

# Hundreds killed in Gaza

## Israel launches expanded offensive aimed at defeating Hamas; ceasefire talks resume

AGENCIES

Israel and Hamas yesterday resumed ceasefire talks in Qatar, both sides said, even as Israeli forces ramped up a bombing campaign that has killed hundreds of people over 72 hours, and mobilised for a massive new ground assault.

Palestinian health authorities said at least 146 people had been confirmed killed in the third day of Israel's latest bombing campaign, one of the deadliest waves of strikes since a ceasefire collapsed in March. Many hundreds more wounded were being treated in hospital, and countless others were still buried under rubble.

Israel says it is mobilising to seize more ground in Gaza in a new campaign dubbed "Operation Gideon's Chariots", which follows a visit this week to the Middle East by US President Donald Trump. It has halted all supplies entering Gaza since the start of March, leading to rising international concern over the plight of the enclave's 2.3 million residents.

Taher Al-Nono, the media advisor for the Hamas leadership, told Reuters a new round of indirect talks with the Israeli



**A Palestinian woman sits under the open sky in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. Displaced multiple times, she and her family found temporary shelter at a tent site in the area, which was targeted by an Israeli airstrike overnight, leaving her displaced again.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

that the talks had started without Israel first agreeing to a ceasefire or to lift its blockade.

Israel's military said it was conducting extensive strikes and mobilising troops with the aim of achieving "operational control" in parts of Gaza.

Gaza health authorities said most of those killed yesterday were in towns on the northern edge of the enclave, including Beit Lahiya and the Jabalia refugee camp, as well as in the southern city of Khan Younis. They said 459 people had been injured.

Israeli forces had told people to leave the northern areas on Friday.

"Northern Gaza is witnessing a systematic campaign of extermination," Hamas said in a statement, calling on Arab

leaders at a summit in Baghdad to take practical steps to stop the aggression and ensure the delivery of aid.

Talks since March have failed to restore a truce under which Hamas would release remaining hostages captured in the October, 2023 assault on Israel that precipitated the war. Hamas has long said it would not free them unless Israel ends its campaign; Israel says it will fight on until Hamas is dismantled.

At the Arab League summit, Egypt's President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, whose country mediates Gaza peace talks alongside Qatar, said Israel's actions aimed at "obliterating and annihilating" the Palestinians and "ending their existence in the Gaza Strip".

United Nations experts say famine now

looms in Gaza more than two months after Israel halted all deliveries of supplies. UN aid chief Tom Fletcher asked the Security Council this week if it would act to "prevent genocide".

On Friday, Trump acknowledged Gaza's growing hunger crisis and the need for aid deliveries.

A US-backed foundation aims to start distributing aid to Gazans by the end of May using private U.S. security and logistics firms. The U.N. has said it won't work with the group because it is not impartial, neutral or independent.

Gaza's health system is barely operational with hospitals hit repeatedly by the Israeli military during the 19-month war and medical supplies drying up.

The head of the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza, Marwan Al Sultan, said huge numbers of wounded victims of the latest bombing campaign were in critical condition.

"Since midnight, we have received 58 martyrs, while a large number of victims remain under the rubble. The situation inside the hospital is catastrophic," he said on X.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on May 5 that Israel was planning an expanded, intensive offensive against Hamas as his security cabinet approved plans that could involve seizing the entire Gaza Strip and controlling aid.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel's military campaign has devastated the tiny, crowded enclave, pushing nearly all inhabitants from their homes and killing more than 53,000 people, according to Gaza health authorities.

NBC News reported on Friday, citing five people with knowledge of the matter, that the Trump administration is working on a plan to permanently relocate as many as one million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to Libya. All major Palestinian political groups reject any such displacement.

## Photographer killed after being lured to fake event: Police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The men who killed a photographer on Friday night and snatched three expensive cameras posed as clients and took two photographers to Shankar, according to police.

The suspects then snatched three expensive cameras, stabbing Nur Islam Fakir, 26, to death, while Nur Alam Emon managed to run away, leaving his camera.

The attackers took away two of Nur's cameras worth around Tk 5 lakh and Emon's camera worth Tk 3 lakh, Emon told The Daily Star.

Emon said a man hired him and Nur to cover an event in Shankar for Tk 10,500.

"We went there on a battery-run rickshaw. The man who hired us was sitting in the front seat next to the driver. As soon as we reached the Durga Mandir Golf area around 8:00pm, 6-7 masked men armed with machetes stopped us.

"When they grabbed our camera bags and began to flee, Nur tried to stop them. Then they stabbed him."

