

Pakistan arrests 100 more militants

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan security forces arrested nearly 100 more suspected Muslim militants overnight as hardliners protests yesterday against President Pervez Musharraf's response to the London bombings.

Musharraf, under international pressure to act against extremists, told the nation in a televised address late Thursday that he would tighten the rein on Islamic schools in a bid to stamp out militancy and those preaching hate.

Within hours of the speech, security forces again raided Islamic schools or madrasas which have been in the spotlight since it emerged that three of the bombers in the July 7 London attacks had recently been in Pakistan.

"During raids overnight in all the four provinces, around 90 more suspected militants have been rounded up and the number of people in preventive detention is more than 300 now," said an interior ministry official monitoring the campaign.

Raids targeted shops selling "hate material" in print, audio and video form, and both police and intelligence services were instructed to arrest anyone inciting violence during sermons at Friday prayers, the official said.

"It is the firm resolve of the government and we will not spare anyone

found to be breaching the law," he said.

An alliance of fundamentalist Muslim parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), called for rallies outside mosques on Friday and denounced the actions of Musharraf, a key Western ally since the September 11, 2001 attacks.

"Musharraf has resumed the crackdown on religious seminars and arrests of Islamic scholars and students to please Washington and London," the MMA said in a statement, condemning the "global conspiracy against Islam."

In his national address, Musharraf -- who has been waging an often unpopular campaign against extremists and has survived at least two assassination attempts by suspected extremists -- said there could be no let-up on terrorism.

He appealed to moderates to pray for "Pakistan's deliverance from the menace of extremism" and said his nation would stand together with Britain "to the end, until we emerge victorious."

But he also had blunt words for Britain, where all the suspected bombers had been "born, bred and educated" and where he said Muslim militant groups continued to operate.

He named two groups, the Hizbul Tahreeer and Al Muhajroon, which he said were responsible for spreading a message of hate and violence.

"They had the audacity of passing an edict against my life and yet they operate with impunity," Musharraf said.

The Pakistani leader launched the crackdown after both Britain and the United States expressed concern about the possible preaching of hate and extremism in some of the country's 10,000 madrasas.

Pakistan has also arrested over 700 suspects linked to al-Qaeda since the September 11 attacks, including the group's number three Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

But critics, including the government in neighbouring Afghanistan, accuse Pakistan of failing to do enough to control Islamic militancy, and many analysts suspect al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden is in hiding in Pakistan.

Analyst Monis Ahmar, a professor of international relations at Karachi University, pointed out one of the dilemmas for Musharraf as he tries to rein in extremists.

He said Islamic militants had in the past received government support to fight against the 1979-1989 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and in the conflict against India over the disputed state of Kashmir.

"How can you defend the same people for one jihad in Afghanistan, term them Mujahedin (holy warriors), and then call the same people terrorists or extremists?" Ahmar said.



PHOTO: STAR

A truck overturns at Kaiyaganj under Gobindaganj upazila of Gaibandha on the submerged Gobindaganj-Dinajpur Highway yesterday.

Interpol help sought

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couple of years. However, as Bangladesh itself did not reciprocate till recently with India's request to take action against Indian insurgents allegedly staying in Bangladesh, India so far took no such move.

"Besides, there is no extradition treaty between the two countries. Even if India arrested the Bangladeshi criminals, it would not hand them over to us," the Rab source said. "We must have some understanding with India first."

The India-Bangladesh relationship nose-dived over a number of issues in the recent years, particularly over India's security concerns and Bangladesh's nonchalance, and India's move to cancel the Saarc Summit in February this year. To improve this situation, the joint forces in late May undertook an anti-insurgent drive in the greater Sylhet region, killed six insurgents and arrested nine.

Both the foreign minister and state minister for home later talked India into launching a patrolling of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), each operating simultaneously from their side of the border.

The foreign ministry sources said India is cooperating and has now

tightened the security breach at the border.

