

SOUTH LEBANON Israel strikes Hezbollah sites

AGENCIES

Israel launched a series of strikes on southern Lebanon yesterday, Lebanese state media reported, with the Israeli army saying it hit a Hezbollah training centre and other targets.

Despite a November 2024 ceasefire that was supposed to end more than a year of hostilities between Israel and the Iran-backed group, Israel has kept up strikes on Lebanon and maintains troops in five areas of the country's south.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported "a series of (Israeli) raids targeting the Iqlim al-Tuffah region" near the towns of Azza, Rumin and Jbaa, about 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of the border with Israel. "A number of houses were damaged" in JBaa, the NNA added.

The Israeli military said it had struck "infrastructure belonging to the Hezbollah terrorist organization in several areas in southern Lebanon".

According to the military "a training and qualification compound used by Hezbollah's Radwan Force" was hit, as were "military structures and a launch site belonging to Hezbollah".



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Textbooks are sorted fresh off the press in Latifpur near Chattogram's City Gate, as workers labour through the rush to ensure primary and secondary students receive their books on the first day of the new year. The photo was taken yesterday.

Medical board finds no fresh deterioration

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Tarique Rahman and Khaleda's daughter-in-law, spoke to doctors at Evercare and met her yesterday. Zubaida, who is also a medical board member, attends its meetings.

Health Adviser Noorjahan Begum visited the hospital last night to enquire about the BNP chief's condition.

On the advice of doctors, Khaleda was admitted to the hospital on November 23 after being diagnosed with infections affecting her heart and lungs. She is also suffering from pneumonia and is currently receiving treatment in the hospital's Coronary Care Unit.

Khaleda, 80, has long been battling multiple liver complications, including liver cirrhosis.

Meanwhile, events praying for her speedy recovery were held in different parts of the country, including Dhaka, Tangail, Rajshahi, Brahmanbaria, Rangpur, Chattogram, and Naogaon.

Party leaders and activists continued to gather outside the hospital yesterday, despite repeated instructions from the party not to crowd the premises.

No illegal gatherings after polls schedule

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gathering or movement that causes public suffering will be strictly controlled. Those who participate in illegal rallies will be brought under the law," the statement said.

Currently, the main objective of the interim government is to ensure that the 13th national election, to be held in the first half of February, is free, fair, neutral, acceptable, and festive, it said.

To this end, the government is focusing on all necessary preparations.

After the announcement of the schedule, all forces engaged in maintaining law and order in the country, including the armed forces, will work to ensure an election-friendly environment.

Around nine lakh members of the armed forces and other law enforcement agencies will be deployed to maintain law and order, which will be the highest to date.

A record one and a half lakh police personnel have already been given election training to conduct a proper election.

Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said, "We know that many have legitimate demands. Over the past one and a half years, protesters have presented their demands to the interim government by organising more than 2,000 movements and demonstrations."

The government has always responded to legitimate demands and has tried to reach solutions through discussions with the protesters, he said.

"But we are now in an election-oriented period. Therefore, on behalf of the government, everyone is being urged to present whatever demands they have to the post-election government. We hope that during this period, no one will create tension or disrupt the normal environment over their demands," the statement said.

Seat-sharing talks change gear

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Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin's address to the nation. EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said the broadcast may air either today or tomorrow.

After meeting the chief justice, the CEC told reporters, "The polls schedule will be announced this week." He added that he had requested the chief justice to expedite deployment of the Electoral Inquiry Committee once the schedule is declared.

"We have completed all preparations to hold the polls," Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmanel Masud told The Daily Star yesterday. He noted that ensuring a level playing field will formally fall under the EC's jurisdiction only after the schedule is announced.

Unlike in previous elections, parties have finalised contenders ahead of the schedule. The BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami have already named potential candidates, many of whom have begun reaching out to voters, though formal campaigning will begin only after returning officers allocate symbols.

