

Tensions rise after deadly strike in Thailand's south

12 soldiers, 6 civilians killed in violence

AFP, Yala

Tensions spiralled yesterday in Thailand's troubled south after 12 soldiers were killed in the single deadliest attack against security forces since a separatist insurgency erupted there in 2004.

Eleven troops were killed late Thursday when their truck was bombed and ambushed by suspected separatist rebels in Yala, one of Thailand's Muslim-majority provinces bordering Malaysia.

A twelfth soldier died early Friday morning, hospital sources said. The attack came with security forces already stretched by a national clampdown after ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his party were barred from elections.

"The militants have stepped up attacks in order to increase pressure on authorities," army spokesman Acra Tiproch told AFP, adding that one more death had been added to the overnight toll.

"This was the biggest single attack yet," he said.

He said that the rebels hoped to provoke a heavy-handed reaction from security forces, who could then be blamed for committing atrocities against residents in the south.

Despite a series of peace-building measures, Thailand's military-backed government is under fire for failing to quell the insurgency which has claimed some 2,200 lives since erupting January 2004 and only appears to be worsening.

Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont, who was in crisis talks on the south with army chief General Sonthi Boonyaratglin Friday morning, promised not to retaliate.

I am not well: Khaleda

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office secretary of BNP, and a few women leaders of the party accompanied Khaleda to the hospital where the Jamaat leader is undergoing treatment.

Jamaat Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahid, and Assistant Secretary General ATM Ajharul Islam welcomed Khaleda at the hospital at 6:45pm, who stayed there for about 25 minutes.

"I've come here to see Motiur Rahman Nizami, it will take time for him to get well," the BNP chairperson said as she was leaving the hospital.

Senior leaders of BNP however were not accompanying their chairperson.

Khaleda's physical condition is not well, and she is also suffering from depression as her elder son Tarique Rahman is in jail and her younger son Koko might also be arrested any time, sources, who met her several times in the last week, told The Daily Star last night.

According to another party source, Khaleda Zia has no contact with other party leaders as most of them are trying to avoid her due to the 'changed situation'. Even the leaders

Bldg collapse

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including contractors, engineers of the DCC from next Tuesday, sources said.

Meanwhile the contractor of the work, Atikullah Khokha, who is now absconding, recently said over telephone that he would come in public if the probe committee report goes in his favour.

Meanwhile DCC staffs are still staying at the adjacent five-storeyed building that developed cracks due to the 'forced vibration' by the collapse of the under-construction building.

"We will check that building also. As cracks have developed at the building, it needs to be strengthened," Dr Sekender said.

EU-Iran nuke talks

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part of a covert nuclear weapons programme.

"The international community is united on what Iran should do and that is to suspend; to demonstrate that it is in fact not seeking a nuclear weapon under cover of civil nuclear power," Rice said.

She also repeated Washington's offer to join multiparty talks on trade, security and technological benefits for Iran if the Islamic state acceded to UN demands.

The Madrid meeting was the first between Solana and Larjani since the expiration of a 60-day time limit set by the United Nations for Iran to stop enriching uranium, a process which can be used both to make nuclear fuel and, in highly purified form, the fissile core of an atomic bomb.

Iran denies it is seeking nuclear weapons, saying it wants only to produce energy for a growing population whose fossil fuels will eventually run out.

Observers said before Thursday's meeting that it had little chance of achieving any break-

"We must be patient ... we have to be firm on the rule of law. We will not do anything to cause more problems and injustice," he said, but added that it would be impossible to gain the support of many militant sympathisers.

An estimated 2,000 students and villagers protested in a Pattani province mosque for the second day Friday to demand the end of a state of emergency and the immediate withdrawal of troops.

Provincial authorities say the demonstration was organised by militants.

Pattani's governor Panu Uthairat has repeatedly tried to calm the crowds, urging them to go home while armed soldiers and police blocked the roads around the mosque.

As the unrest increases, many districts in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani provinces have become virtual no-go zones for government troops.

Both soldiers and civilians die each day in shootings and bombings, while the region has also been plagued by frequent arson attacks.

"The situation in the south is getting worse day by day. The militants are stepping up violence to show to the government that they cannot help people in the south," said Sravut Aree, a senior researcher at Chulalongkorn University's Muslim Studies Centre.

Others say Thursday's attack showed that the militants were becoming more sophisticated and confident in confronting better-equipped government troops.

"The latest attack showed that militants are increasingly capable of

attacking armed security forces," said Panitan Wattanayagorn, a security expert and political science professor at Chulalongkorn University.