Meanwhile, based on the statements of Arman—one of the top 23 criminals of the country who was arrested in early June from Dhanmondi area—the law enforcers arrested one George Miah. A petty criminal, George came up with a confessional statement that he along with top criminal Subrata Bain and 12 others had staged the grenade attack on the AL rally. Some of these criminals are now staying in Kolkata, he said.

The AL, however, rejected George Miah's statement terming it a fake one to mislead the investigation. The press also reported that the statement is full of inconsistencies, and that it does not make sense why some criminals would attack a rally of a big political party unless some other higher level conspirators were backing them.

The intelligence sources claimed that they were "convinced" that Subrata led the grenade attack, but they do not know whether Subrata is now in Bangladesh or in India.

Meanwhile, Arman, who has not been accused in the grenade attack case, has been kept in the Kashimpur jail. He is cooperating with the detectives in revealing the

criminal network existing in Bangladesh and West Bengal of India, claimed the intelligence sources.

"Our investigation into this case leads to Joy, Mukul and Robin," noted an intelligence official. "We do not have any proof or information as to who had employed them for the grenade attack. But we can gather more information if we can arrest these three."

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar will be on a 10-day government visit to the USA where he will meet the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and US security officials to talk about assistance on curbing terrorism.

He will also place reports to the US government on the condition of law and order in Bangladesh and answer questions on violation of human rights through the extrajudicial killings by the law enforcement agencies.

The sources added that Babar will also discuss the rise of militants in Bangladesh.

However, while talking to the press recently, the minister said, "The details of my discussion with the US government have not been chalked out yet."

London cops kill 'would-be bomber'

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ongoing terrorist investigation, Metropolitan Police commissioner Ian Blair said.

The information I have available is that this shooting (in Stockwell station) is directly linked to the ongoing and expanding anti-terrorist operation," Blair told reporters.

"As I understand the situation, the man was challenged and refused to obey police instructions," he said.

"I need to make clear that any death is deeply regrettable," he said, adding: "I can't go any further at this stage."

Witnesses said the man was not wearing a rucksack like the ones filled with explosives that were used in the July 7 attacks and again on Thursday.

Blair said the man, who has yet to be publicly identified, was declared dead at the scene after the London Ambulance Service and a helicopter ambulance were called in.

Meanwhile, police briefly threw a cordon around a mosque in east London yesterday, a day after apparent attempts to carry out suicide bombings in the British capital, BBC News 24 television reported.

Police had no immediate details on the situation at the mosque in east London on Whitechapel Road. But a Muslim leader said it was evacuated following a bomb threat.

Mohammed Abdul Bari, chairman of the East London Mosque, said the threat came in a telephone call yesterday morning. A bomb squad came was searching the premises.

Not long afterwards, it said the police had stood down, as the focus of attention remained on an underground subway station in south London where a man -- a would-be suicide bomber -- according to reports -- was shot by police.

More than 6,000 people were expected for Friday afternoon prayers but there were only about a dozen of the explosive devices in the hope of finding fingerprints or other clues to the identity of the bomb-makers.

Friday's newspapers focused on the "miraculous" escape by hundreds of commuters after the devices detonated without causing any injuries, in stark contrast to the deadly attacks two weeks ago that killed 56 people, including four bombers, and wounded 700. "Our lucky day," said a banner headline in the Daily Mirror. "Four bombs, three trains, one bus, zero deaths."

But, any joy was tempered by the knowledge that the attackers had managed to elude police and were still at large.

"Four suicide bombers on loose," was the tabloid Sun's headline.

Passengers on at least two of the trains told of would-be bombers fleeing after the explosions, which police said might have been detonators going off but failing to trigger a bomb.

The explosions appeared to be an attempt to copy the July 7 attacks, when four young British Muslims detonated rucksack bombs in three packed trains and a bus at morning rush hour.

"They had the same pattern and the same objective," an unnamed anti-terrorism official told the Guardian newspaper.

Security experts said it was still unclear why the devices failed to explode properly. Police said the unexploded bombs were 'home-made'.

