

Lebanon says two dead in Israel strike

AFP, Beirut

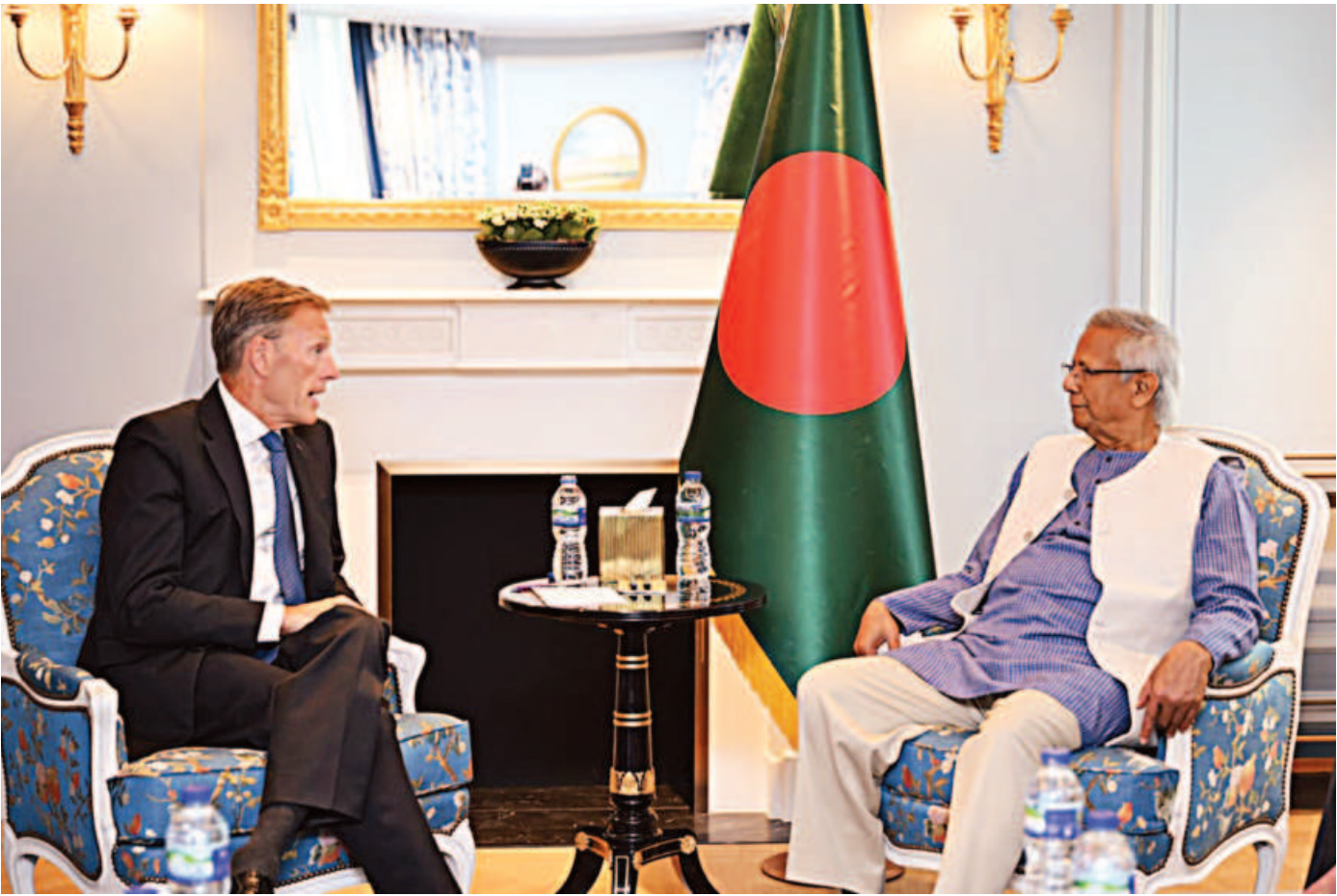
An Israeli strike killed a Lebanese father and son yesterday in a southern village, the Lebanese health ministry and state media said, the latest deaths despite a November ceasefire.