BNP IN SEAT-SHARING TALKS
The BNP has named potential aspirants in 272 constituencies, angering alliance partners who say they were kept uninformed. To address tensions, the BNP will begin seat-sharing discussions today. A committee led by Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir will meet partners -- the 12-party alliance today and tomorrow, followed by the Gonotontro Moncho and Jatiyatabadi Somomona Jote in phases.

Allies and like-minded groups that had staged anti-government protests simultaneously with the BNP are collectively demanding that the BNP sets aside at least 22 seats for them. BNP insiders, however, say the party may keep around 15 of the 28 remaining vacant seats for partners, far fewer than hoped.

BNP leaders argue that ceding too many seats risks defeat, as allies will contest under their own symbols, potentially aiding Jamaat or rebel candidates. To reduce risks, the BNP has proposed forming a new platform under which partners would run election activities.

"The platform could be named the Democratic Reform Alliance, and

its partners may be given facilities, including positions in the upper house if it is formed in line with the party's proposal, according to their qualifications," said a Standing Committee member. The idea was discussed on Monday night at the chairperson's Gulshan office, with acting chairman Tarique Rahman presiding virtually.

JAMAAT FOR ONE SEAT-ONE-CANDIDATE

The Jamaat was the first to unofficially announce aspirants for all 300 seats, later revising several names. Since September 18, Jamaat and the alliance of eight parties staged protests to press for a proportional representation system and other demands.

The parties in the alliance include Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Nezam-e-Islami Party, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, Bangladesh Development Party, and JAGPA.

Seat-sharing talks among the eight parties began yesterday, and top leaders will meet next week. Leaders said the guiding principle of the talks will be "one candidate for one seat," and each party is conducting surveys to determine the strongest contender.

"With all these changes based on the survey, the eight-party alliance will reveal the final list of nominations after the election schedule is announced," Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair told The Daily Star.

Tensions, however, persist. The seven other parties have already submitted lists. IAB submitted over 100 names; Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis (Mamunul Haque) around 45; and others 10-20 each.

Jamaat sources said they are unwilling to surrender more than 60-70 seats.

IAB Secretary General Maulana Yunus Ahmed said candidates will be chosen based on popularity, qualifications, and social influence. "We will evaluate the candidates of other parties, and they will do the same with ours," he said.

JAGPA's Rashed Prodhan added, "Whatever decision is made collectively in the interest of the coalition, we will accept it."

Meanwhile, Khelafat Majlish

(Mamunul Haque) has announced aspirants in 268 constituencies, while a faction led by Maulana Abdul Basit Azad has named 256. IAB has prepared primary nominations in all 300 seats.

NCP IN NEW ALLIANCE

The National Citizen Party said 1,484 aspirants collected nomination forms. "We will finalise the candidates soon," NCP Senior Joint Member Secretary Tasnim Jara said.

After months of talks, NCP, Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party), and Bangladesh Rastro Songskar Andolan formed a new alliance -- Gonotatrik Songskar Jote -- on Sunday.

Alliance leader and NCP Convener Nahid Islam said any party aligned with the July uprising's spirit or interested in state reform may join. The alliance will contest under one symbol.

OTHER BLOCS EMERGE

On Monday, Jatiya Party factions led by Anisul Islam Mahmud and Anwar Hossain Manju, along with 16 other parties, announced the National Democratic Front.

Registered parties in the bloc include the Manju-led JP faction, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, Bangladesh Sanskritik Mukti Jot, Bangladesh Nationalist Movement, and Bangladesh Muslim League.

Anisul Islam Mahmud said they will participate if the law-and-order situation allows a free and fair election.

Separately, on November 30, nine leftist parties -- including the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, Gonotatrik Biplobi Party, Biplobi Communist League, Somajtantrik Andolon, Bangladesh Jasod, Oikya-NAP, Basod (Mahbub) and Basod (Marxist) -- formed the Ganatantrik Jukta Front. Basod General Secretary Bazlur Rashid Firoz said the alliance will contest for all 300 seats.

The Election Commission has already published the final voter list, completed delimitation of all 300 constituencies, approved registration of two new parties, with two more pending, updated the electoral code of conduct, and launched a mobile app for expatriate voter registration.

