

INTERNATIONAL

25 held after attack on UN peacekeepers

Says Lebanon

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese authorities yesterday said that more than 25 people have been arrested following an attack on a United Nations convoy that wounded two peacekeepers, including the force's outgoing deputy commander.

UN and Lebanese officials have condemned Friday's attack, which came as Hezbollah supporters blocked the road to the country's only international airport for a second night over a decision to bar two Iranian flights from landing.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon has demanded a "full and immediate investigation" after one of its vehicles was set on fire in the attack, which wounded outgoing deputy force commander Chok Bahadur Dhakal, who was heading home to Nepal after completing his mission.

ROHINGYA 'GENOCIDE'
Argentine court issues warrants for Myanmar officials

AFP, Buenos Aires

An Argentine court has issued arrest warrants for the head of Myanmar's military junta and former officials including Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi over alleged "genocide and crimes against humanity" targeting the Rohingya minority group.

The court ruling, seen by AFP on Friday, was issued in response to a complaint filed in Argentina by a Rohingya advocacy group.

It was filed under the principle of "universal jurisdiction" by which countries can prosecute crimes regardless of where they occurred if, like genocide or war crimes, they are considered sufficiently serious.

Warrants were issued for military and civilian officials including current junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, ex-president Htin Kyaw, and former elected civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in her capacity as "state counsellor" from 2016 to 2021, when she was ousted in a coup.

In that time, she has been accused by detractors of doing little to stop the abuse of Rohingya.

Hlaing is also under investigation by the International Criminal Court, while the International Court of Justice -- the UN's highest tribunal -- is examining a complaint of "genocide" against Myanmar.

The Rohingyas, mainly Muslims, are originally from Buddhist majority Myanmar where, according to Amnesty International, they have been subjected to a regime akin to apartheid.

Beginning in 2017, many have been forced to flee persecution and violence to richer and predominantly Muslim Malaysia, or to refugee camps in Bangladesh, where about a million of them live.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 coup that sparked renewed clashes with ethnic rebels and saw the formation of dozens of "People's Defense Forces" now battling the junta.

In her ruling issued Thursday, Judge Maria Servini said the allegations listed in the complaint "constitute crimes that violate human rights recognized in various international criminal law instruments, subscribed to by most countries in the world."

They included "internationally known crimes such as genocide and crimes against humanity, committed by the political and military authorities in power in that country," she added.



Former Palestinian prisoners, released as part of the sixth hostage-prisoner exchange, are welcomed by friends and relatives upon arriving at the European Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Defying truce, Israel still destroying Gaza homes

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

Israel has destroyed dozens of homes in Rafah, southern Gaza, despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, satellite imagery analysis conducted by Al Jazeera's fact-checking agency, Sanad, has revealed.

The crossing between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah, which has served as a critical lifeline into the enclave for decades, was closed by Israel in May 2024.

Since seizing control of the border area, in breach of its 1979 peace agreement with Egypt, Israel has been digging in the Philadelphia Corridor, a 14-km (8.7-mile) strip of land along the boundary between Egypt and Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has emphasised the importance of remaining in the corridor, despite the illegality.

According to Sanad, the images, taken between January 19 and 21, show the Israeli army to have built sand fortifications across the Rafah crossing.

Additionally, the agency said, a new military outpost has been established just to the north of the crossing.

The army has also constructed a 1.7 km (1.1-mile) road surrounding the crossing, running parallel to the sand fortifications.

Israeli forces have also kept thousands of Rafah residents from their homes, Israeli vehicles shooting at dozens of people trying to go home, injuring and killing them.

Israel, in essence, is constructing a "buffer zone that allows you to push any kind of fighters or, in technical terms, any hostile within an otherwise friendly environment away from you", Palestinian defence analyst Hamze Attar said.

As part of the ceasefire, which began on January 19, Israel agreed to reduce its forces in the area before completely withdrawing its troops by the 50th day of the agreement.