"The militants are becoming more confident in launching big attacks against the military," he added.

The attack against the soldiers capped one of the bloodiest days in the recent history of the insurgency.

Earlier Thursday five young men were gunned down in a mosque in the Saba Yoi district of Songkhla province, which borders Yala and has also seen a spike in separatist violence.

A sixth victim from the mosque attack died Friday, police said.

Elsewhere in the south, two people, including another soldier, were shot and killed, while nine troops were wounded in a series of bomb blasts.

Hasina

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member Shahjahan Khan were among those who exchanged views with her.

Meanwhile, most of the senior leaders refrained from meeting Hasina after the joint forces picked up the party leaders on May 28.

Talking to the reporters outside the Sudha Sadan, Shahjahan Khan said, "She was quite upset as the adviser whom she had requested to arrange proper treatment of Jalli and Selim, did not pay attention."

Mohiuddin

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already informed us verbally about his (Mohiuddin) deportation," the foreign secretary added.

Home Ministry sources said Mohiuddin Ahmed will be arrested on arrival.

When contacted last night, Home Affairs Secretary Abdul Karim said, "Proper legal steps will be taken against Mohiuddin Ahmed."

The acting foreign secretary said, "Process of Mohiuddin's deportation is their (US) judicial concern...uncertainty will prevail until his arrival in Dhaka. We are keeping contact with the counsel office at Los Angeles in this regard."

Meanwhile, family and friends of Mohiuddin have appealed to Canada to grant him asylum. A Canadian daily newspaper on May 29 reported that the US authorities were set to deport Mohiuddin soon.

Mohiuddin was sentenced to death in Dhaka in his absence in 1998 for his role in the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975.

US federal immigration agents arrested him at his Los Angeles residence on May 15.

Mohiuddin entered the United States in 1996 on a visitor's visa soon after the Awami League had assumed office. Since then he has been staying in the United States illegally.

He applied for staying permanently in the United States, but an immigration judge in 2002 ordered him to be deported.

The Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina urged the US government to extradite Mohiuddin who, along with 14 others, was sentenced to death in 1998 for the murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

On November 8, 1998, the Dhaka District and Sessions Judge Quazi Golam Rasul sentenced 15 of the 19 accused in the case to death. Only three of the convicts were in the dock during the pronouncement of the judgement.

Two of a family

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around 10:30pm and soon engulfed the house.

Sofia and Liza were asleep in a room. Two other members of the family—Rahima and Lopa—received burn injuries and were admitted to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

On information, the fire fighters from Thakurgaon rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze.

Gas pipeline

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"Any gas pipeline installed above the ground would develop cracks and leakages unpredictably. There is no explanation why this was installed in this way," said a source in Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited.

He said this pipeline had previously developed similar cracks in 2000. Following its repair, the experts had advised the authorities to lay the pipeline under ground otherwise a similar or worse disaster might take place. But the authorities did nothing about it.

"The type of pipeline that connects Aminbazar with Tongi is also sub-standard for Titas' requirements," the source said, adding: "It is not yet clear when the repair works will be completed."

Hasina faces pressure

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in new cases since her name has come up during interrogation of the party colleagues detained by the joint forces, sources added.

Left high and dry by Monday's action that saw AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil detained, Hasina has been desperately seeking options to deal with the happenings. But the senior and influential leaders stayed aloof and wanted her to keep silence over the crackdown, sources said.

Only a few leaders went to Sudha Sadan, the AL chief's Dhanmondi residence, on Monday evening to discuss the situation. They suggested that she strongly condemn the detention of Jalil.

A group of senior leaders, mostly presidium members, have distanced themselves from Hasina of late, adding to the pressure on her to concede the demand for radical changes in the party.

It is learnt that the group with support from some mid-level leaders has been working towards intra-party reforms by rendering Hasina ineffective or forcing her to quit. It is trying to convince the others that no meaningful reform is possible with Hasina still in command.

The pro-reform group has already been discussing the name of a senior AL leader to replace her as the party president, sources said.

It has turned out to be quite a challenge for Hasina to deal with the

crisis both within and outside the AL, said party insiders.

Under the circumstances, some leaders, close to her, have suggested that she would better open a dialogue with the government to know exactly what reforms it wants to take place, they added.

Hasina however has assured her worried colleagues that she would not cave in to any pressure. She would rather face the crisis. She also told them that the government might even detain her, said an AL source.

Apart from the AL general secretary, AL Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Hasina's cousin, was held on Monday night.

