

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

"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 Srawut 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 Jali 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."

Leaders who accompanied Khaleda on May 30 to the mausoleum of the party's founder, late president Ziaur Rahman, to observe his death anniversary, are also 'frightened' due to the latest arrests of political leaders.

2.6 kg heroin

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Alamgir assured Saimon of providing 25 per cent of the profit, the latter said, adding that after his joining the gang sold out another 2kgs of heroin, but he is yet to get his part of the profit.

According to Saimon there are over 100 drug spots in the city, but he visited only a few spots at Town Hall in Mohammadpur, Nayabazar and Agargaon.

Saimon told the narcotics control officials that as he is a neighbour of Alamgir at Sharsha village in Jessore, Alamgir assured him to join their group saying that he would earn a lot.

"We conducted the raid after receiving information on Thursday that a huge consignment of drugs had come to the house," said Fazlur Rahman, an assistant director of the Department of Narcotics Control.

Saimon and Emon are now in the custody of the Narcotics Control Department and will be placed before a Dhaka court on Sunday with a prayer for seven-day remand.

Narcotics control officials conducted raids at several places in the city yesterday to arrest Alamgir, but failed to nab him as of 9:00pm.

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 Larijani 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-

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 Dhamondi 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.

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

Another presidium member, Kazi Zafarullah, 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.

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 upazila in Satkhira.

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

Among the injured Kairul Islam, Alu 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 Gafoor, outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBPC) leader Abdul Halim, Pute, Ebadul and Obab 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 body 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.

The UN team will also look into

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.

Police said Bachchu 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. Bachchu 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 Shite 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 Mostafa was killed by the operatives of the outlawed Purba 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 Bangladeshi 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 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 upazila.

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</h