

INTERNATIONAL

56 killed
as fighting
grips greater
Khartoum

AFP, Port Sudan

Artillery shelling and air strikes killed at least 56 people across greater Khartoum on Saturday, according to a medical source and Sudanese activists.

Sudan's regular army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been locked in a battle for power since April 2023 that has intensified this month as the army fights to take all of the capital Khartoum and its sister cities of Omdurman and Khartoum North.

RSF shelling killed 54 people at a busy market in Omdurman on Saturday, overwhelming the city's Al-Nao Hospital, a medical source told AFP.

"The shells hit in the middle of the vegetable market, that's why the victims and the wounded are so many," one survivor told AFP.

Across the Nile in Khartoum, two civilians were killed and dozens wounded in an air strike on an RSF-controlled area, the local Emergency Response Room (ERR) said.

Although the RSF has used drones in attacks including on Saturday, the fighter jets of the regular armed forces maintain a monopoly on air strikes.

The ERR is one of hundreds of volunteer committees across Sudan coordinating emergency care.

In addition to killing tens of thousands of people, the war has uprooted more than 12 million and forced most health facilities out of service.

A volunteer at Al-Nao Hospital told AFP it faced dire shortages of "shrouds, blood donors and stretchers to transport the wounded".

The hospital is one of the last medical facilities operating in Omdurman and has been repeatedly attacked.

After months of stalemate in greater Khartoum, the army retook several bases in Khartoum last month, including its pre-war headquarters, pushing the RSF increasingly into the city's outskirts.

Witnesses said Saturday's bombardment of Omdurman came from the city's western outskirts, where the RSF remains in control.

A resident of a southern neighbourhood reported rocket and artillery fire on the city's streets.



A former Palestinian prisoner released by Israel is hugged by members of his family as he disembarks a Red Cross bus after arriving in Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hamas-Israel complete 4th hostage-prisoner swap

Five Arab FMs reject forced displacement of Palestinians

AFP, Gaza City

Freed Palestinian inmates were greeted by a cheering crowd in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday, after Hamas released three Israeli hostages from the Gaza Strip in the fourth exchange under the group's ceasefire deal with Israel.

Three other buses carrying freed Palestinians also arrived in the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis, with the inmates in grey prison uniforms met by hundreds of well-wishers.

In Ramallah, the bus carrying the inmates struggled to make its way through the jubilant throng of supporters as it arrived from the Israeli-run Ofer Prison.

Several of the freed inmates were hoisted onto the crowd's shoulders, including an elderly man who raised his crutches over his head in a triumphant

pose.

Earlier in Gaza, hostages Ofer Kalderon and Yarden Bibas were paraded on stage by Hamas fighters before being handed over to the Red Cross in the southern city of Khan Yunis. American Israeli Keith Siegel was freed shortly thereafter in a similar ceremony on January 19 under the terms of the ceasefire deal with Israel.

Israeli campaign group the Hostages and Missing Families Forum hailed the release as "a ray of light in the darkness".

After holding the hostages for more than 15 months, Hamas began releasing them on January 19 under the terms of the ceasefire deal with Israel.

Groups in Gaza have so far handed over 18 hostages to the International Committee of the Red Cross in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, many of them women and minors.

The Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group had said Israel would free 183 prisoners yesterday.

Hamas sources said a fifth hostage-prisoner exchange would take place next Saturday.

After yesterday's hostage release, Gaza's key Rafah border crossing was reopened, with the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory saying 50 Palestinian patients had gone through the crossing to Egypt.

The fragile ceasefire's 42 day first phase hinges on the release of a total of 33 hostages in exchange for around 1,900 people, mostly Palestinians, held in Israeli jails.

Negotiations for a second phase of the deal are set to start on Monday, according to a timeline provided by an Israeli official.

The second phase is expected to cover the release of the remaining captives and to include discussions on a more permanent end to the war.

Indian troops kill 8 Maoists

AFP, Raipur

Indian commandos shot dead at least eight Maoist rebels in the dense jungles of central India yesterday, as security forces ramp up efforts to crush the long-running conflict.

More than 10,000 people have been killed in the decades-long insurgency waged by the rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of marginalised Indigenous people.

The gunfight broke out early on Saturday in the forested areas of Bijapur district in the state of Chhattisgarh, considered the heartland of the insurgency.

"After a fierce gun battle, bodies of eight Maoists were recovered today from the jungles of Bijapur district," top police officer Sundarraj P. told AFP.

Weapons recovered from the rebels included a grenade launcher and rifles, he said, adding that a search was still underway.

A crackdown by security forces has killed some 287 rebels in the past year, an overwhelming majority in Chhattisgarh, according to government data.

Amit Shah, India's home minister, said last year the government expected to crush the rebellion by 2026. The Maoists demand land, jobs and a share of the region's immense natural resources for local residents.

20 Bangladeshis

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according to the ministry message.

Meanwhile, Shariful Hasan, associate director (Migration and Youth Platform) of BRAC, in a social media post last night said most of the deceased were from Madaripur and Shariatpur, and some from Bhairab.