Another presidium member, Kazi Zafrullah, who too is known as faithful to the AL president, was arrested on April 18. Besides, the forces have picked up two of Hasina's personal staff.

Meanwhile, the army-led joint forces continue their hunt for a number of AL leaders having allegiance to her.

Earlier on April 18, the government issued a press note imposing a ban on Hasina's coming home from abroad. It then said if she returns, she might seek to make provocative statements and disrupt public order.

The government however withdrew the restrictions on April 25, allowing her to return home.

Nato soldier

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nation of the troops.

The latest death takes to 74 the number of foreign soldiers killed this year, most of them in hostile action.

Five US soldiers, a Briton and a Canadian military photographer were killed when a helicopter came down in the southern province of Helmand province late Wednesday. The Taliban said they shot it down.

In the southern province of Kandahar, a district chief said about 20 Taliban were killed in an operation by Isaf and Afghan forces on Thursday.

Some of the bodies were left at the scene and some dragged off by the fighters, said Zhari district chief Khairuddin.

In eastern Paktia province, men stormed a police officer's house overnight and "tried to either take the officer or one of his family members," the interior ministry said in a statement.

Police and army reinforcements were sent to the area and "in this conflict six enemies were killed and seven more were injured," it said.

In the northeastern province of Kunar, two women were killed and another six people were wounded when a rocket hit a civilian house

overnight, police said.

A rocket barrage was apparently aimed at an Afghan and US military base but missed, provincial police chief Abdul Jalal Jalal told AFP.

He blamed "enemies of Afghanistan," a term often used to refer to the ultra-Islamic Taliban movement that has been waging an insurgency since being ousted from government in late 2001.

Up to 380 Afghan civilians were killed in Taliban attacks and anti-militant raids by military forces in the first four months of this year, the United Nations said Monday.

In a separate incident, insurgents attacked a police post in Nuristan province, sparking a gun battle that killed a policeman and a militant and wounded four police, provincial governor Tamim Nuristani said.

The US-led coalition announced the arrest of a Taliban sub-commander and bomb-maker in the south of the country who was "known for his terror tactics."

It said the man, identified as Haji Salam, had also been involved in suicide attacks in the southern province of Ghazni, which has seen a spike in violence in the past week.

Law Commission

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formed under an act of 2003 has yet to become effective even after four years of its existence.

Important laws like the Money Laundering Prevention Act, and the Money Loan Court Act also had to be amended within a short time of promulgation. The highly politicised Gram Sarkar Act 2003 is also now in the process of being repealed.

Some laws are straight up controversial. For instance, the law to extend the retirement age for judges has been so controversial that it ended up intensifying political conflict in the country. A 2004 law increasing the number of women's seats in the parliament to 45 from 30, by scrapping the provision of direct elections to those seats, also intensified political conflicts.

Law Commission officials noted they do not expect governments to accept all recommendations of the commission. But by ignoring the commission completely, it has been made ineffective despite its legal expertise.

"We make our recommendations keeping in mind that the rule of law and the judiciary have to be upheld. But political governments consider laws keeping in mind political issues," said a top official of the commission.

"Even the few Law Commission recommendations that had been adopted, underwent changes and deviations in the hands of the government," he added.

The commission noted that the law ministry even forgets the recommendations it sent in the immediate past. "Sometimes ministry officials call us asking for a report that we sent earlier. If we tell them that we have already sent it, they become surprised," said an official of the commission adding, "As if this commission is just a post office"

Before framing a draft, the commission typically discusses with the stakeholders. If the government thinks that the commission has not done enough homework, it can hold additional discussions with the stakeholders and bring necessary changes. "But ignoring the commission totally is such a waste of intellectual and financial resources!" quipped a commission official adding, "We make drafts and never get any feedback, as if we are ghosts!"

In contrast, the Indian Law Commission is an effective one as it works independently without trying

to make the ruling party happy, and with a primary goal of upholding the rule of law. The British Law Commission also plays a strong role in drafting laws.

"It's the political attitude of a government that determines how effective a commission would be," the Law Commission high official said.

"Five years ago, the commission drafted a law to modernise consumer rights. But the erstwhile government didn't bother about it. Meanwhile consumers in recent years strongly voiced their opposition to adulteration of food. Much of it could have been avoided if we had such a modern law," he pointed out.

"We prepared a draft for a full-fledged citizenship act, which does not exist in Bangladesh. But that was ignored too. Again we prepared a draft of a law regarding the Contempt of Court Act, but nobody bothered about it although we have been seeing a high frequency of contempt of court charges," he added.