"It could be they weren't constructed properly, it could be the explosives exceeded the age of their usefulness, or it could have been just sloppy handling," said Jim Ludwiczak, president of Kentucky-based Blasting and Mining Consultants.

Another analyst, Professor Hans Michels, of Imperial College, London, told the Times newspaper it was "extremely improbable" that all four devices would have failed to explode.

"It may be that the object this time was not to kill people but to cause chaos," he said.

Police said yesterday that no one had been arrested in connection with the blasts. Two men were released without charge late on Thursday after being questioned, Scotland Yard said.

While the blasts caused no injuries, police said one passenger was treated in hospital for a suspected asthma attack.

Security analysts said the attacks could have been masterminded either by the same group responsible for the July 7 blasts or by less sophisticated sympathisers -- maybe young, disaffected Muslims.

"There is a resonance here," police chief Ian Blair said, but he cautioned it would take time to tell who was to blame.

An al-Qaeda-linked group said yesterday it carried out the latest London attacks, warning it will not relent until all "infidel" forces quit Iraq, according to an Internet statement.

"Our strikes in the heart of the British infidel capital are nothing more than a message to all European governments that we shall not relent until all infidel forces quit Iraq," the group known as the Brigades of Abu Hafs al-Masri said.

"This is a warning to all those who follow the policies of the president of infidel America," said the statement, whose authenticity could not be confirmed.

Meanwhile, British Muslims said

they feared police were operating under a "shoot to kill" policy after a man was gunned down at an Underground train station yesterday following a new wave of bomb attacks.

The Muslim Council of Britain called on police to explain why the Asian man, reported as a suspected suicide bomber" by Sky News, was shot dead at Stockwell station in south London.

Police have confirmed that officers pursued and shot a man who was pronounced dead at the scene, but have offered no explanation for the shooting.

A Muslim Council spokesman said Muslims were "jumpy and nervous" and feared reprisal attacks.

"I have just had one phone call saying 'What if I was carrying a rucksack?'," said Inayat Bunglawala, referring to the rucksack bombs used in the London attacks.

"It's vital the police give a statement about what occurred (at Stockwell) and explain why the man was shot dead," Bunglawala said.

"We are getting phone calls from quite a lot of Muslims who are distressed about what may be a shoot-to-kill policy."

Witnesses told Sky News that police shot the man five times at close range after shouting at him to stop.

"There may well be reasons why the police felt it necessary to unload five shots into the man and shoot him dead, but they need to make those reasons clear," Bunglawala said.

Another report says, police yesterday sealed off the home of a Muslim convert identified as one of the suicide bombers who killed 56 people in London two weeks ago after a suspected attempt to burn the building. Officers were called to Germaine Lindsay's home in Aylesbury, a town just outside London, shortly after 6:30am after reports of a strong smell of petrol in the street, officers said.

A substance thought to be petrol or diesel was found and the area was sealed off, with houses adjoining Lindsay's former home evacuated, police said.

Lindsay, a 19-year-old Jamaican-born Briton who converted to Islam, blew himself up on a London Underground train on July 7, killing 26 people that day.

(AP, Reuters, AFP)

Robber cop

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The arrestees were remanded for three days on Thursday and the DB is interrogating them.

The robber cops stopped the jewellery employees and demanded Tk 50,000 for letting them go with the ornaments, said Rana in the FIR (first information report).

Rana gave ASI Khalil Tk 28,000 but the cops did not release the ornaments. The DB seized Tk 25,100 from Khalil the same day.

Bidhan torture

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Thursday recommended punitive actions against them.

The police, meanwhile, are yet to initiate any investigation into the general diary (GD) filed by Bidhan's sister accusing the Rab men of torturing her brother and another by Rab men claiming they had saved Bidhan from the wrath of a mob.

"I am yet to receive court permission to launch investigation into the incident," Sub-Inspector Abu Sayeed of Uttara Police Station told The Daily Star yesterday. He said the permission may come today and then he will look into both the GDs.

Officials at the Rab headquarters said they began scrutinising the investigation report yesterday.

