

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 at 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

Hasina-Modi virtual summit on Dec 17

FROM PAGE 1

Indian Prime Minister Modi was scheduled to visit Bangladesh in March this year to attend Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birth centenary event, but could not come because of the pandemic.

He is likely to visit Bangladesh in March next year to join the 50 years anniversary of Bangladesh's independence.

According to officials concerned, celebrations of the 50th anniversary will be a special focus during the meeting. The two premiers will launch a commemorative postal stamp and Bangabandhu-Bapu Digital Museum.

Bapu is an affectionate form of address given to Mahatma Gandhi by his near and dear ones and later became one of the sobriquets used for him along with Mahatma and Father of the Nation.

"The 3D digital museum will feature historical events in the lives of the two great leaders of India and Bangladesh," a foreign ministry official told this correspondent.

An Indian High Commission official had earlier said the museum will showcase the values that "our founding fathers bequeathed to our respective nations."

Bangabandhu-Bapu Digital Museum will be shown on TV-screens placed at different places in Bangladesh, India and some other countries, the official added.

"The summit between the two prime ministers is very significant. This is happening at a time when Bangladesh is celebrating the birth centenary of Bangabandhu and is preparing for the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence," the foreign

ministry official said.

"The meeting will reflect the depth of the two country's relationship."

Marking the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence, India also undertook various activities throughout next year. Sometime next year, a road connecting Mujibnagar in Meherpur and Nodia of West Bengal will also be opened.

"It was a difficult time. We declared independence. Awami League leaders and international journalists came to Mujibnagar in Meherpur on April 17 in 1971. The oath-taking ceremony of the provisional government was held there," said Foreign Minister Momen.

"They came here through the Meherpur-Nodia border. It is a historic road. On Indian side, the road is open. On our

side, it is not. We want to open it. India also agreed. We would like to name it Swadhinata Sarak.

"There are beautiful sculptures in Mujibnagar. Indians can also come to visit..."

Recalling the role of then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said her contribution must be recognised. She wrote letters to the heads of states across the world, describing the tortures on the Bangladeshis by the Pakistani military.

"She [Indira Gandhi] visited the US, Europe and Russia to highlight the tortures."

After Pakistan's attack against India in early December 1971, India declared war and recognised Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty. India also has

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.

Govt preparing UN launches int'l prize in honour

FROM PAGE 2

burden on the country.

She also said that the Armed Forces will always remain ready to ensure the security of the country and the region and establish security in the world arena.

"And we're working to that end," she said.

'WORK FOR THE PEOPLE' The prime minister urged all members of the armed forces to build up themselves imbued with patriotism as the country's Armed Forces was born through the great Liberation War.

She asked the Armed Forces members to work for the people of the country remaining beside them.

She highly appreciated the Armed Forces for their works in all crisis of the country including the Covid-19 pandemic for the betterment of the mass people.

Sheikh Hasina said that the country got its independence with the supreme sacrifice of millions.

"This sacrifice must not go in vein, this independence will take our county to the highest peak of success so that we could roam in the world arena holding our heads high," she said.

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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