A second son was also wounded in the strike in Shebaa, the state-run National News Agency reported. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

“An Israeli enemy drone carried out a strike in the village of Shebaa, killing two people and wounding one,” a health ministry statement said.

Israel had warned on Friday that it would keep up its strikes on Hezbollah targets across Lebanon despite the condemnation expressed by the Lebanese government after a massive strike on south Beirut the previous night on the eve of the Eid al-Adha holiday.

Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah said the strikes levelled nine residential blocks. The Israeli military said they targeted underground drone factories.



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus talks to Wouter Van Wersch, executive vice-president of Airbus, who called on the CA at the Dorchester hotel in London yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Man’s hacked body recovered from Mirpur-11

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered the body of a man bearing multiple hack wounds from a roadside in the capital’s Mirpur-11 area.

The victim, Rakibul Hasan, also known as Paper Sunny, was found with his hands cuffed behind his back and legs tied with a scarf, said Sub-Inspector Humayun Ahmed of Pallabi Police Station.

Shafiul Alam, officer-in-charge of the station, said they suspect Rakibul was killed sometime between Monday night and early yesterday.

On information, police went to the spot around 8:00am and recovered the body from Block-B of Mirpur-11.

Rakibul’s mother Rozina Begum said he was brought up in the Murapara Bihari camp in Mirpur-12, but had been living in Savar with his wife, where he sold clothes on the roadside near the Savar Bus Stand.

“Rakibul came to Mirpur-12 and dropped his wife off at his father-in-law’s house in another Bihari camp around 8:00pm. He immediately left saying he would meet his friends and return at night.

“I called him around 11:00pm but no one picked up. Some people came to our house early in the morning [yesterday] and told me that my son was found lying in a pool of blood in Block-B.”

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‘A potential turning point’

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and holds great importance both nationally and internationally. Many issues could be resolved through this meeting, and new dimensions may emerge,” Fakhrul added.

Later yesterday, speaking to reporters in London, Chief Adviser’s Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam confirmed the meeting will be held on Friday morning.

Since Tarique Rahman is currently the leader of Bangladesh’s largest political party and Prof Yunus is the head of the interim government, they will meet for discussions.

Shafiqul said the format of the meeting was not fixed yet. Various aspects of Bangladesh’s current political situation, including the announced election timeline, the July Charter, reforms, and other relevant matters, may come up.

“The specific agenda will be decided by them [Yunus and Tarique],” Shafiqul added.

Speculations about a possible meeting between Yunus and Tarique gained momentum after the chief adviser’s UK visit was announced, although the meeting was not included in his official itinerary.

Party insiders said Tarique may urge Yunus to bring the election date forward, arguing that April is not suitable for electioneering since Ramadan will end in mid-March.

BNP standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said, “Political discussions will certainly take place, along with talks about the current situation in the country. We are hopeful that the chief adviser will reconsider his decision [regarding election date], and also discuss the overall situation of the country and the current political situation.”

“He [chief adviser] may consider factors like the weather, Ramadan, and public examinations while determining an appropriate time for the election. Additionally, the discussion will cover many other important issues related to national security, politics, and the broader national context,” he told this newspaper.

The BNP also has some observations and proposals to ensure the government’s neutrality, he added.

Another senior BNP leader, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, said,

“This is an opportunity to restore democracy, hold an acceptable and neutral election, and bring back a fair political environment.”

BNP standing committee members have welcomed the proposed meeting, granting Tarique full authority to negotiate on the party’s behalf.

During a meeting to exchange Eid greetings, they briefed Chairperson Khaleda Zia about the announcement of election timing.

According to sources, she told them, “An election is necessary, not a debate. It is better to avoid confrontation.”

A standing committee member, who requested anonymity, interpreted this as a signal that the party should avoid escalating tensions and instead leave the door open for negotiations.

At a subsequent meeting on Sunday night, BNP’s senior leadership briefed Tarique on recent political developments, including reform proposals, the roles of government advisers, and updates on local government elections.

The Standing Committee reiterated its position that the national election must be held under the interim government, but preferably before Ramadan.