"We'll take punitive action on the basis of the gravity of their faults," Rab Additional DG Fazlul Bari told The Daily Star last night over telephone.

The Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and National Security Intelligence (NSI) are also conducting separate investigations.

CAN RAB PUNISH ITS MEN?

A question has been raised whether Rab can punish the 'dirty dozen', even if they are found guilty to a punishable extent, as there is no Rab act providing punishments for major misconduct of its members.

"Rab can take administrative steps for minor misconduct of its men but not for major ones," a high Rab official said, requesting not to be named.

"If any Rab man commits a serious misconduct, the authorities send them to his mother organisation, asking it to take steps for the misdeed," he said.

The mother organisations -- police, Ansar, army, navy and airforce -- can punish them according to their departmental codes and rules.

BIDHAN STILL

CRITICALLY ILL

Abu Bakar Sultan Bidhan, executive director of Harness Level Industries Ltd, is still in a critical condition with several bones fractured in the beating. He is being treated at Central Hospital in Dhanmondi.

"Doctors have been transfusing blood into him for the last two days," said his wife Tania Sultana Joya. Bidhan is still vomiting, she said.

A number of national and international rights organisations, foreign diplomats and political leaders visited him at the hospital.

A group of Rab members led by ASP Ashraf haunched Bidhan to Rab-1 office and tortured him following an altercation between Ashraf and Bidhan on Jasimuddin Road.

Talking to The Daily Star, several high officials of Rab said Bidhan assaulted Ashraf in front of his family, even after the Rab ASP had disclosed his identity. "The media is highlighting his [Bidhan's] version. But we too are citizens of this country, our versions should also get notice," said one of them.

Economy faced

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prices -- Bangladesh is a net importer of both the items -- also recorded a significant jump of \$41 a metric ton in a year. The global markets are also in an unsettled mood following the EU referendum in which the French and the Dutch voted against the proposal for an extended constitution. The looming German elections and the recent terrorist attacks in the UK have made matters even more critical.

To add to the worry, the US economy is showing no signs of fighting the ballooning fiscal deficit, while the Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan has indicated that the US interest rates will go further up. And there comes little hope for a breakthrough in the global trade talks to be held in December in Hong Kong that can see Bangladesh on a gaining ground either in agriculture or non-agriculture market access. Even the recent G8 summit served little good news for Bangladesh, for that matter for Asia, in trade justice issue with most promises going to writing off debt of Africa.

"But the domestic political contours augur no less a daunting scenario -- the upcoming elections will exert pressures on public finance and the economy now under the IMF programme is also going to face a number of challenges in economic management. The reforms have become back-loaded due to slow progress in implementation of some critical measures. Experience shows the development administration usually goes into a state of paralysis ahead of the elections. This will further accentuate a sense of policy limbo, which is apprehended in the wake of electoral transition," opined Dr Debaripriya.

The planned post-monsoon agitation by the opposition will only add to this challenging situation. This may also affect the emerging positive trend in the foreign direct investment. As if all this was not enough to weigh down on the economy, the domestic investment upswing is acting as a deadly cocktail, as it has exposed the economy to external pressures.

The export that increased by 12.82 percent till March, as the latest balance of payment statement for July 2004-March 2005 shows, could not meet the import demand that grew by 26.4 percent. Even a 16 percent remittance growth and a significant inflow of foreign assistance -- \$500 million under the World Bank's Development Support Credit and \$100 million under the Education Sector Support Credit, all coming as budgetary supports -- was overshadowed by the import surge and the resultant foreign exchange crisis. The crisis is as much a result of the demand crisis as of the Bangladesh Bank's role -- it did not let the banks buy dollar from it as per demand and

also dictated the market not to allow rates going significantly up. Without the foreign aid and remittance flow the situation would have reached a crisis point, as many point out.

On the fiscal side, the developments are not too healthy -- revenue expenditure growing faster than earning last year fuelling further inflation, although an overall fiscal balance could be maintained because of non-implementation of the ADP. Though it is true that inflation was largely underwritten by global price increases of food, petroleum, fertiliser and steel, the nature of public finance also played a role here.