He said this based on information from the Bangladesh embassy in Libya and the victims' families.

"According to my information, at least three more bodies may have washed up. There were at least 25 people in the group. I think two are alive, but I don't know where they are. It is unclear how the accident happened," he wrote.

He said Bangladesh ranked first among countries whose nationals attempted to cross the Mediterranean in 2024. In the past year alone, 13,044 Bangladeshis were identified as taking this route.

The Bangladesh embassy has not been able to confirm the number of Bangladeshis killed in last week's boat capsizing.

"We have heard that several Bangladeshis may have died in the boat capsizing, but we have no confirmation yet," an official of the embassy told The Daily Star last night.

The official said once a clearance is obtained, a team from the embassy would travel to the area to gather information, identify the deceased, and facilitate repatriation of the bodies if those are of Bangladeshis.

On January 30, the Bangladesh embassy in Libya on its Facebook page said several bodies of migrants had been recovered over the past two days from the shores of Brega. It said the bodies washed ashore after a boat carrying migrants capsized in the Mediterranean.

The embassy urged anyone with information about Bangladeshis who may have died, been injured, or affected by the incident to come forward. Concerned individuals can contact the embassy via its Facebook page or official mobile numbers: +218916994202 and +218916994207.

Remnants of fascist regime still present

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protect ourselves, our families, the people of the country, and overall Bangladesh, we all must remain united at any cost.

"So, we take the first vow at this council that all BNP leaders and workers will remain united under any circumstances. Our second pledge is that, with the people, we'll build the country by maintaining unity," he said.

The BNP leader said there could be differences of opinion among democratic parties and organisations on various political issues, including the future function of parliament, its tenure, the tenure of governments --

both interim and elected -- and the limit for a person's tenure as prime minister.

"We can resolve these issues through discussions. But if we engage in excessive debates on these matters, we will fall behind in rebuilding the country," he said.

Tarique said the country and its people would suffer if the rebuilding activities of Bangladesh were hindered. "We'll sit together and engage in discussions. If we can't resolve it in one sitting, we'll continue to meet and find solutions through dialogue."

He said the people of Bangladesh have not had the right to vote in the last 15 years, as the Awami League

government took it away at gunpoint in the name of dummy, voter-less, and rigged elections.

The BNP leader also accused the Hasina regime of destroying all institutions and plundering significant amounts of money in the name of development, as it had no accountability to the people.

He said the government's accountability is ensured when the people can elect their representatives through their votes.

At another programme, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said that Hasina continued to conspire against the country from Delhi.

Justice for mass killing first

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party," he added.

Taking a dig at the ousted Awami League, he said those who threatened to banish them have now fled the country.

"They used to send us abroad without passports, visas, or tickets; but now they are fleeing without those," he said.

He also took a swipe at former Supreme Court judge Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, saying, "Have you seen a Supreme Court judge sleeping on a banana leaf? That was his fate due to his

misuse of power while in office."

On education, he pledged that if Jamaat comes to power, it will prioritise education and establish a modern, job-oriented system.

"Our brightest minds leave the country for higher education and never return, whereas, in the past, the Mughals, British, and Portuguese came here seeking fortune. Now, the situation has reversed," he said.

Highlighting the integrity of his party's activists, he said his party activists are not involved in any extortion or litigation trade.

"Critique us as much as possible. It will only make us work harder. If we fail to deliver, you have every right to abandon us," he said.

Shafiq said if Jamaat comes to power, Sunamganj will witness rapid development.

"If not, we will fight alongside the people for their rights and development," he said.

Sunamganj district Jamaat Ameer Maulana Tofayel Ahmed, Jamaat's Assistant Secretary General Advocate Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair were present at the meeting among others.

BNP drafts July uprising declaration

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For input from other anti-fascist political parties to refine the document and discuss its upcoming programmes, the BNP held meetings with the 12 party alliance, Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh, and Jatiyatobadi Samamona Jote in the last two days.

It plans further discussions with its partners and those who boycotted the last parliamentary election in January 2024.

The draft declaration traces its roots from the 1971 Liberation War to the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government following the July-August mass uprising led by students last year, according to party sources.

They say the declaration underscores a firm commitment to preventing the resurgence of fascism and ensuring justice for crimes against humanity, including enforced disappearances and killings during Hasina's rule.

It also stresses the urgency of holding free and fair polls and completing constitutional reforms through an elected parliament.

Leaders of the Students Against Discrimination, which spearheaded the uprising, and its citizen platform the Jatiya Nagorik Committee attempted to make a July uprising proclamation in late December last year. However, the government said it would make the proclamation itself after consensus among all the parties.

After the uprising leaders submitted their draft to political parties, an all-party meeting was convened on January 16. The BNP decided to support the students' initiative with necessary revisions.

According to party sources, the party has carefully chosen the term "declaration" rather than "proclamation"

for the document.

They said the BNP decided to draft the declaration after discussing the matter within its policymaking forum.