Political analysts have also welcomed the development, seeing it as a possible breakthrough in Bangladesh’s tense political impasse centring the polls.

They believe direct interaction may reduce a lack of trust between the BNP and the interim government and help soften the party’s firm demand for polls by December.

Prof Dilara Chowdhury, a former teacher of Jahangirnagar University’s government and politics department, described the planned meeting between Tarique and Yunus as a “very positive step.”

“This meeting could play a crucial role in resolving misunderstandings, fostering political consensus, and easing tensions,” she said, adding, “It opens a channel for negotiation and could reshape the political landscape.”

Prof Dilara believes the meeting will dispel suspicions that Yunus may aim to stay in power beyond the interim period.

“The perception that the chief

adviser wants to prolong his stay will be addressed. This is a moment of political maturity,” she said.

She also said that the BNP might soften its position that the election must be held by December.

“Yunus is engaging directly with the [BNP]. That itself is a good political culture,” she said.

Political analyst Al Masud Hasanuzzaman said that most of the previous interactions between the BNP and the government occurred without direct input from the party’s top leadership.

“This meeting marks the first direct contact between BNP’s top leader and the head of the government since the political upheaval. If any agreement emerges from it, the impact will be significant,” he said.

Tarique, the eldest son of Khaleda, has been living in London since his release from prison during the state of emergency in 2008.

Under the Awami League regime, he was sentenced in five cases in absentia, while over a hundred cases were filed against him.

However, following the fall of the Awami League government in the July 2024 uprising, Tarique has been acquitted in all the cases in which he had been sentenced.

MEETING DECISION

Tarique joined the BNP’s Standing Committee meeting virtually on Monday night, where the decision to meet Yunus was finalised.

Party sources said the BNP initially was not interested in such a meeting. Unease among senior leaders persisted over the government’s lack of seriousness about their demand for polls in December despite informal communication from the chief adviser’s office.

The party later agreed to the meeting, as the election schedule was expected to come up in the discussion between Tarique and Yunus.

Salahuddin said the situation became such that the meeting seemed “somewhat uncertain” since the chief adviser set an April timeline for the election.

“But even after a meeting at the chief adviser’s office, communication was maintained. Given this context, we decided that political decorum necessitates a courtesy meeting,” he said.

Bangladesh go down fighting

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green, buoyed by the inclusion of the likes of Hamza Choudhury and Shamit Shome, but the performance on the pitch in front of an expectant capacity crowd at the renovated National Stadium fell short of the hype.

Although Rakib Hossain’s 67th-minute strike had given the hosts a chance of a comeback after going down 2-0, and the confidence of applying heavy pressure on the visitors in the last 20 minutes, the equalising goal never came.

Defender Tariq Kazi’s last-minute header was tipped onto the bar by Singapore goalkeeper, something that denied Bangladesh the one crucial point that would have kept them firmly in the race for the Asian Cup, with India losing 1-0 to Hong Kong earlier in the day. The frustration from the fans was evident, with objects thrown onto the ground towards the end of the game.

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera had handed a maiden cap to Canada-based Shamit in the starting XI, one of three changes from the side that won a recent friendly against Bhutan 2-0.

There were two changes in the midfield, with captain Jamal Bhuyan and veteran Sohel Rana making way for Shamit and Mohammad Ridoy.

Shakil Ahad Topu replaced Taj Uddin at right-back, while Rakib played as a No. 9 with Quazem Shah operating on the right -- the same modus operandi that the Spanish coach had opted for against Bhutan in the first half.

The move didn’t work as neither Quazem nor Rakib looked comfortable in their adopted positions. But it was the overall lethargy and lack of cohesion among the midfield and the defence that hit the hosts hard.

Needless to say that Singapore’s simple game plan of quick attacks and punishing the opposition aerially worked wonderfully well for them, as they now lead Group C with four points, level with Hong Kong.

Even though Bangladesh enjoyed better possession throughout the match, it was Singapore and their quick feet and tall forwards who looked threatening whenever they had the ball.

Iskhan Fandi, Singapore’s prolific

striker, saw his header miss the target by a whisker in the 16th minute before forcing Bangladesh goalkeeper Mitul Marma to a fingertip save on the half-hour mark.

