

## Israel carries out strike on Hamas in northern Gaza

Hamas pushes for phase two of Gaza truce, stresses urgent need for aid to re-enter enclave

AFP, Gaza City

Israel carried out an air strike on Hamas members in northern Gaza yesterday, rattling an already fragile ceasefire as it prepared for fresh talks in Doha on the future of its truce with Hamas.

Hamas called for an immediate start to negotiations on the ceasefire's second phase, which it hopes will lead to a permanent end to the war.

Representatives of the Palestinian group met with mediators in Cairo over the weekend, stressing the urgent need for humanitarian aid to re-enter the besieged territory "without restrictions or conditions", according to a Hamas statement.

- ➔ Hamas's key demands for 2nd phase include a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza
- ➔ Israel wants an extension of truce's first phase until mid-April

"Hamas stresses the urgency of forcing the occupation to immediately begin second-phase negotiations under the agreed parameters," senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Mardawi told AFP, adding that this would pave the way for a permanent end to the war.

Hamas's key demands for the second phase include a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, an end to the Israeli blockade, the reconstruction of the Palestinian territory and financial support, Mardawi said. Following talks with mediators, Hamas spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanoua said indicators were so far "positive".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said it would send delegates to Doha today, while the Israeli media reported that the government's security cabinet was due to discuss the matter later yesterday.

Israel says that it wants an extension of the truce's first phase until mid-April.

The initial period of truce ended on March 1 after six weeks of relative calm that included the exchange of 25 living hostages and eight bodies for the release of about 1,800 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel.

The truce largely halted more than 15 months of fighting in Gaza, where virtually the entire population was displaced by Israel's relentless military campaign.

It also enabled the flow of vital food and medical assistance into Gaza. After Israel cut off that flow again, UN rights experts accused the government of "weaponising starvation".



A truck and ambulances transport the coffins of Hezbollah fighters and civilians killed in the recent war with Israel, during their funeral procession, along a war-devastated road in the southern Lebanese border village of Kfar Kila yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

## Iran won't negotiate under US 'bullying'

Says Supreme Leader Khamenei

REUTERS, Dubai

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said later on Saturday that Iran will not be bullied into negotiations, a day after US President Donald Trump said he had sent a letter to the country's top authority urging Tehran to negotiate a nuclear deal.

In an interview with Fox Business, Trump said, "There are two ways Iran can be handled: militarily, or you make a deal" to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

At a meeting with senior Iranian officials, Khamenei said Washington's aim was to "impose their own expectations," Iranian state media reported.

"The insistence of some bullying governments on negotiations is not to resolve issues. ... Talks for them is

a pathway to have new demands, it is not only about Iran's nuclear issue. ... Iran will definitely not accept their expectations," Khamenei was quoted as saying, without directly mentioning Trump.

In response to Khamenei's comments, White House National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes reiterated almost word for word the choice of negotiations or military action that Trump said he had presented to Iran.

"We hope the Iran Regime puts its people and best interests ahead of terror," Hughes said in a statement.

While expressing openness to a deal with Tehran, Trump has reinstated a "maximum pressure" campaign that was applied during his first term as president to isolate Iran from the global economy and drive its oil exports to zero.

## Pak Taliban attack kills 4 paramilitary troops: police

AFP, Peshawar

At least four Pakistani paramilitary troops were killed when local Taliban fighters attacked a security checkpoint in a northwestern border region, a police official said yesterday.

The attack occurred in Kurram district, located on border with Afghanistan, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where there has been a rise in violence in recent years. "Heavily armed militants" launched the attack yesterday morning, the official said.

"At least four security personnel were martyred, and seven others were injured," he said.

## US Secret Service shoots armed man near White House

AFP, Washington

US Secret Service agents shot an armed man near the White House during the night, an agency spokesman said early yesterday, while President Donald Trump was spending the weekend at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida.

The man had been hospitalised and his condition was "unknown," the spokesman said in a statement that did not specify whether the White House or Trump may have been the intended target.