A standing committee member, who was involved in drafting the declaration, said that BNP adopted aspects of the students' proclamation that align with the party's ideology.

"We have modified and reformulated the unreasonable aspects of the students' manifesto," the leader added, speaking to this newspaper on condition of anonymity.

According to sources, the party believes the declaration remains relevant despite the time elapsed since the uprising and the formation of the interim government.

The core elements of the draft would remain intact, with possible minor adjustments based on the feedback from allies, according to the party sources.

Meanwhile, a comparison between the student-led draft and BNP's version reveals key differences.

The students refer to the 1971 war as a "People's War" while the BNP calls it the "Liberation War", explicitly mentioning the March 26, 1971, independence declaration, which is absent in the students' draft.

On constitutional reforms, the students criticise the 1972 constitution for failing to reflect the aspirations of Liberation War participants, advocating for its amendment or abolition.

The BNP, however, proposes systematic reforms through an elected parliament.

Its draft also highlights the formation of the interim government on August 8, 2024, led by Prof Muhammad Yunus, based on the Supreme Court's opinion under article 106 of the constitution.

In contrast, the students' draft

demands immediate structural reforms before the next election. It credits the Students Against Discrimination for leading the July uprising, while the BNP's version attributes the mass movement to people from all sectors of society.

The BNP's draft includes detailed casualty figures, citing over 2,000 deaths, including of women and children, and thousands left with life-altering injuries like the loss of a limb or eyesight. The details are absent in the students' draft.

While the students focus on the persecution of students and youths under Awami League rule, the BNP's draft broadens the scope to include opposition leaders, activists, and others.

Both drafts demand justice for crimes committed during the uprising, while the BNP also wants justice for the crimes during the 16 years of fascist rule, including enforced disappearances and human rights violations.

The students' draft calls for a "New Republic" to address systemic oppression and inequality, urging official recognition of their declaration effective from August 5, 2024. On the other hand, the BNP's draft focuses on constitutional reforms through an elected parliament, avoiding the term "New Republic".

The BNP focuses more on the political struggle against the Awami League, describing the uprising as a continuation of the struggle, and emphasising the role of political parties and other organisations in leading the movement.

The students' draft focuses on the broader societal impact of discrimination, corruption, and environmental degradation, emphasising the role of students and common people in the movement.

Language Movement

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In February of that year, Muslim League leaders and many other members of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly opposed a proposal to use Bangla in state affairs. Immediately afterwards, like their peers in Dhaka, the students of Faridpur also erupted in protests centring Rajendra College and the schools.

According to Ahmed Rafiq's book *Bhasha Andolan: Teknaf Theke Tetulia*, the protesters in Faridpur decided to successfully enforce a strike announced centrally from Dhaka for March 11, 1948 by the Rashtrabhasha Sangram Parishad. Rajendra College students, led by Syed Mahub Ali, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Abdul Matin and others, started campaigning for the strike in the last week of February through processions and street rallies.

A spontaneous strike was observed in Faridpur, Dr Abu Muhammad Delwar Hossain wrote in his book *Bhasha Andolaner Ancholik Itihas*. Police baton-charged the protesters, injuring Mahub Ali, Mohiuddin Ahmed and several others when the demonstrators brought out a procession from Rajendra College and started marching around the city. The police detained 11 student leaders, but released them later due to the sympathetic role of Faridpur district's administrator Abdul Halim Chowdhury.

After the government declared Urdu as the sole state language of Pakistan on January 27, 1952, a Rashtrabhasha Sangram Committee



Faridpur Central Shaheed Minar.

PHOTO: SUZIT DAS

was formed in Faridpur in early February, with Imamuddin Ahmed as the president and Monowar Hossain as the general secretary. With the support of leftist leaders and activists, the movement spread all over Greater Faridpur. A Flag Day was observed in Faridpur on February 4. And it was decided that a strike would be enforced on February 21.

According to the book *Bhasha Andolone Faridpur* by Rezaul Karim, the agitated students took to the streets when the news of killings of students in police firing in Dhaka on February 21 reached Faridpur that afternoon through telegram. Several student protesters in Faridpur were injured when the police clubbed them outside Kotwali Police Station.

A full-day strike was observed in Faridpur on February 22. On that day, the students marched from Rajendra College to Chawkbazar Mosque in violation of section 144 of the CrPC,

which restricts gatherings. The police attacked the procession and arrested several demonstrators. In protest, the students staged a sit-in outside Kotwali Police Station until the police released the arrested students at midnight.

From February 23, Faridpur practically became a city of processions. All administrative activities came to a standstill as the movement spread to the rural areas. In protest against the killings in Dhaka, school students also joined the processions in Faridpur.

The Daily Azad newspaper on February 27 reported that the students of Char Atra Azizia Junior High Madrasa in Faridpur enforced a full-scale general strike against the killings in Dhaka. They also flew the national flag at half mast, brought out a procession and held a rally.

[Translated and edited by Osham-ul-Sufian Talukder]