

TALIBAN OFFENSIVE IN KANDAHAR

Dozens of militants, 7 civilians killed

AFP, Kandahar

Dozens of Taliban fighters were killed in fierce overnight fighting between Afghan forces and militants who attacked multiple checkpoints in the insurgent bastion of Kandahar, officials said yesterday.

Taliban militants attacked checkpoints in five districts surrounding the city of Kandahar, which Afghan forces countered with heavy air and ground assaults, the ministry of defence said in a statement.

"The security forces repulsed the attack, killing 51 terrorists and wounding nine," the ministry said, without offering details of any casualties among government forces.

Seven members of a family were also killed in an Afghan air strike in one of the districts, a local official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"The Afghan air force wanted to target a car filled with explosives... when they hit the car it detonated and caused civilian fatalities," he said. The ministry of defence said it was investigating the incident.

The southern province of Kandahar is the birthplace of the hardline Islamist movement.

Since a US-Taliban deal in February, the insurgents have not carried out major attacks on key cities but have launched near-daily assaults against Afghan forces in rural areas.

The surge in violence in recent months comes as the Taliban and Afghan government engage in peace talks. The negotiations started on September 12 in the Qatari capital of Doha, but on Saturday the two sides announced a pause until January 5.



Members of the far-right group Proud Boys clash with counter protesters, in downtown Washington, US; a supporter of President Donald Trump fights with counter protesters in Washington; and supporters of Trump take part in a rally to protest the results of the 2020 election in the US capital. All photos were taken on Saturday. PHOTO: REUTERS



CLIMATE FINANCE FOR POOR NATIONS

Rich nations 'lagging badly'

Says UN chief, urges them to do more as 2020 goal slips

THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

Rich nations are "lagging badly" on a longstanding pledge to channel \$100 billion a year in funding, from 2020 onwards, to help poorer countries develop cleanly and adapt to the worsening impacts of climate change, the UN chief said on Saturday.

Antonio Guterres told journalists, on the sidelines of a virtual "Climate Ambition Summit" to mark the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement, that a new report by climate finance experts estimated the promise would not be met this year.

Nor had donors responded adequately to the Covid-19 financial crisis to provide cash-strapped developing countries with liquidity and debt relief, he noted.

"There is a clear need to increase both forms of finance - and they should be inter-linked," he said, calling for the pandemic recovery to be climate-friendly.



In 2009, wealthy governments agreed to increase climate finance for vulnerable countries to \$100 billion annually by 2020, and under the Paris Agreement they said they would negotiate a yet-higher amount that would kick in from 2025.

Many developing-nation leaders, including from the Maldives and Kenya, told Saturday's event they would need more financial support to achieve new, stronger climate plans to cut emissions and protect their people from wilder weather and rising seas.

Guterres also noted that just 20% of the \$79 billion in climate finance

raised by wealthy governments in 2018 was earmarked for efforts to adapt to climate change, and said more was needed for that purpose especially.

"Adaptation must not be the forgotten component of climate action," he added. Adaptation includes measures such as systems to warn people of weather threats, climate-smart infrastructure, water-harvesting for farmers in dry areas and restoring protective coastal mangroves.

The summit also saw the launch of a UN-backed "Race to Resilience" initiative that aims to help 4 billion people from groups and communities vulnerable to climate risks become better able to withstand the impacts of climate change by 2030.

It aims to build a coalition of business and civil society groups to transform urban slums into healthy, clean and safe cities, equip smallholder farmers to adapt and thrive, and protect coastal homes and businesses against climate shocks.

Clashes erupt as Trump supporters rally across US

Electors to formally cast their votes today

AFP, Washington

Four people were stabbed and one shot as rallies backing President Donald Trump's baseless claims of election fraud led to clashes in major US cities on Saturday.

Scuffles broke out in many places between rally-goers and counter-protesters who turned up to criticize the president, who lost the November 3 election to Democrat Joe Biden but is yet to concede.

Every state has now certified the results, giving Biden 306 votes in the Electoral College to Trump's 232. Electors are to formally cast their votes today.