Interestingly while the BNP-led government was ignoring such drafts, its law minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed was giving the public an impression that he was working on such laws.

"By resorting to falsehood, Moudud was giving an impression to the media that he cares a lot about those issues. In reality he didn't bother about the drafts," said the commission high official.

Regretting the fact that the parliament never discussed implementation of Law Commission recommendations, the commission official said while the government did not submit any recommendation to the parliament, parliamentarians themselves were also not aware of their legal bindings.

"The parliament's right to information was undermined through the process," he said.

The three-member Law Commission is headed by former chief justice Mustafa Kamal as its chairman, while Justice Sirajul Islam, and former inspector general of police M Enamul Haq are its members.

Amitabh does not qualify as a farmer

AFP, Lucknow

Indian film legend Amitabh Bachchan was dealt a setback yesterday when a court ruled he did not qualify as a farmer -- a status that entitled him to buy a 20-acre farm.

A lawsuit alleged that Bachchan had used his political contacts in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which is wife represents in parliament, to get designated as a farmer and allow him to buy the land.

The court found that a certificate identifying the 64-year-old actor as a farmer since 1983 was forged.

"The superstar cannot get away lightly," said Amir Haider, a member of the ruling Congress party who filed the suit. He said the Bollywood star should now face a criminal investigation.

Bachchan bought a farm in Maharashtra, which along with many other Indian states restricts the purchase of agricultural land to legitimate farmers.

Land grabbers kill 1, injures 15 in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Armed land grabbers attacked landless people, living on a piece of government land, and killed one person and injured 15 others, three of them critically, at Bairagirchak of Kaliganj upazaila in Satkhira.

The dead was identified as Kabir Hossain Sana, 45, son of Kurban Ali Sana.

Among the injured Khairul Islam, Ala Uddin, Akram Hossain, Khadija Khatun, Jeher Ali, Sufia Khatun, Abdur Rahim, Malek, Jabbar and others were admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital and local clinics.

Sources said a group of land grabbers led by Mahabbat Mir, Abdul Gafar, outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) leader Abdul Halim, Pute, Ebadul and Ohab Ali Peyada attacked the landless people around 12:30am yesterday. They fired 20-25 shots at the residents of the government khas land.

Panic gripped the locals and they called, over cellphone, Officer-in-charge (OC) of Kaliganj Police Station Nur Islam for help. The OC asked them to leave their homes and gather at a remote edge of the land they are living on, local sources said.

The landless people followed the OC's instructions but around 5:00am the attackers started firing at them. Kabir and the others were hit by bullets then. Kabir was rushed to Satkhira Sadar Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

Quoting locals, police said over 300 landless families were residing on 300 acres of government khas land. They took lease of the land from the government in 2002.

Since taking lease, a group of influential land grabbers, who had been illegally occupying the land, was trying to evict them, sources said. They had launched attacks eight times on the landless people earlier and had beaten an old man to death in 2005.

Over 500 landless people with Kabir's wife went to the residence of superintendent of police (SP) of Satkhira and a local army camp yesterday afternoon demanding arrest and exemplary punishment to the killers.

A case was filed with Kaliganj Police Station accusing 25 people.

27th BCS

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any such programme without prior permission from the authorities, he added.

Several successful candidates, who 'were preparing to join' the cadre service jobs, termed the government decision to cancel the viva voce 'unjust'.

"For the alleged corruption and irregularities of a few people, why all of us who studied hard for the examinations should suffer?" said a successful candidate.

The council of advisers to the caretaker government on May 30 requested the Public Service Commission (PSC), which holds the BCS examinations, to cancel the viva voce results of the controversial 27th BCS examinations and immediately reschedule the viva for all successful candidates of the written examinations.

There were allegations of widespread corruption and irregularities at different stages of the examinations that were held during the BNP-Jamaat led coalition government's tenure.

Candidates who passed the viva voce expressed frustration at the government decision while the candidates who passed the written examinations but were disqualified in the viva voce welcomed the decision.

Earlier Fair BCS Movement was barred from holding programmes including press conference, roundtable and discussion meeting on the issue of the 27th BCS, especially the demand for cancellation of the examination results.

Two contractors

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they refused to compensate.

Locals said they started the construction work with 10 labourers on the land around 8:00am yesterday without resolving the dispute. Alam, Monir and Anwar were supervising the work.

Following the deaths of the contractors, locals vandalised the houses of the attackers including Jamir's house.