No injuries to Secret Service agents were reported, according to the statement posted by spokesman Anthony Guglielmi on social media platform X.

The agents had been warned by local police of a "suicidal" man travelling to Washington from Indiana and around midnight found his parked vehicle near 17th and F Streets, the statement said - very near the White House. They then spotted an individual nearby who matched the description they had been given, the statement said.

## COMMUNAL CLASHES Syria leader issues plea for national unity, peace

AFP, Damascus



Syrian leader Ahmed al-Sharaa yesterday called for peace and national unity after days of clashes between security forces and loyalists of the former government that have killed more than 1,000 people, most of them Alawite civilians.

"We must preserve national unity (and) civil peace as much as possible and, God willing, we will be able to live together in this country," Sharaa said in a speech delivered from a mosque in Damascus where he spent part of his childhood. He added that as long "the mosques have taught their children morality... and fairness and justice among the people, there is no fear for Syria, God willing".

## Four girls, two women raped

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South Keraniganj Police Station, said two young men promised her shelter and took her to an abandoned house in the Panchgaon Rishipara Nayabari area where their two other accomplices were already present.

Three of them raped her and as another one attempted to rape her, locals rescued her, hearing her screams, the OC said. They caught two of them and handed them over to the police while the two others managed to escape.

The other case against five people over the alleged rape of a seven-month pregnant woman was recorded at Madhabdi Police Station yesterday, according to the UNB.

The station's Officer-in-Charge Md Nazrul Islam said the 23-year-old victim's husband was in jail in a case, the UNB reported.

Citing the victim, Additional Superintendent of Police Md Anwar Hossain said the main suspect Iqbal

Hossain, 43, of Asmandirchar in Pachdona union, promised to help secure her husband's release by posing as a lawyer.

Later, four people allegedly drugged her, confined her to a building, and sexually assaulted her in turns from February 19 to 21, according to the police. The victim named another person, Pappu Mia, 29, as accused.

One of the accused was arrested and a drive was underway to arrest the other suspects, said OC Nazrul.

In Sherpur's Nokla upazila, police arrested a 60-year-old day labourer named Chand Mia alias Locha Mia for allegedly raping a five-year-old girl on Saturday by luring the child with a chocolate into a corn field.

The victim's father lodged a case with Nokla Police Station that evening, and the police arrested the suspect that night. The victim was sent to Sherpur General Hospital for medical tests.

The accused was produced before a court that sent him to jail yesterday, said Md Habibur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Nokla Police Station.

Another elderly man, Abad Ullah, 70, was arrested in Belghar Uttar Union of Cumilla's Lalmai upazila for allegedly raping a 7-year-old girl several times over a span of 10 days before her mother learnt about the incidents.

Villagers held an arbitration and fined the accused Tk 50,000, but a team of army and police raided the venue of the arbitration and arrested the accused.

Shah Alam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Lalmai Police Station, said the accused was sent to jail through the court yesterday after the victim's mother filed a rape case on Saturday.

At West Hajipara in Dhaka's Rampura, a 14-year-old girl was allegedly raped by her own father, a rickshawpuller. He was sent to jail yesterday, said Ataur Rahman,

officer-in-charge of Rampura Police Station.

Police filed a case on the victim's victim as her mother died last month. She was sent to DMCH's One-Stop-Crisis Centre for medical attention.

In Chattogram, police arrested a 52-year-old security guard was held on charges of raping his 10-year-old daughter after she called the law enforcers through the 999 helpline.

Abdul Karim, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said the culprit had previously raped the victim in the Baluar Dighirpar area. She recorded the incident with a mobile phone and called the police following the advice of her mother, a garment factory worker.

A case will be filed in this connection, the OC said, adding that the girl was sent to Chattogram Medical College Hospital's One Stop Crisis Centre.

In Narayanganj's Bandar upazila, police arrested the foster father

of a 14-year-old madrasa student for allegedly undressing her and recording her nude video on his mobile phone when she was asleep in the early hours of February 28. The same night, he also allegedly harassed her sexually.