Against such a backdrop, the CPD apprehends that food price is likely to emerge as a separate issue, as the next annual paddy production may have little impact on price due to a continued high cost of production. Added to this worry is the global price situation and the coming seasonal Monga and floods. Without an early food-for-work programme, the situation may become critical.

The banks have increased interest rates on lending, but deposit rates remain insignificantly changed to encourage mopping up of surplus from the market.

In view of the emerging scenario, Dr Debaripriya maintained, "There is an urgent need for a coherent, integrated and informed consideration to address such inter-related macro-economic issues -- exchange rate, interest rate, taxes, tariffs and public expenditures. The government may suitably use the non-functional Co-ordination Committee for Fiscal and Monetary Affairs for this purpose."

"Maintaining the macroeconomic stability and sustaining the growth momentum pose a win-win situation for the government and opposition. They both have a stake in maintaining a good economy now and beyond the elections. The government will not want to face the election with spiralling inflation, unstable exchange rate and high interest rate. It will also not be in the interest of the opposition to inherit a weaker economy. Thus, while the government and the opposition may be at loggerheads on electoral reforms, they may try to reach an understanding to ring-fence the national economic interests for their own good," suggested the CPD.

As this piece was going to the press, one good news, albeit small, emerged -- China has re-valued its currency for the first time in about a decade by 2 percent. This is a small hope for the garment exporters who had been witnessing the onslaught of Chinese producers in both the US and the EU markets.

72-hr deadline

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authorities to take initiative to inform the students' guardians of the incident.

STUDENTS' POSITION

Some students of the hall told The Daily Star that no one had instigated them and their demonstrations had not been politically motivated either. They said they plan to sit down with the university authorities soon to explain their position.

"I call on the authorities to listen to both the teachers and the students before coming to a conclusion in this regard," said one of the students preferring anonymity. She also claimed that the list of 21 students given by the house tutors was made on the basis of previous enmity between the teachers and the listed students.

Bangladesh Chhatra Union yesterday in a statement urged the DU authorities to meet the students' demands immediately.

ADB assistance

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involving the ADB now when appointment of 50 Bac officials has already been completed. Twenty anti-corruption officers and 30 inspectors had been screened and later absorbed in the commission in the first phase as per a guideline framed by the commission.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan told The Daily Star, "We've not yet finished screening of all the Bac staff. As the ADB consultants are coming soon to aid us with technical expertise anyway, we've decided to take their assistance also in the screening of the rest 1050 Bac staff."

A number of sources however said the decision to involve the ADB has been taken to avoid controversy following the deepening split in the commission over the issue of assimilating the DDs.

The 11 DDs had landed the Bac jobs allegedly through fraudulence and seven of them were even disciplined for the wrongs they had done in their recruitment.

As the ACC has completed screening and absorption of 50 Bac officials, it faces huge pressure from the rest Bac officials for absorption in the commis-

sion. The Bac staff, who have yet to be screened, are frantically lobbying the ACC officials for their absorption, said sources.

Engaging the services of ADB consultants in the screening is mainly aimed at dealing with the pressure, making the screening acceptable to all, and avoiding controversy, added the sources.

Hua Du, officer-in-charge of Bangladesh resident mission of ADB, during the July 18 meeting proposed that they would set criteria of their own for the screening and that all Bac staff, including the 50 already screened, will come under the scrutiny.

Disagreeing with both the proposals, the commission said the screening would be done in accordance with the ACC guideline and only the rest 1050 will go through it.

"The ADB will make suggestions while the commission will take the decision regarding the screening and absorption," observed Justice Sultan.

The ACC expects to get the government approval regarding ADB's assistance in a week and finish the screening job by a week after getting the nod.