Shahadat Hossain, inspector of Dhanmondi Police Station, said police watched CCTV footage and spoke to witnesses.

"We suspect it was a planned robbery that ended in the killing," he said.

The man who hired the photographers is currently on the run, he added.

## Rallies, procession prohibited in certain areas of capital from today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All forms of gatherings, rallies, processions, and demonstrations in several parts of Dhaka have been banned from today until further notice, said the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a statement.

The restrictions will be in effect in and around Kochukhet Road, from Bijoy Sarani to the Chief Adviser's Office area, near Birsreshtha Shaheed Jahangir Gate, from BAF Shaheen College to the Mahakhal Flyover, Sainik Club Mor, Bhashantek, Matikata, ECB Chattar, and surrounding areas.

Later, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) also issued a release prohibiting public gatherings in the same locations.

- ▶ The expanded Israeli offensive comes as famine looms in Gaza
- ▶ Hamas says talks started 'without any preconditions' in Doha
- ▶ UN chief calls for permanent and immediate Gaza ceasefire

delegation in Doha began on Saturday, discussing all issues "without preconditions".

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz also said in a statement that negotiations on a deal to release Israeli hostages held by Hamas had resumed in Doha. He noted

## Quick trial marks a watershed

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In Bangladesh, rape case trials can often take several years to conclude, even at lower courts. The trial was completed in 13 working days, which is groundbreaking in the country, lawyers on the court premises said.

Judge M Zahid Hasan of the district's Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal pronounced the verdict in front of the four accused in a packed courtroom at 9:30am, said Public Prosecutor Monirul Islam Mukul.

The tribunal also fined Hitu Tk 1 lakh.

Before the delivery of the verdict, Hitu, Jaheda and their two sons were brought to the courtroom amid tight security.

Hitu and his two sons were garbed in flak jackets and helmets with protective visors to save them from the ire of the masses, who have been demanding justice since the girl's rape and death that shocked the nation.

Soon after hearing her husband's death sentence, Jaheda broke down in tears inside the dock.

The victim's mother, grandmother and several relatives came to the court premises, but they could not enter the courtroom due to the crowd.

They all expressed dissatisfaction over the acquittal of the three accused after hearing the verdict from others outside the courtroom.

While the prosecutors were busy briefing the media, the aggrieved mother was seen quietly leaving the court premises.

"I am not happy. All three of them might do the same thing [to others] after being released - what will

happen then?" she said firmly while standing outside the court premises.

"I am not satisfied. The three deserved punishment, as they assisted in the murder and concealed information."

Hitu's mother, Rokeya Begum, however, maintained that her son is innocent.

"I have not got justice. They have bound my son and taken him to the gallows," she said, crying for her son on the court premises.

"I could not hire any good lawyer for the lack of money. No lawyer wanted to stand for us here. One lawyer from the state was appointed to defend my son, but he did not do his job properly. So my son was sentenced," she added, "I will challenge the verdict in the higher courts."

Given the gravity of the case, the home ministry appointed Ehsanul Haque Shomaji, a lawyer ranked as an attorney general, as a special prosecutor.

Shomaji told the journalists on the court premises yesterday, "We are satisfied that the main accused has been given the death penalty. However, we are not happy with the acquittal of the other three. We will try to understand why they were acquitted after receiving the full verdict. After reviewing it, we will discuss with the appropriate authorities and then decide our next steps."

Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer, said in reaction to the verdict, "There appears to be an effort to expedite the trials of cases that receive significant media attention. This is referred to as selective justice."

"In Bangladesh, there are already a

huge number of pending cases related to rape and murder in various courts. If those cases are not resolved at the same pace, it will create disparity, leading to judicial inequality.

"Equality in the application of the law is a fundamental aspect of article 27 of our constitution, which must be upheld. Therefore, all cases must be given equal priority when it comes to swift disposal," he added.

Hitu was charged with rape and murder, Sajib and Ratul were charged with criminal intimidation, and Jaheda was charged with tampering with evidence, according to the case dossier.

According to the case documents and the probe report, the child went to visit her elder sister's house on March 1.

On March 6 morning, the elder sister woke up to find the girl lying unconscious on the floor instead of beside her on the bed.

The child later complained of severe pain and burning in her genital area. The girl said her brother-in-law had unlocked the door, allowing his father to come, according to her sister.

The victim told her sister that she was forcibly taken to another room, gagged, and raped before being left unconscious on the floor of the room her sister was in.

The case statement said that when the elder sister tried to inform their mother over the phone, her husband snatched the phone and physically assaulted her. The two sisters were then locked in separate rooms, where the younger fell unconscious.