The following day, the accused showed the girl the video and threatened her so that she would not reveal the matter to anyone. However, the girl told her foster mother everything upon her return from work on March 2, said Tariqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station.

The foster mother refrained from pursuing legal action at first, but enraged locals assaulted the accused, and handed him over to the police on Saturday night after the girl told a neighbour about the incident, OC Tariqul added.

The accused was sent to jail through the court yesterday after the foster mother filed a case under

the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act and the Pornography Control Act.

In Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, the teacher of a government primary school, arrested on charges of attempting to rape a 12-year-old fifth grader in the institution, was beaten by an angry crowd at the court premises yesterday.

Witnesses said that a group of enraged people attacked the teacher and punched him as soon as he was brought to the court compound.

Police then beefed up security in the area. Later, Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Md Shariful Islam ordered to send him to jail, said Court Police's Inspector Md Belal Hossain.

[Our correspondents in Sherpur, Narayanganj and Thakurgaon contributed to this report]

## DMP appoints 500 security guards

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investigate the complaint, and after a preliminary inquiry, lawful action will be taken based on the findings.

Asked about the selection process, Nazrul said the DMP has identified malls and markets that already have private security guards.

"We appointed the team leaders of these security guards as auxiliary force members," he said.

In residential areas, the DMP focused on localities and alleys where security guards lock the gates after a specific time. "We have chosen these guards as members of the auxiliary police force."

When asked whether the auxiliary officers would receive training, Nazrul said the initiative is temporary.

"We will not provide any training. They will only wear a band labelled 'Auxiliary Police Force' on their arms."

Addressing concerns of misuse of power, Nazrul assured that strict monitoring mechanisms are in place.

"Our patrol teams and local police stations will supervise the activities of auxiliary members round the clock. If any member is found abusing their authority, their appointment will be terminated immediately."

Nazrul said the move aims to bring a large number of security guards working in malls and residential areas under greater accountability.

"We want to boost their confidence as they act as associates of the police in ensuring security. Once their work receives legal protection, petty crimes in alleys and marketplaces are expected to decrease, enhancing overall security," he said.

Earlier on Saturday, DMP Commissioner SM Sazzat Ali said that the initiative was introduced to enhance security during Ramadan and Eid shopping, as many shopping centres will remain open late into the night.

Experts have welcomed the move but emphasised the importance of supervision, background verification, and training to ensure its effectiveness.

Many private security organisations employ retired armed forces personnel and former police officers, according to Nurul Huda, a former inspector general of police.

"A significant number of these individuals have experience in firearm handling and minor investigations. This makes them a ready force, whereas recruiting and training new personnel properly would take at least six to nine months."

Supervision is essential to ensure that those appointed are properly vetted, Huda said.

Verification must be done to confirm their background, and if there are any training gaps, they can be addressed in seven to ten days.

He acknowledged that there is added pressure due to Ramadan as security duties increase during this time.

"Shopping malls remain open late and ensuring security with standard eight-hour shifts requires three shifts per day to meet international standards."

Besides, many key police positions in the DMP are now occupied by newly appointed officers.

"Handling law enforcement in a metropolitan city like Dhaka requires extensive local knowledge and a well-

established information network, which some new officials may still be developing," he said.

He remains optimistic about this initiative.

"Rather than dismissing this as a failure, it should be seen as an experiment. If it proves effective, it could be a model for future security arrangements."

## China army vows to tighten its 'noose' around Taiwan

AFP, Beijing

China's military yesterday vowed to tighten its "noose" around Taiwan if separatism on the island escalated, warning independence proponents to step back from the "precipice".

Beijing considers the self-ruled island of Taiwan to be part of its territory and has not ruled out using military force to claim it.

China has increased pressure on Taiwan's authorities in recent years with military drills and frequent dispatches of fighter jets and naval vessels around the island.

"The more rampant 'Taiwan independence' separatists become, the tighter the noose around their necks and the sharper the sword hanging over their heads will be," army spokesman Wu Qian said in an interview published by state broadcaster CCTV.