIONAL

Zardari voted  
Pak president  
for 2nd time

AFP, Islamabad

Asif Ali Zardari, the widower of Pakistan's slain first female leader Benazir Bhutto, was voted in as president for a second time yesterday, after elections marred by rigging claims.

Zardari was voted in with 411 votes to 181 for the opposition-backed candidate, the Election Commission of Pakistan announced after tallying the votes by national MPs, provincial MPs and senators.

Lawmakers of Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) voted Zardari into the largely ceremonial post, backed by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party in an alliance forged after the February 8 polls.

Zardari is expected to be sworn in at a ceremony on Sunday. PML-N's Shehbaz Sharif was sworn in as prime minister on Monday.



Palestinians walk away with some items salvaged from the rubble of a residential building hit in an overnight Israeli air strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Russian attacks  
kill several in  
south, east  
Says Kyiv

AFP, Kyiv

Russian shelling and strikes on Ukraine's Kherson region killed one person and wounded several, with at least two civilians also killed in attacks on the centre and east of the country, Kyiv said yesterday.

Russia's invasion has dragged on for more than two years, with fierce fighting in the east and regular attacks away from the frontline.

Kyiv's interior ministry said Russian shelling killed a 58-year-old woman in the southern village of Olhivka on the Dnipro river. Officials also said a Russian air bomb fell near a residential building in the city of Kherson, wounding a child.

"Last night, the Russian army struck the city with a bomb. The shell landed near a five-storey building," Kherson's administration said on social media.

It published a video of a destroyed building, with a large crater outside it. "A seven-year-old boy who suffered from the shelling is under medical supervision," authorities said, adding that "the child's life is not in danger."

Israelis try to stop aid  
trucks at the edge of Gaza

CNN ONLINE, Kerem Shalom

Angry Israelis cut across a field of stubble to try to get around a police blockade to disrupt shipments of food and supplies intended for Gaza.

For weeks Israeli border officers allowed protesters to disrupt the critical aid convoys at Kerem Shalom, the country's sole functioning border crossing with Gaza. But at the end of last month, with international pressure and condemnation mounting, authorities announced they were moving additional officers to the crossing to take back control. But even with the area now declared a closed military zone, protesters continue to arrive and try to outmaneuver the police.

The protests are being led by the "Tsav 9" movement, a grouping of demobilized reservists, families of hostages and settlers. Its name, meaning "Order 9," is a reference to the emergency mobilisation notices that call up reservists.

The protesters say they fear the aid is helping militants still holding their friends and relatives hostage, five months after the cross-border raids led by Hamas that killed about 1,200 people in Israel with 200 more being taken prisoner. They hope preventing food and supplies

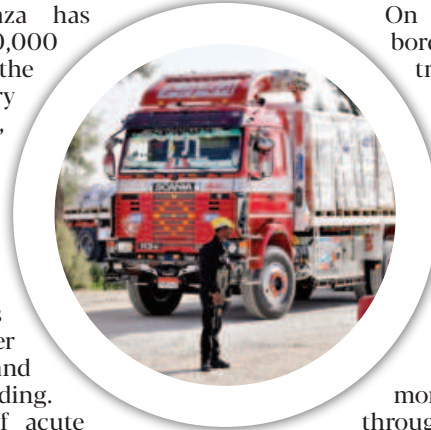
from entering Gaza will force Hamas to release them. A recent poll by the Israel Democracy Institute found that two-thirds of Jewish Israelis support their view opposing the transfer of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

The war in Gaza has killed more than 30,000 people, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza, and the remaining population has been forced from their homes and struggle to survive. The World Health Organization says food and safe water have become scarce and diseases are spreading. There is a surge of acute malnutrition, it says. Children are dying.

But aid has been slow to reach those in desperate need. Israel restricts what can go in, and a UN official said from February 24 to March 3 fewer than 1,000 trucks entered the strip, far below the required 500 daily.

Some countries started dropping

aid from the air, and the US, UK and European Union are setting up a shipping corridor in the Mediterranean to access Gaza directly, but the UN says road access remains vital to stop a deepening of the catastrophe.



On Thursday, the Israeli border police ensured aid trucks got through at Kerem Shalom, but only after turning away several attempts by protesters over the course of several hours. As the day wore on, officers took a more aggressive stance against protesters.

This is a critical moment for aid delivery through Kerem Shalom as Gaza inches closer to famine. According to Gaza's health authorities, at least 17 children have died from malnutrition and dehydration already.

Many more are sick. Inside Kamal Adwan Hospital - the only pediatric facility still operating in the north of Gaza - doctors are struggling to treat 7-year-old Fadi al Sant.