Singapore’s tactical play paid off in the 44th minute when Song Uiyoung volleyed home from in front of goal after Hariss Harun delivered a cross across the goal following a throw-in, which Mitul could only half-clear.

The National Stadium was stunned into complete silence 12 minutes after restart when Fandi drilled home a powerful diagonal shot after Mitul’s parry on a powerful shot from Hami Syahin came right into the foot of the towering Singapore striker.

Cabrera, under pressure, made a handful of changes and injected some speed into the attacks with fresh legs of Faysal Ahmed Fahim and Shahrir Emon, but it was Rakib’s shot on a through ball from Hamza in the 67th minute that gave Bangladesh a fighting chance.

The coach threw all his cards in desperation, and hope grew among the team and the fans, with the team launching numerous attacks, only to see those yield no result.

At least 10 minors were forcibly disappeared

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accounted for the largest group -- around 37 percent. Another 31 percent were from Islami Chhatra Shibir, and 25 percent were members of Jamaat-e-Islami.

“The vast majority identified with what were, at the time, political oppositions,” stated the commission’s report, which was submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on June 6.

The report was released in parts throughout the Eid-ul-Azha holidays.

Only two individuals from the subset of 101 were associated with the then ruling Awami League.

“In the rare cases involving supporters or activists of the ruling party, we usually find the enforced disappearances to be the result of intra-party factional disputes, personal property conflicts, or other criminal dynamics unrelated to political dissent,” the report noted.

These two Awami League-linked victims were forcibly disappeared over an intra-party feud centring a upazila parishad election.

The average length of disappearance was 47 days.

“The absence of clear justification for why one person is held longer than another reinforces the extrajudicial and punitive character of the system.

“If the variation in how long victims were disappeared had followed some legal or operational logic, we could have expected consistent categories -- shorter durations for less severe cases, longer for those considered greater threats. Instead, the data shows arbitrary and extreme inconsistencies,” the report said, adding, “The uncertainty of how long one might be disappeared becomes, in itself, a tool of repression.”

The commission found that the majority of victims were aged between 19 and 35, with the highest concentration between 25 and 28.

“The peak does not occur in the teenage or early 20s range, where radicalisation is said to most commonly begin. Instead, the largest group falls in the late 20s -- an age bracket more closely associated with political maturity and organising capacity. This suggests that the system of enforced disappearance may have been driven less by counterterrorism objectives than by an intent to neutralise perceived political threats.”

While a significant number of victims were students, most were at a post-graduate level and politically active.

Interrogations were always politically motivated across all agencies, the commission found. Details of the circumstances of abduction were collected from 233 individuals -- 221 of whom said they were picked up by men in plain clothes.

The commission called this a standardised method of operation. “The use of civil clothes was a calculated tactic to avoid institutional accountability.”

Additionally, 55 percent of the cases involved multiple agencies.

“In these cases, one agency carries out the initial abduction and subsequently transfers the victim to another -- often involving a third or even fourth agency -- before the person is ultimately produced before a court,” the report said.

Agencies were identified in at least 138 cases, while Rab’s intelligence wing and the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) were found to be frequently operating in tandem.

“This reveals a high level of inter-agency cooperation, pointing to a deliberate and systematic repression apparatus operated at the state level.”

Victims also reported being blindfolded and transported in vehicles, only to be stopped and handed over to a different team midway. “In many such cases, the blindfolds and handcuffs are physically replaced during the transfer. We infer that each agency uses its own equipment, suggesting a meticulous administrative process during these handovers.”

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, however, typically operated alone.

“One CTTC team is responsible for the abduction, another for producing the individual before a court or filing charges, and a third for presenting witnesses to substantiate the case. Unlike other agencies, CTTC and DB [Detective Branch] appear to have more in-house mechanisms for handling the entire cycle from disappearance to legal proceedings.”

Rab, meanwhile, maintained a clear and centralised command structure.

