

US-led forces kill 70 Taliban rebels

REUTERS, Kabul

US-led forces killed around 70 Taliban rebels during clashes in southern Afghanistan, the US military said yesterday, raising the number of insurgents killed to 100 over the past three days.

Afghanistan is suffering its worst spell of violence since US-led forces toppled the Taliban in 2001. It comes ahead of Nato troops taking over military control in the violent south from the United States.

Last week the US-led coalition announced a major offensive, codenamed "Operation Mountain Thrust", to push deep into the Taliban's southern heartland.

A clash erupted on Friday after about 40 Taliban fighters attacked coalition forces in the Tarin Kot district of the southern province of Uruzgan.

"They all were killed," Soldier Chris Miller, a spokesman for the coalition forces, told Reuters of the Taliban casualties.

In another incident, coalition and Afghan forces attacked "a large group of extremists" in the Zharic district of neighbouring Kandahar province, killing 25 rebels in a battle that lasted three hours, a US military statement said.

Four more rebels were killed in a firefight with a coalition patrol in Kandahar on Friday night, Major Quentin Innes, a coalition spokesman, said.

The Taliban were not immediately available for comment, but have rejected reports of big losses in recent weeks.

The US military said coalition troops had killed about 31 Taliban insurgents in the south on Wednesday and Thursday.

The rebels have stepped up attacks this year in their southern and eastern heartland where they enjoy considerable support from locals.

Local politicians have recently voiced concern over the deteriorating security situation in the south despite the presence of foreign forces, saying rebels are expanding their influence in several parts of the region.

More than 1,000 people, including more than 40 foreign soldiers, have died this year. Around 400 were killed in May alone.

Division of the Supreme Court, said Iqbaluddin Ahmed is now the president of the country and there is no scope for the speaker to continue as the acting president.

"When the president returned from Singapore the acting president automatically became the speaker again," he said.

"If President Iqbaluddin Ahmed is unable to do his job, the president must say so himself, and not the doctors, since the president is not in a coma or any other critical situation," Justice Rabhani argued adding, "So far we know the president did not say so. So the speaker cannot act as the president."

However, Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed, and Parliamentary Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury last week in the parliament said in accordance with the constitution, the speaker is discharging duties as the acting president and the president will resume his office after recovering from his illness.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday on condition of anonymity, a former chief justice echoed them and said there is no controversy over the status of the presidency. Some people are intentionally creating the controversy, he asserted.

"President Iqbaluddin Ahmed is unable to discharge his duties due to his illness. It does not matter whether the president takes rest at Bangabhaban or in a hospital. The speaker will act as the president until the president resumes his office," he said.

Replying to a query, the former chief justice said it is not mandatory that the president has to say that he wants to take rest. The physicians have advised him to take rest. It's enough," he argued.

The Daily Star contacted former chief justice also former chief adviser to a caretaker government, Justice Latifur Rahman, but he declined to comment on the matter.

65 rescued

FROM PAGE 1
Scene and rescued all the 65 people on board, including 36 crew and labourers of the vessel, with the help of the local people who reached there by fishing and speedboats. Sources, however, claimed that a crew of the tanker was missing.

The navy men also managed to bring the raging blaze under control at around 2:30pm.

The cause of the accident, however, could not be confirmed as of 5:30pm yesterday.

Among the rescued, seven were slightly injured. Four of them were identified as chief officer Jahurul Islam and cleaners Mir Hossain, Fariduddin and Zakir Hossain.

They were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Of them, the three cleaners were released after receiving first aid while Jahurul was undergoing treatment, the hospital sources said.

Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Chairman AMM Shahadat Hossain and other top port officials visited the spot in the afternoon.

The 138-metre long tanker was procured about 25 years ago at a cost of Tk 50 crore, sources said.

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According to sources, the Merchantile Marine Department (MMD) and the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation formed two separate committees to probe the accident.

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