Law enforcers rushed to the spot and dispersed the mob. A large number of policemen were deployed there to thwart any untoward incidents.

The mob, however, captured Muslim, son-in-law of Jamir, from a nearby area while he was trying to escape. They handed him over to the police. Jamir's granddaughter Shumi Akhter, 18, was also detained and handed over to the police.

Altaf Hossain, a partner of the firm, filed a murder case accusing nine people.

In another incident, a gang of three broke into a grocery shop and hacked Oli Akand, 22, at Chunkuthia in Keraniganj around 3:00am and left the place.

Injured Oli was rushed to Mitford Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Police yesterday morning recovered the body of an unidentified woman aged around 22 underneath a pile of sand near an under-construction building at Ambagicha in Keraniganj.

Police suspect the woman might have been strangled to death.

In another incident, a husband

allegedly killed his wife over a family feud at Sirajnagar in Keraniganj early yesterday, UNB reports.

The dead was identified as Amena Begum, 40, wife of Bachhu Mia.

Police said Bachhu had an altercation with his wife late Thursday night and at one stage of the argument hit Amena with a wooden stick on her head, leaving her critically wounded.

Amena was admitted to local Kalatia Clinic where she succumbed to her injuries in the morning.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Mitford Hospital morgue for an autopsy. Bachhu went into hiding after the incident.

Jessore weekly

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The gang stabbed the editor of the weekly in his chest and abdomen and left the scene immediately, they added.

Mostafa was rushed to Jessore General Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

A Shi'ite by faith, Mostafa Kamal was the founder of Mowla Ali Academy, which is being run by the Shias at Chanchrah in the town.

The officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali Police Station said the murder might have been committed due to previous enmity over land dispute.

But unconfirmed sources said Motafa was killed by the operatives of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddho faction).

UN team

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The delegation will submit a report of the provisional conclusions and propose recommendations for the Bangladeshese government and for future counter-terror cooperation.

The UN team sent over a hundred questions to the government late last year to evaluate its performance in the context of UN counter-terror resolutions and its mandate, sources say. Various government ministries are currently busy holding preparatory meetings for the visit.

The questions to the government were in relation to its counter-terror legislations and enforcement, "crossfire" deaths, the performance and operation methods of law-enforcement agencies and the military, the operation of the "underground terrorist groups", and the madrasa education system, among a host of others.

The delegation's policy and cooperation team will meet several senior officials from the foreign, law and home ministries to discuss ways to improve cross-border counter-terror cooperation, sources say.

Major points of discussion may include intelligence cooperation and possible legislative changes so as to make the local laws more in-line with UN conventions on counter-terrorism, sources say.

Standard of enforcement of existing counter-terror mechanisms is likely to be high on the delegation's agenda, sources added.

The country had previously pledged to enact a counter-terrorism law, but a draft of the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance, 2007 has been shelved at the law ministry since March this year.

The law ministry is also vetting an amendment to the Money-Laundering Act, 2002, which has already been approved, in principle, by the council of advisers.

The UN team will also look into

Bangladesh's madrasa education system, particularly its curriculum, number of madrasa students, and professions pursued by madrasa graduates and what changes can be made in order to prevent the system from being used as a breeding ground for militants.

The second group of the UN delegation will visit Bangladesh's air and seaport facilities and will also evaluate ports' scanning procedures.

The visit follows the recent adoption of a global counter-terrorism strategy by the General Assembly of UN. The plan underscores the important role of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in strengthening dialogue between the UN and countries and relevant international and regional organisations in counter-terrorism matters.

Rain brings

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within 6:00pm today.

People in the Dhaka city heaved a sigh of relief as an evening shower yesterday helped cool down the condition. People haunted by the persisting heatwave, welcomed the brief rainfall.

Besides, Dhaka, some places in Sylhet and Barisal divisions experienced rainfall.

A correspondent from Sharsha, Jessore reports Romesa Begum, 50, died of heatstroke yesterday at Shibobash of Sharsha upazaila.

A satellite television channel reported that six others died of heatstroke in Dinajpur, Meherpur and Madaripur districts.

Dinajpur experienced the highest temperature, 40.5 degrees Celsius, in the country yesterday while the lowest, 23.7 degrees Celsius, was recorded in Sylhet.

Run-down track

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sleepers decaying to the point of not existing at all at places, and with broken down signalling systems.

According to the reports published in newspapers, on Chittagong-Dohazari line local trains derail almost twice a week. In 11 of the 12 stations there, no phone line exists, so nobody knows when a train would come into a station until it is visible.

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