“We have received testimony indicating that even minor decisions required clearance from senior command. For example, when

captives fell ill at the Taskforce Interrogation Cell, guards had to seek approval from their superiors before even administering basic medication, such as paracetamol. Such information further demonstrates the extent of control and oversight exercised by senior leadership. It reinforces the view that superior command and responsibility, both operational and moral, can be clearly attributed to specific actors within the institution,” the report stated.

‘HOLD AGENCIES ACCOUNTABLE’ The commission said in its report that meaningful change will require the dismantling of Rab as a force.

“Its [Rab’s] dissolution is essential to break the cycle of impunity, restore public confidence, and enable the creation of a rights-respecting security framework.”

On the CTTC, the commission warned, “If the trajectory of Rab serves as a warning, then the CTTC now stands at a similar crossroads -- where unchecked power, foreign backing, and political misuse have led to systematic violations and a widespread loss of public trust.”

It noted that CTTC, like Rab, continues to operate under a veil of opacity and has cultivated an internal culture of impunity.

The Detective Branch, the commission added, also requires urgent institutional reform, independent oversight, and judicial accountability.

Criticising the DGFI, the commission said, “The lack of parliamentary oversight -- being answerable only to the defence minister -- has contributed to accusations of unchecked authority and institutional opacity.

“Its future legitimacy as an intelligence agency depends on urgent reforms aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability, and compliance with human rights standards. Only then can it function as a professional and apolitical institution within a democratic framework.”

The commission also recommended institutional overhauls of National Security Intelligence (NSI), stating that it faces critical challenges, including politicisation, lack of transparency, and inadequate oversight.

Substantial legal and institutional reform of the NSI is also necessary to ensure accountability, it concluded.

Govt to expand Covid testing facilities

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of maintaining standard Covid-19 precautions.

Two new SARS-CoV-2 Omicron subvariants, XFG and XFC, have been detected for the first time at Chattogram Medical College Hospital in April, according to a hospital-based influenza surveillance study jointly conducted by icddr,b and IEDCR.

The new variants accounted for approximately 7 percent of the patients attending study hospitals, marking a significant increase from earlier in the year when the positivity rate remained near zero, according to an icddr,b report on Monday.

Subsequently, the DGHS has already instructed medical facilities with RT-PCR lab facilities to take preparation for resuming Covid tests, said Prof Halimur Rashid, DGHS’s line director of communicable disease control.

Test kits available at local companies are also being procured, he said, adding that the Central Medical Stores Depot has been directed to start the process of procuring test kits from abroad.

“We hope that testing facilities will

be restarted within 10 days -- but it would be at a limited scale.”

Only medical colleges and district hospitals having RT-PCR facilities will start testing at the initial stage. Patients with Covid-19 symptoms or those referred by the doctors will be allowed to test.

However, the scope will be expanded if the infection rate increases, he added.

Meanwhile, the DGHS on June 4 directed relevant authorities to strengthen health screening and surveillance measures at all land, river and air entry points to prevent the transmission of new sub-variants of the coronavirus -- particularly Omicron I.F.7, XFG, JN.1, and NB.1.8.1 -- detected in several neighbouring countries including India.

The DGHS asked the relevant authorities to use thermal scanners or digital handheld thermometers with non-contact techniques to measure body temperature at all entry points; ensure an adequate stock of masks, gloves and personal protective equipment for healthcare workers; and disseminate infection prevention guidelines to raise public awareness

and prevent virus transmission.

It advised the public to avoid travelling to India and other affected countries unless absolutely necessary.

On June 6, the health ministry issued the use-mask directive. The Bangladesh Railway and metro rail authorities have urged passengers to wear masks too.

The DGHS advised people to wash hands with soap as needed at least for 23 seconds and seven times a day; use masks to cover the nose and mouth; maintain a minimum distance of three feet from infected individuals; avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands; and cover the nose and mouth with an elbow, tissue or cloth when sneezing or coughing.

It asked people to stay at home if they were ill, seek medical attention at the nearest hospital in case of severe illness, and, if needed, contact the IEDCR hotline at 01401-196293.

Covid-19 first hit Bangladesh on March 8, 2020, with the first death reported ten days later. Since then, the country has recorded 20.51 lakh cases and 29,499 deaths, with 2021 being the deadliest year.