## Tigers lose series

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[celebration] is something they could not get out of," Najmul said.

"I think they should live in the present, for their own good. I feel we didn't do anything outside the laws of the game [during the World Cup match]. They are going overboard but we aren't bothered by it," he added.

At the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, there was also an incident involving Towhid Hridoy - who was seen arguing with the Lankan players while they were busy celebrating the dismissal of the right-handed batter. When Sri Lanka star Kusal Mendis was asked the same question, assistant coach Naveed Nawaz stepped in to play down the incidents, informing "the atmosphere is really nice" between the two camps.

"I think both teams... give their hundred per cent. Sometimes emotions come into the middle. The players are all very friendly outside the boundary line. They fight really hard once they are inside the ground. I think that's what the game is all about... [and] that's what both teams are expected to do," Nawaz said.

In the second T20I, the third-umpire's call to reverse Soumya Sarkar's out decision had created a stir amongst the visitors; although Nawaz reckons that "it's part of the game".

"I think the umpire made a mistake. Everyone can make a mistake. Our team isn't thinking about it too much," he said of the controversial umpiring incident.

Having shown fight in the first two T20Is, Bangladesh will be bitterly disappointed to not have fared better yesterday. However, Nuwan Thushara's destructive spell of five for 20 dashed the Tigers' chances of winning the series.

Overall, Rishad Hossain's 30-ball 53 that lifted Bangladesh from 24 for five, Jaker Ali and Mahmudullah Riyad's rearguard action after early wickets fell during a 200-plus chase in the first T20I, and how the bowlers had operated throughout were positive takeaways from the series.

## Almost half the positions in BR vacant

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operating more trains on the four new routes it opened last year, they said.

Currently, more than 100 out of 507 railway stations across the country remain closed owing to this ongoing crisis, they added.

Since December 2022, a total of 5,342 people have been hired under six categories, namely assistant station master, guard, pointsman, technical assistant (khalasi), assistant locomaster, and wayman.

Furthermore, the recruitment process for several other positions, such as more pointsmen and booking assistants, is currently underway.

Railways Minister Zillul Hakim acknowledged the manpower shortage at Bangladesh Railway while speaking during a programme organised at Rail Bhaban in the capital yesterday.

He said that the Saidpur Railway Workshop, which is the largest facility in the country for repairing and maintaining locomotives and carriages, was operating at less than half its capacity, citing his recent visit

there.

"There are currently only 850 staff working there against an authorised workforce of 2,800. This severe understaffing significantly impacts their ability to deliver the expected level of service."

The minister, however, said that BR is hiring more employees in accordance with the prime minister's directives.

Also speaking at the programme, Railways Ministry Secretary Humayun Kabir pointed out a "serious lack" of planning and coordination between various departments within Bangladesh Railway.

He stated that this lack of collaboration is hindering the efforts to deliver quality services.

"However, we're not sitting idle. We're working tirelessly to resolve the issue."

The Ministry of Railways, Bangladesh Railway, and Reporters for Rail and Road (RRR), a platform of reporters working on roads, railways, communication infrastructures, and transport-related sectors, jointly organised the workshop programme.

## JP splits again, Raushan new faction chief

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Leaders of different political parties including Krishak Sramik Janata League President Kader Siddique, Jatiyo Party (Monju) secretary general Sheikh Shahidul Islam and Bangladesh Islami Front Chairman MA Matin delivered congratulatory speech in the programme.

Diplomats and representatives of different foreign missions in Dhaka were also present at the programme. The tenure of central executive committee of Jatiyo Party expired in December 2022.

Addressing the council, Raushan said JP would have been lost if the council had not been held. "We would have lost thousands of leaders and activists if the council was not held," she added.

She urged those who left the party to return.

"I don't want to misuse the powers of chairman. I want to decentralise my power," she said.

At present opposition leader GM Quader is chairman of a faction of JP while Mujibul Haque Chunnun is the secretary general.

Raushan in late January relieved JP chairman GM Quader and secretary general Mujibul Haque Chunnun from their post and announced to take charge as the party's chairman.

Raushan, widow of JP founder HM Ershad, made the announcement following Jatiyo Party's debacle in the January 7 elections in which JP managed to get win in only 11 seats, the party's worst performance since

1991.

Raushan and her son didn't participate in the election due to their conflict with GM Quader over giving nomination.

Many JP leaders blamed GM Quader and Chunnun behind the party's debacle in the election.

GM Quader so far expelled at least 30 leaders including several top leaders of the party like Kazi Firoz Rashid, Abu Hossain Babla and Shunil Suwho Roy centering the January 7 national election.