Meanwhile, the government has amended the Representation of the People Order and carried out major reshuffles in field administration and the police.

CPJ urges Yunus to free journos in jail

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CPJ mentioned that in a November 2024 interview with The Daily Star, Prof Yunus had acknowledged that murder cases were "hastily filed" against journalists and said the government had moved to stop such actions.

The group wrote that since Yunus took office on August 8 last year, fresh murder charges have been brought against all four journalists while they have been repeatedly denied bail.

The letter also raised concern that their lawyer, Zi Khan Panna, was recently targeted with a murder allegation.

Highlighting Bangladesh's obligations under its constitution and international law, CPJ wrote, "Freedom of speech and expression are protected under Article

39 of Bangladesh's constitution and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights... Bangladesh authorities must uphold domestic and international human rights obligations."

The group urged the chief adviser to mark International Human Rights Day on December 10 by taking steps "that would allow all journalists imprisoned in Bangladesh to return to their families and resume work."

CPJ said more than 1,500 journalists from over 100 countries had backed its call during a solidarity action at the Global Investigative Journalism Conference in Malaysia this year.

The letter concluded, "Your personal attention to this matter would underscore Bangladesh's commitment

Rights to conduct an independent fact-finding mission into violations committed during the former government's crackdown on the 2024 protests. The mission's report was released in February 2025.

"The government also established six reform commissions, including a Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances. The government has approved an ordinance to address disappearances. Courts have begun dropping cases against human rights defenders, marking early signs of

progress despite ongoing tensions and reports of violence," the report stated.

The CIVICUS Monitor evaluates conditions in each country using data from national civil society activists, regional research partners, international human rights indices, and its own in-house analysts. These findings are then synthesised to assign ratings ranging from "open", "narrowed", "obstructed", "repressed", to "closed".

We were picked up, detained, and tortured Hasnat testifies before ICT-2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hasnat Abdullah, a key coordinator of the July uprising, yesterday told the International Crimes Tribunal-2 that several then officials of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence had picked up three coordinators, including himself.

He said they were held in a secret detention centre and subjected to intimidation and torture after they refused to withdraw the movement last year.

Testifying as the 22nd prosecution witness in the killing of Begum Rokeya University student Abu Sayed in Rangpur, Hasnat said he and fellow coordinator Sarjis Alam were picked up from a relative's house in Dhaka's Science Lab area on July 17.

"We were taken to the State Guest House Padma where three then ministers -- Anisul Huq, Mohammad A Rafat and Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel -- arrived within 30 minutes," said Hasnat, chief organiser of National Citizen Party (South).

The then DGF members pressured them to sit with the ministers, but when they refused, the ministers left. "For over an hour, the DGF personnel tried to convince us with temptations, threats and pressure. They repeatedly asked us to just sit for the meeting, but we refused, saying we could not do so without consulting other coordinators -- Nahid and Asif."

Enraged, the DGF personnel did not take them home, he said, but instead took them to a secret "safe house".

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Human rights report

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and its allied organisations, leaving at least 4,577 injured and 80 dead.

In 141 clashes between the BNP and Awami League, 19 were killed and 736 injured. In 55 clashes between the BNP and Jamaat, two were killed and 503 injured. The remaining casualties occurred in conflicts among other political parties.

Of those killed, 91 were BNP members, 23 from the Awami League, three from Jamaat, one from the Students Against Discrimination, six UPDF members, one from an "extremist" group, and three victims remained unidentified.

At least 293 attacks targeted journalists, leaving two dead, at least 256 injured, 47 harassed, 74 threatened, and 14 arrested.

In March, a female journalist was gang-raped in the capital while gathering news.

In addition, 105 journalists were implicated in 31 cases. Five cases were filed against journalists under the Cyber Security Act 2023, and one journalist was arrested.

Besides, at least 27 cases were filed under the Cyber Security Act 2023 and

the Cyber Protection Ordinance 2025, leading to the arrest of 24 individuals and charges against 54 others.