Tajuddin's birthday

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a pioneer role against the then West Pakistan by forming the first government of Bangladesh at the most critical moment of the Bangalee nation in 1971 in absence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Involved in politics since his student life, Tajuddin played a key role in the Language Movement of 1952. He had been the general secretary of Dhaka district Awami League (AL) from 1953 to 1957. He was also involved in formulating the historic six-point demand of Awami League in 1966.

After the independence of the country, Tajuddin also served as the finance and planning minister till October 26, 1974.

After the cruel assassination of Bangabandhu along with his family members in 1975, Tajuddin Ahmad was kept in house arrest and later shifted to jail. On November 3, he was brutally killed inside the jail along with three other national leaders of the country--Syed Nazrul Islam, Captain M Mansur Ali and AHM Qamaruzzaman.

"The countrymen always remember Tajuddin Ahmad with gratitude for his great contribution to every event of the country's independence," AL Presidium Member Tofai Ahmed said yesterday while addressing a discussion organised by the Bangabandhu Sanskritik Jote (BSJ) on the eve of Tajuddin's birth anniversary.

Tajuddin Ahmad played an active role in all the historical planning and decisions of Bangabandhu as his closest associate. Tofai asserted at the discussion held at the Liberation War Museum in the city.

"The evil forces killed Tajuddin Ahmad because they believed that killing Bangabandhu was not enough to exterminate the Awami League," Tofai Ahmed viewed.

He called upon general people to be strongly united to free the country from "the clutches of the present failed government" and materialise the dream of a happy Bangladesh envisioned by both Bangabandhu and Tajuddin Ahmad.

Tofai Ahmed also reiterated the AL decision not to go for the next parliamentary elections unless the proposed reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC) are implemented.

Floods unchanged

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Goalundo and 4cm at Bhagyakul. In the Meghna basin, the Surma recorded further rise at Kanaighat but it remained steady at Sylhet.

According to the FFWC sources, light to moderate rainfall at most places over the Brahmaputra basin, moderate rainfall a few places over the Ganges basin, light to moderately heavy rainfall at many places over the Meghna basin and the southeast hill basins were recorded yesterday.

The Daily Star correspondent from Nilphamari yesterday reported that though the teesta marked a fall at different points on Thursday, it was flowing 16cm above the danger mark at Teesta Barrage point at Dalia.

Diarrhoea took a serious turn in the flood-hit upazila. Three people died of diarrhoea in Sadar and Dimla upazilas over the last four days and at least 2000 people were affected by the waterborne disease.

The chairman of Kundupukur Union told this correspondent that the number of diarrhoea patients is increasing in Sutipara village. He alleged the medical team is providing only oral saline and tablets for the victims and giving them advice to go to the government hospitals for treatment.

The waterborne disease is also spreading fast at Huzurpara village under Domar upazila. At least 100 people of the village have been affected by the disease.

Ctg 'criminal'

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Locals caught them red-handed and beat them up until police rescued them. Ripon died on way to hospital, while Manik is receiving treatment at Chittagong Medical College and Hospital in a critical condition.

Five alleged criminals have been lynched in the city in the last eight days.

Three were beaten to death after a robbery at Technical Training Centre (TTC) in Khulshi on July 15.

Abdul Monaf alias Monaipya, 28, a listed criminal and accused in 18 criminal cases, was caught while collecting toll and lynched in Paschchim Madarbari Methorpatti on Tuesday.

PDB rejoinder

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experience was found qualified in the tender evaluation.

In another rejoinder, the PDB said while the report said that clarification was sought from Chinese company Harbin without the approval of the Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC), the TEC actually approved the seeking of clarification.

Our reply

The rejoinder on selecting Harbin for the Fenchuganj power project is self-explanatory. The Daily Star ran two stories in details in the past describing the selection process which did not differ from the process described in the rejoinder.

Harbin was the lead partner, while Doosan is a consortium member. A lead bidder cannot be selected on the basis of the experience of the secondary consortium member.

At the same time, the Meghnaghat-2 power project was rejected by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman when the project was sent for the Purchase Committee's approval. The name of the lead bidder was changed twice just to qualify in that bid, since the partner bidders did not have enough experience.