Sajib went to the room the child was kept in and poured water on her

so that she could regain her sense, said the case statement.

However, as her condition kept worsening, Jaheda, with the help of some neighbours, took her to a local hospital and left her there.

Afterwards, she was taken to a hospital in Faridpur, then to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and eventually Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka.

The victim's mother filed the case against Hitu, Jaheda, Sajib and Ratul with Magura Sadar Police Station on March 8.

The comatose victim battled for her life for about a week, suffering multiple cardiac arrests before succumbing to her injuries on March 13.

Hearing the news of her death, enraged locals set fire to Hitu's house.

Md Alauddin, inspector (investigation) of Magura Sadar Police Station, who investigated the case, submitted the charge sheet naming the four accused on April 13.

The death of the girl had sent shockwaves across the nation, with many demanding that the government expedite justice for rape victims and reform laws related to the safety of women and children.

The court took two days - May 12 and 13 - to hear the arguments from the prosecution and the defence before setting the verdict date. It also took eight days to record the testimonies of 29 out of 40 prosecution witnesses mentioned in the charge sheet. They included the victim's sister.

Journalists from Dhaka and the district were not allowed to enter the courtroom to hear the judgment.

## Yunus for a bank dedicated to microcredit

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Peace Prize in 2006 for their efforts to "create economic and social development from below". Grameen Bank's objective has been to provide small loans to the poor without requiring collateral - a system known as microcredit.

The chief adviser noted that microfinance organisations currently operate under an NGO-style framework. "If they want to transition out of the NGO-style stage, they must evolve into a full-fledged bank."

He added that a separate law should be enacted for the proposed microcredit bank. "This must be a new kind of bank. The Microcredit Regulatory Authority or any other organisation can serve as its regulatory body."

He said that when such a licence is granted, it must clearly state that it is not for conventional banking operations, adding that it will function as a social business entity to ensure that owners cannot extract profits.

Yunus said the proposed bank would also provide young people with loans in the form of venture capital, allowing them to invest in their businesses and become entrepreneurs. "If the young people get capital for their business from the bank, they will

never [have to] run around for a job."

Citing Grameen Bank as an example, he said that microcredit recipients would be the owners of the proposed bank.

Reflecting on Grameen Bank's evolution as a microcredit institution, he described the microcredit system as the "real banking system", contrasting it with conventional banks that disburse loans against guarantees. "Grameen Bank extends credit to the poor based on trust."

The remarks come at a time when, ironically, collateral-based banks - the so-called "real banks" - have vanished into thin air. "They are nowhere to be found, their funds have disappeared, and their institutions have collapsed," Yunus said.

"Meanwhile, the microcredit system remains strong. No one has embezzled money, no one has fled the country with funds."

The chief adviser also pointed out that the question of regulatory oversight is not unique to Bangladesh. "Every country that has implemented microcredit has faced challenges."

"I have repeatedly told them [other nations] they do not need to overthink the matter, as Bangladesh has already provided a solution. The Microcredit Regulatory Authority [MRA] has not

only served Bangladesh but has also been instrumental in assisting many countries."

The MRA was founded in 2006, with a vision to create a transparent and accountable microfinance sector to help alleviate poverty and ensure sustainable national development.

Yunus also recalled the period before the establishment of the MRA, when there was a push to bring non-government microfinance institutions (MFIs) under a regulatory framework.

As of this March, there are 4.29 crore microcredit beneficiaries from MFIs - 91 percent of whom are women.

**GOVT MULLS NEW LAW**  
Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur, who also chairs the MRA, said microcredit has made significant progress.

Currently, the microcredit sector holds assets equivalent to 10 percent of the banking industry. More importantly, where traditional banking has weaknesses, microcredit has established a strong foundation."

He noted that members' savings have exceeded Tk 68,000 crore, while the accumulated surplus has surpassed Tk 61,000 crore.

Mansur added that the microcredit system will face new challenges as the rural economy expands and agent

banking continues to grow. "Right now, microcredit institutions have around 26,000 branches, while agent banking branches have surpassed 20,000. This healthy competition is fostering formal financial integration into rural economies, and microfinance institutions must adapt to these challenges to remain relevant."

To improve the functionality of the microcredit sector, he said the regulatory authority and Bangladesh Bank will work together. "A draft law on microcredit regulation has already been prepared and will soon be presented to the government."

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed emphasised that the regulations must be user-friendly rather than overly restrictive, ensuring that nothing is imposed forcefully.

He also said the MRA should focus not only on regulation but also on promotion of the sector.

Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, special assistant to the chief adviser, Nazma Mobarek, secretary to the Financial Institutions Division, and Prof Mohammed Helal Uddin, executive vice chairman of the MRA, also spoke at the event.

## India curbs land port

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move through land ports, making the new restrictions especially disruptive. Bangladesh exported \$1.55 billion worth of goods to India in fiscal 2023-24, down 9 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

Anwar Ul Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said the restrictions will hurt Bangladesh's apparel exports.

"This is essentially a non-tariff barrier to our garment exports," he said. "Now that shipments must go through sea ports, lead times will increase significantly, which in turn will raise costs for Indian importers sourcing from Bangladesh."

RN Paul, managing director of RFL Group, expressed concern over the sudden restrictions on road-based land port exports.

"We were not informed in advance that several items would no longer be exportable via Indian land ports. The list reportedly includes plastic goods and plastic granules, which we export in significant volumes," he said.

"These restrictions will severely disrupt our trade. These exports form a vital part of our monthly revenue," Paul said.

"We may have to scale up our Agartala and West Bengal operations. We already have small supply chains there, but this situation may force us to expand quickly," he added.

Paul also said confectionery products, another major export, are included in the new restrictions. "This is not just an RFL issue. At least 20 Bangladeshi companies would be affected," he said.

"We must act now. Exporters need time to adjust. We should also begin identifying alternative export corridors," he added, pointing to an old transit route near Bishramganj, adjacent to Agartala, as a potential option.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the move will force exporters to rely solely on sea routes.

"This decision will ultimately hurt Indian importers more than anyone else," he said. "Sea shipment is time-consuming and lacks the flexibility of land port logistics. Indian buyers who depend on

just-in-time delivery will face serious disruptions."

Selim H Rahman, chairman of Hatil Furniture and the Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners Association, said the restriction could hamper bilateral trade.

"Policymakers in the Bangladeshi government must step in to address this issue," he said, adding that Hatil exports furniture worth \$1.5 million to \$2 million annually to India.

Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling, said such sudden and selective port restrictions can hinder the growth of bilateral and regional trade.

"While regulatory oversight is a sovereign right, such measures increase trade costs and create uncertainty, especially for small and medium-sized exporters," he said.

He said that the northeastern region of India is a natural market for Bangladeshi goods, and limiting access undermines supply chains built over the years.

"I hope that such NTBs can be reviewed in the spirit of bilateral and regional cooperation," Raihan said. Constructive dialogue and better coordination on trade facilitation would help support inclusive and sustainable economic growth for both countries, he added.

In a notice issued on April 13, Bangladesh's National Board of Revenue blocked yarn imports through the Benapole, Bhomra, Banglabandha, Burimari, and Sonamasjid land ports to protect the domestic textile and spinning industry from Indian raw material imports.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, economist and chairman of the Dhaka-based think tank Research and Policy Integration for Development, said it is unfortunate that the two neighbours are now restricting, rather than facilitating, trade.

"For neighbours, land ports can be a vital mechanism for boosting trade and welfare gains," he said. "Obstructing those routes stifles trade flows and raises exporters' costs."

Razzaque said that India is a critical market for both garment and non-garment Bangladeshi exports. "Trade restrictions and retaliatory measures make both countries worse off," he said.

## Opening aid corridors

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unnecessarily complicating the country's political situation. He underscored the need for establishing a government accountable to the people through their direct votes in a credible national election, reports UNB.

Otherwise, "it will not be easy to confront the fallen and runaway despotic Awami League," he said.

"We hope that the interim government will soon announce the date for the national election and fulfill its responsibility to establish the rights of the people of Bangladesh, rising above greed and temptation," the BNP leader said.

He said that political parties prepare themselves to serve the people through the practice of party politics, ideals, and political discourse, and to govern the country with the people's mandate.

"It is very important to strengthen democratic political parties, political norms, rules and systems, instead of depoliticisation," Tarique said.

He also stressed the urgent need to strengthen constitutional institutions, which can only be achieved through continuous democratic practice. He said it is the right time to implement the process of institutionalising democracy so that no future dictator or fascist can strip the people of their rights.

Tarique said BNP and other political parties have called for a clear roadmap of action from the government.

"But if we consider all the developments so far, we see that the government has not responded accordingly. Rather, it seems they have tactically entangled the announcement of a definite election date within an innovative condition of minor and major reforms."

The event was presided over by NDM Chairman Bobby Hajjaj. NDM leaders Mominul Amin and Parvez Khan, BNP leader Syed Moazzem Hossain, Chief Coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon Zonayed Saki also spoke.