Attacks on minority communities included at least 24 incidents that left 15 people injured and led to the destruction of five temples, 37 idols, and 38 homes. In addition, more than 50 shrines were attacked, vandalised, or looted.

Sixty-nine attacks by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) left 24 Bangladeshis dead, 38 injured, and 60 arrested. In addition, the BSF forced at least 3,399 people back into Bangladesh, while the Indian Coast Guard detained 108 fishermen near the Bay of Bengal.

More than 50,000 people were arrested in various cases and special joint operations, the majority of them leaders of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations.

At least 89 workers were killed and more than 1,020 injured in 236 incidents of labour-related violence. During the same period, unsafe working conditions and the lack of protective equipment led to workplace accidents that claimed the lives of 154 workers.

Biggest hurdle for reforms

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Iftekharuzzaman, also head of the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission, remarked that the interim government has relied on secrecy in framing every law. "Even as the commission chief, I had to obtain draft ordinances through other channels in order to give my opinion."

Noting his involvement with several ordinances passed under the interim government, he clarified, "I'm not saying I was allowed to be involved; I'm saying I managed to get involved."

He further mentioned that when these ordinances were drafted, the urgent proposals submitted by the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission were not fully taken into account.

Iftekharuzzaman added that the commission had proposed the formation of a "selection and review" committee for the Anti-Corruption Commission. While drafting the ordinance, the word "selection" was retained, but "review" was dropped. Upon learning this, he met senior government officials, who agreed to retain "review". Later, he discovered it had been removed once again.

On the issue of media reform, Iftekharuzzaman said that no change will come unless the government can safeguard the media. "The Media Reform Commission's report has already begun to gather dust, with little of its recommendations implemented."

In his keynote paper, TIB's Deputy Coordinator for Outreach and Communication, Zafar Sadik, said the Media Reform Commission had submitted its recommendations nine months ago, but none of the "immediate action plans" have been implemented.

In the keynote, he noted that the draft ordinance on protecting

journalists' rights omitted several major sections proposed by the commission.

TIB put forward a 12-point demand to ensure press freedom and improve the media landscape, calling for the immediate and full implementation of the commission's recommendations.

TIB also urged the government to announce an ordinance that reflects the commission's suggestions.

Also speaking at the event, SM Shameem Reza, professor of mass communication and journalism at Dhaka University, said students are increasingly reluctant to enter journalism and are instead opting for careers in communication.

He added that the situation would not improve until the profession's legal protection and salary structure are strengthened.

Dhaka Tribune Editor Reaz Ahmad stressed the urgent need for media reform, saying the previous authoritarian regime left the sector "polluted".

"But the government is not going for real reforms, which would make a difference in public life."

Daily Sun Editor Rezaul Karim Lotus said many within the media itself obstruct press freedom. "When a strong report is about to be published, some of us first lobby to block it."

Daily Sun Senior Reporter Rashidul Hasan won this year's award in the "national newspaper" category, while two reporters from Dainik Gramee Kagoi, Foyzal Islam and Ashique Rahman Shimul, won in the "regional newspaper" category.

In addition, Ekattor TV reporter Multa Parvez Nadir Reza won in the "television reporting" category, and Channel 24's investigative programme Searchlight won in the "TV documentary" category.

BNP will ensure

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"Only BNP has the track record of success. Only BNP has the plans. Nice words cannot give people food. Nice words cannot create jobs. Development needs planning, and only BNP has that planning."

Tarique urged party leaders and activists to take BNP's plans to every village and every household, including women, young people, community elders, and religious leaders.

"There is no time to sit quietly. We must go to the streets and reach the people. Everything, including the

country's independence, sovereignty and democracy, now depends on the BNP," he said.

Tarique said ensuring law and order is also crucial for the success of their development plans.

He said people are tired of hearing constant arguments and political blame games in the media. "Voters now want clear answers about what a party will do for them. Students want to know what kind of education system they will get. Young people want clear guarantees about their future and employment."