However, analysis carried out

on satellite images taken between January 19 and February 1 shows the Israeli army has continued construction in the area, demolishing and bulldozing 64 buildings within the city of Rafah, specifically in the as-Salam, Idari, and Tel Zaarab neighbourhoods.

The demolitions occurred only 700 metres from the Egyptian border. At the same time, Sanad also

Meanwhile, Hamas expects



identified at least six homes razed in Tal as-Sultan, west of Rafah, a little more than 750 metres (820 yards) from the Egyptian border.

"This is a war crime because they are destroying residential houses," Attar said, referring to the fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the destruction of private property.

Meanwhile, Munir al-Bursh, director-general of the Ministry of Health in Gaza, said on Tuesday that Israeli attacks, unexploded ordnance, or fatal injuries sustained earlier have killed 118 people since the ceasefire agreement took effect.

In addition to military breaches of the ceasefire, Israel has not allowed in sufficient amounts of essential humanitarian aid, such as food, fuel, tents, and emergency shelters.

Rafah Mayor Ahmed al-Sufi said most of the city's residents remain displaced, with an estimated

200,000 people sheltering in the al-Mawasi Khan Younis area and other locations across Gaza, unable to come home.

According to him, initial estimates indicate that 90 percent of Rafah's homes have been damaged, with approximately 52,000 units suffering various degrees of destruction.

Meanwhile, Hamas expects

indirect negotiations with Israel for the second phase of an ongoing truce in Gaza to begin "early next week", an official of the Palestinian militant group said Friday.

"We expect the second phase of the ceasefire negotiations to begin early next week," Hamas official Taher al-Nunu said.

Another source familiar with the talks told AFP that "mediators informed Hamas that they hope to start the second phase of negotiations next week in Doha".

Under the terms of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States -- which came into effect on January 19 -- negotiations for the second phase were due to start on February 3.

The 42-day phase one revolves around the release of 33 Israeli hostages in exchange for around 1,900 prisoners, most of them Palestinian, being held in Israeli jails.

Falgun festivities obstructed

FROM PAGE 14

CRB ground, along with police went to the site to stop the programme, leaving attendees and participants frustrated.

Visiting the area around 3:30pm, our correspondent saw sound technicians loading their equipment back onto vehicles, while decorators were packing up chairs and tables.

Ariful Alam Khandaker, who had come to enjoy the festival, said, "I came here for the afternoon cultural programme. To my surprise, I found the event had been called off without any explanation."

Contacted, Sheikh Farid, an officer of the BR Kalyan Trust, said he was unaware of the situation. "We gave permission for the day-long programme. But we have no information on today's [yesterday's] incident. Perhaps GM sir [the general manager of BR's eastern zone] is handling the matter."

GM Md Sabutkhan could not be reached for comments despite several attempts.

Shakila Soltana, deputy commissioner (South) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that a police team accompanied the BR officials visiting the spot to observe the situation.

"Bangladesh Railway is the approval authority. They cancelled the approval. The police went there to prevent any untoward situation."

Meanwhile, another

Basanta Baron celebration, which included a kite-flying programme, in Tangail's Gopalpur upazila, was also cancelled after backlash from certain groups yesterday.

A collective of local platforms, including a Facebook group called "Amra Gopalpurbashi [We Are Residents of Gopalpur]", had been organising the event for the past few years.

Anju Anowara Moyna, one of the organisers and an admin of the Facebook group, told our correspondent they cancelled the event after leaflets were distributed from a local mosque claiming it was "unislamic and immoral."

On Friday, a crowd vandalised a gift shop and shut down a fast food joint on College Road in the district's Bhauapur upazila.

Alam, owner of the shop Mama Gift Corner, confirmed to our correspondent that his shop was attacked for selling flowers.