Washington State Police said in a tweet late Saturday that a shooting had taken place after clashes near the capitol building in Olympia, and that a suspect had been detained.

In the US capital, DC Fire and EMS Department communications chief Doug Buchanan told AFP that four people had been stabbed and were now hospitalized "with serious injuries." The New York Times reported that 23 had been arrested throughout the day.

There was no indication of whether any of the victims had been involved in the protests, on either side of the divide.

The day had begun with a festive atmosphere as thousands of red-hatted protesters filled Washington's streets to support the president, undeterred by the US Supreme Court's rejection on Friday of what may have been his last chance to overturn the results.

Similar events took place in Olympia, Atlanta and St. Paul, Minnesota, as well as in smaller towns in Nebraska, Alabama and elsewhere.

NEWS IN BRIEF

About 70 anti-Lukashenko protesters detained in Belarus

Police in Belarus yesterday detained about 70 of demonstrators, the Belarusian rights group Viasna-96 (Spring-96) said, as weekly protests demanding the resignation of veteran President Alexander Lukashenko continued. Belarus, a country of 9.5 million that Russia sees as a security buffer against Nato, has been rocked by mass protests since an Aug. 9 presidential election that Lukashenko, who is in power for 26 years, said he won. His opponents claim the vote was rigged. More than 30,000 people has been detained in Belarus since the start of the protests in August, according to opposition leaders.

Azerbaijan says four killed in recent Karabakh clashes

Four Azeri servicemen have been killed in recent weeks in clashes in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan's defence ministry said yesterday, in the first report of casualties since a Russian-brokered ceasefire accord. Separately, authorities in Armenia said six of their servicemen had been wounded in what they described as an Azeri military offensive but did not say when. The Baku government said the clashes, which also left two Azeri servicemen wounded, had taken place in an area which fell under its control when the fighting ended on Nov. 10 and swathes of territory in Nagorno-Karabakh previously controlled by ethnic Armenians were handed over to Azerbaijan.

Indonesia arrests Islamist cleric over virus rule breaches



A firebrand Indonesian Muslim cleric was arrested yesterday for allegedly breaching coronavirus restrictions after he held a series of sermons with tens of thousands of followers. Rizieq Shihab's arrest came just days after Jakarta police shot dead six followers of his hardline Islamist group in a highway shootout. If found guilty, he could face up to six years behind bars for breaching coronavirus rules. Indonesia has reported more than 600,000 coronavirus infections and over 18,500 deaths, with authorities imposing nationwide restrictions to curb the spread of the disease. Despite those restrictions, Shihab held sermons, all of which were attended by thousands of people.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Haryana state police stop farmers and union leaders along a highway on the Haryana-Rajasthan border as they were marching to Delhi to protest against the central government's recent agricultural reforms, in Rewari district, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Israel and Bhutan establish diplomatic relations

REUTERS, Tel Aviv

Israel established relations on Saturday with Bhutan, a majority-Buddhist nation neighbouring India, as it looks to continue to expand its diplomatic links internationally.

Israel's accord with the Himalayan country did not appear to be related to its budding ties under U.S.-sponsored accords with Arab and Muslim countries, though Israeli officials sought to portray it as evidence of its growing acceptance abroad.

The agreement follows several years of secret contacts between Israel and Bhutan with the aim of establishing relations, Israel's foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Israel's circle of recognition is growing and expanding," Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi said. "The establishment of relations between us and the Kingdom of Bhutan will serve as another milestone in deepening Israel's ties in Asia."

Bhutan relied on India for guidance on its

foreign and defence policy until a friendship treaty was revised in 2007. It maintains diplomatic relations with around 53 countries.

A signing ceremony was held between the Israeli and Bhutanese ambassadors to India on Saturday at the Israeli embassy in New Delhi, a joint press release posted on the Bhutanese foreign ministry's website said.

"The establishment of diplomatic relations (will) create new avenues for cooperation between the two countries in water management, technology, human resource development, agricultural sciences and other areas of mutual benefit," it said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the agreement, adding there had been contacts with other countries which wanted to establish relations.