Meanwhile, JP (Japa) Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnun yesterday said JP led by GM Quader is the original Jatiyo Party.

"Jatiyo Party remains united under the leadership of GM Quader," he added.

## Mujib appeals

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work out with Yahya some political settlement that would avoid bloodshed, satisfy Bengali aspirations, and preserve some vestige of a link with Pakistan, writes Blood.

Mujib asked, "Does the United States want to see a military confrontation with the prospect of an eventual communist domination of Bengal, or would it prefer a political solution to the crisis?" Blood replied that the question was easy to answer: peaceful political solution in lieu of bloodshed.

Then the messenger said that Mujib wanted to know if the United States would be willing to indicate to Yahya its hopes for a political solution to the ongoing crisis. The American Consul General replied positively and assured that he would undertake to suggest to the US Ambassador in

Pakistan, Farland, to inform Yahya about it before the latter departs for Dhaka. [Archer K Blood, The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh, UPL, 2006, pp. 185-186]

## WEST PAKISTANI LEADERS' SUPPORT FOR MUJIB'S FOUR-POINT DEMAND

In a meeting called by Nawabjada Nasrullah Khan, former chief of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), on March 10, 1971, in Lahore, several leaders from West Pakistan proclaimed their support for Sheikh Mujib's four-point demand and urged for the immediate opening of the National Assembly session.

The smaller parties of West Pakistan were converging on a strategy of supporting the Awami League, which made Bhutto's People's Party politically isolated by mid-March of 1971.

## Dengue meanest

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"The patients also need to be kept under mosquito nets so the virus doesn't spread through them."

Manzur added, "There is no surveillance being done to recognise the serotypes of dengue and chikungunya [diseases carried by the Aedes mosquito], which is also very important to control the diseases."

Prof Kabirul Bashar, an entomologist at Jahangirnagar University, said the number of dengue cases is high in Dhaka, Chattogram, Barishal, Barguna and Pirojpur this year, as per their findings.

"However, the numbers of patients are higher outside the capital and we fear they would be the highest since 2000."

Bashar, who conducted a survey with a team of his university, said, "We are finding Aedes larvae in high densities outside Dhaka, and this is one of the main causes of dengue cases being at an all-time high this year."

"In many areas outside Dhaka, dengue cases are being recorded for

FLOODS, LANDSLIDE  
18 dead in Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

At least 18 people were killed and five others were missing after flash floods and a landslide on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, a local official said yesterday. Torrential rains triggered the floods and landslide that hit Pesisir Selatan regency in West Sumatra province, forcing around 46,000 people to evacuate to temporary shelters. "Eighteen people were found dead. Five were missing," Pesisir Selatan disaster mitigation agency acting head Doni Gusrizal told AFP late yesterday. The official updated the toll from 10 he gave in an earlier statement. Doni said debris from the disasters had hampered ongoing rescue efforts. "The impact from the floods (was) extraordinary. Currently we are cleaning the road... Our vehicles cannot pass through," he said. As of late yesterday, electricity services were still down in several parts of Pesisir Selatan after the disaster, according to an AFP reporter in the regency. At least 14 houses were buried in the landslide, more than 20,000 houses were flooded and eight bridges had collapsed.

## 20 YEARS ON RUN

Italian crime lord  
held in Portugal

REUTERS, Lisbon

Portugal's criminal police agency PJ said yesterday it arrested a member of Italy's Camorra crime group who has been on the run for two decades. PJ said in a statement it made the arrest in the country's northern region and that the member of the Camorra, as the Naples version of the mafia is known, was the target of a European arrest warrant. Twenty years ago, the 69-year-old male was sentenced to 15 years behind bars for drug trafficking but absconded and has been wanted by Italian authorities ever since, PJ said. He has appeared before a Portuguese judge and will remain in jail until he is extradited.

## PUBLIC DANCING

Iran arrests 2  
women

AFP, Tehran

Two young women were arrested in Tehran after the publication of a video in which they danced to celebrate the coming of the Persian New Year, Iranian media said yesterday. The clip of the two women shaking hip near Tajrish square, a popular gathering spot for young people in the north of the Iranian capital, went viral on social media. "The Tehran prosecutor ordered the arrest of two women who broke social norms by dancing in Tajrish," the Tasnim news agency reported. The two women were dressed up as Hadji Farouz, a red-clad folklore character whose dancing and songs announce the coming of Nowruz, the Persian New Year that will begin on March 20. Islamic law as practised in Iran prohibits mixed dancing or women being alone in public.