According to witnesses, protesters moved to the fast-food shop Niribili Food Corners and chanted through loudspeakers "Valentine's Day spreads promiscuity and immoral behaviour". Videos of the incident went viral on social media.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Bhauapur Police Station, told The Daily Star he heard about the incident but had not yet received any complaints.

Natya Utsab postponed amid 'security concerns'

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we met him at his office and briefed him in detail about the festival," he said. "They were cordial enough, and suggested a few changes to the lineup of the plays."

According to Thandu, following discussions at the police station, the authorities assured them of security, prompting the organisers to submit a formal request for police assistance.

"Upon hearing about this meeting, a group of 7-8 youths arrived at the police station and started causing a fuss," he said.

Later that night, an unidentified group vandalised the venue. "There is no way could we go ahead with the programme after that," Thandu added.

Connected, Ramna Police Station OC Golam Faruk said, "We received some phone calls complaining about this festival, but that's all we can say."

Deputy Commissioner (Media) of DMP Muhammad Talebir Rahman said he was not aware of any threats and added that enough security measures were in place for

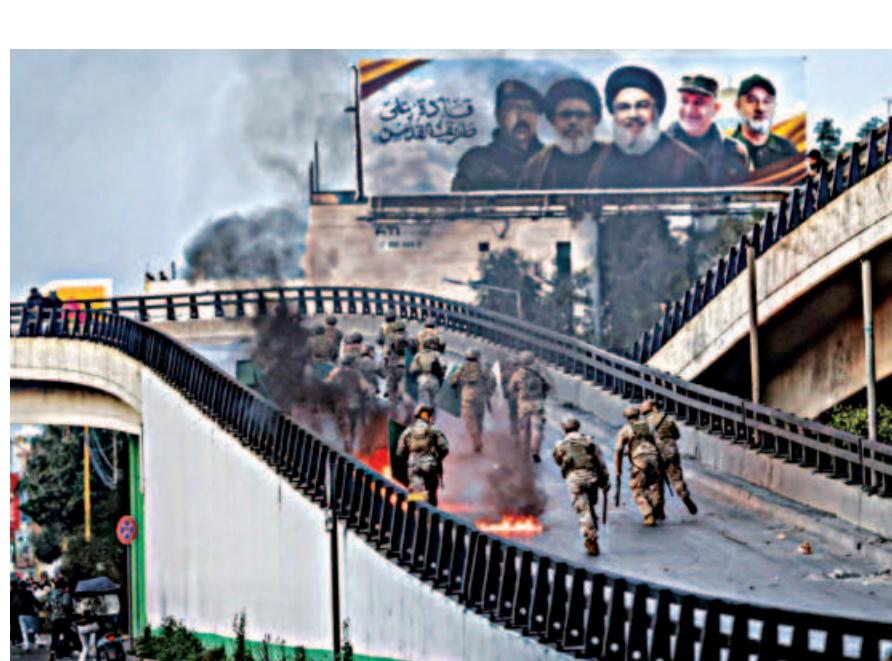
the event.

In a statement signed by Talebir, DMP said it had issued no directives to halt the cultural programme. "We always encourage creative and artistic endeavours. We do not understand why the festival was halted. DMP remains alert to make sure that no untoward incident takes place surrounding the festival," the statement added.

BNP's cultural wing Jasas, however, sent a statement claiming that "collaborators of fascists" were trying to regroup using the cultural programme.

"When the instigators of [the July] massacre tried to rehabilitate themselves on the stages of Dhaka under the banner of Natya Utsab, we informed the Mohila Samity that the people will not tolerate any attempts to accommodate the fascist's collaborators," said a statement signed by Md Mizanur Rahman, central committee member of the Jasas.

The Mohila Samity accepted Jasas's "just and fair" demand and cancelled the booking, the statement added.



Lebanese Army riot-control forces attempt to disperse protesters during a Hezbollah-organised rally to block the road to Beirut International Airport over a decision to bar two Iranian flights from landing there. The photo was taken in Beirut yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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