Israel and Morocco on Thursday agreed to normalise ties in a deal brokered with U.S. help, making it the fourth Arab country after the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan to set aside hostilities with Israel in the past four months.

Two 'confess'

FROM PAGE 1

(R) Madrasa in Jugia area of Kushtia town.

A senior judicial magistrate recorded their statements after a Kushtia Model Police Station inspector placed the accused before the court around 4:00pm on completion of their five-day remand.

On Saturday, two other accused in the case, teachers of the madrasa Al-Amin and Yusuf, made confessional statements under section-164. They too are in jail now.

A source in Kushtia police, who was present in the court, said the accused students confessed before the court. During interrogation, the two claimed that they had been inspired by the anti-sculpture statements of Maulana Mamunul Haque and Maulana Faizul Haque.

Kushtia Superintendent of Police SM Tanvir Arafath told The Daily Star yesterday evening that they would further investigate before deciding whether to accuse Maulana Mamunul and Maulana Faizul in the case.

Vandals defaced an under-construction sculpture of Bangabandhu in Kushtia town in the early hour of December 5.

UN launches int'l prize to honour

FROM PAGE 1

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman this year and prepares for the 50th anniversary of the country's independence next year.

UNESCO Executive Board adopted Bangladesh's proposal of establishing the prize at the 210th virtual session on December 11.

This is the first time any UN agency introduced international prize in the name of Bangabandhu, who struggled throughout his life for peoples' rights, democracy, pluralism, and led the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 -- the greatest achievement of this nation.

The prize worth \$50,000 will be given once in every two years. The award, for the first time, will be given during UNESCO's 41st general meeting in November next year, which has also been declared by the UN as the "International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development".

Primarily, the prize will be given for six years and then UNSECO can renew. A five-member jury board comprised of eminent experts will decide the persons or institutions for the prize.

"This prize will recognise the exceptional initiatives of the cultural activists or organisations working for the development of youths in creative economy," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told reporters at his office yesterday.

He said the contribution of Bangabandhu in promoting Bengali culture is remarkable. He participated in Language Movement in 1952, struggled for freedom of speech, and helped establishment of institutions to create scopes for promoting Bengali culture.

Considering Bangabandhu's non-communal values, love for culture and mother tongue and the values of peace and harmony, the government thought of introducing a prize in his name.

Against this backdrop, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a proposal to the prime minister. After having the approval, the proposal was submitted to the UNESCO Director General in Paris in August last year through Bangladesh's Ambassador to France and Permanent Representative to UNESCO.

"This prize is expected to internationalise the ideals of

Bangabandhu and spread those across the globe during his birth centenary," Momen said.

Coronavirus pandemic has badly affected the people involved in creative economy that create more than 30 million jobs, of which 45 percent is for women. Its contribution to the world economy was \$2.25 trillion, he said.

Creative industries include advertising, architecture, arts and crafts, design, fashion, film, video, photography, music, performing arts, publishing, research & development, software, computer games, electronic publishing, and TV/radio.

In its website, the UNESCO said it adopted the Bangladesh's proposal, recognising the potential of the creative sector to provide young people with economically and environmentally sustainable jobs, in line with the UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth 2014-2021.

It also recognises the necessity to encourage women in the creative economy, in line with UNESCO's global priority gender equality. "...the prize will

create a knowledge-sharing mechanism by capturing, celebrating and communicating best practice in the development of creative entrepreneurship," UNESCO said.

All costs relating to the implementation of the UNESCO-Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman International Prize for the Creative Economy will be borne by Bangladesh.

In its 40th general meeting last year, UNESCO enlisted the birth centenary of Bangabandhu in its anniversary programme. By introducing the prize this year, the UN agency has directly been involved in celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary.

Earlier in 2017, UNESCO recognised Bangabandhu's March 7 historic speech in its Memory of the World International Registry. In 1999, this UN agency recognises February 21 as the International Mother Language Day.

Besides, UNESCO declared Bangladesh's Shatgambuj Masjid, Boudha Bihar of Paharpur, and the Sundarbans as World Heritage.

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