

Turkey attacks PKK rebels in northern Iraq

AFP, Undated

Turkey made good on its threat to strike Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq yesterday, saying it inflicted "heavy losses" on the armed separatist movement PKK with cross-border airstrikes and artillery.

The army said it used artillery and airstrikes against a group of "50 to 60 terrorists... inside Iraq's borders" southeast of the Turkish town of Cukurca in Hakkari province in the mountainous Turkey-Iraq border region.

"If necessary, other army units will intervene in the region," it added.

Contacted in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Arbil, Fuad Hussein, chief of staff for Massud Barzani, the president of Iraq's Kurdish region, did not categorically confirm the strikes but said "it could be artillery shellings."

He said a ground assault by Turkish forces was not expected given the "prevailing weather conditions."

"The winter and heavy snow is not favourable for a ground assault."

Jabbar Yawar, the head of peshmerga forces in northern Iraq, said without elaborating that Turkish aircraft had been "trespassing northern Iraqi airspace for a week."

Tensions along the Turkish-Iraqi border increased after October 21, when PKK militants ambushed a military unit, killing 12 soldiers and capturing eight. The captives were released in November.

Soon after, the Turkish government secured parliamentary approval for cross-border military operations into northern Iraq. The United States and the Iraqi government are keen to avert a large scale incursion.

Turkey, where the army continues to wield strong influence in national politics, has the second largest army in NATO after the United States with around 515,000 troops.

In recent weeks it has deployed around 100,000 soldiers along its 380-kilometre (240-mile) border with Iraq in the mainly Kurdish south-east region of Anatolia.

Saturday's operation comes days after the cabinet of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan authorised the army to carry out a cross-border operation -- a month after the green

light from parliament.

The Turkish parliament's decision last month provoked a flurry of diplomatic activity between Turkey, Iraq and the United States.

Baaghdad promised to rein in the Kurdish rebels in the north of the country, and in early November President George W. Bush said the United States would provide "real-time" information on PKK movements from its satellites.

Hajj flight

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fill up each hajj flight since the very beginning of the hajj flight operations this year.

Haab leaders on the other hand, lashed back at Biman last week for the disorder and flight delays.

Biman so far flew 19,199 hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia and it would be able to carry about 12,000 more pilgrims, said a Biman official.

The national flag carrier has so far cancelled 12 hajj flights as private hajj agencies could not send sufficient number of pilgrims for each flight. The cancelled flights could have carried a total of 4,869 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

Haab Secretary General Maulana Eyaqub Sharafat brushed aside Biman's allegation and said, "It's not true what the Biman authorities have claimed. We, in fact, are not getting enough seats for our intended hajjis."

Highly criticising Haab, officials of Biman Bangladesh Airlines told The Daily Star that even after 18 days into the hajj flights, the private hajj agencies have failed to provide sufficient number of pilgrims.

"About 60 seats in three hajj flights remained vacant even yesterday," said a Biman official last night.

Haab leaders said Biman was responsible for the present situation as they fixed the hajj flight schedule without discussing with the Haab.

TECHNICAL GLITCHES ON DC10-30

Technical glitches in the fuel pump of a DC10-30 of Biman Bangladesh Airlines on Friday early morning forced it to return to Zia International Airport after it took off for Jeddah, Biman sources said.

There were about 314 passengers on board including 91 hajj pilgrims.

The aircraft was on the skyline of Bhopal, India when the fault was detected, but the fault was not serious in nature and was not a threat to its passengers, added a Biman official.

The aircraft flew for Jeddah again at 1:00pm the same day after getting the problem fixed.

FBCCI

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Talking to reporters after the AGM, FBCCI Director Golam Dastagir Gazi said the election should be held immediately to bring back democracy into the FBCCI.

"We have no objection if an administrator is appointed," he said, adding that the administrator's responsibility will be to complete the election as soon as possible.

The accord was signed on December 2, 1997, ending two decades of bush war.

Urging the present neutral government to implement the accord in full, leaders of the indigenous people said successive political governments in the past failed to execute the accord properly because of their limitations due to involvement in massive corruption. But the present government has no such limitations or weaknesses either to any individuals or parties, they noted.

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), a political forum of indigenous communities in the CHT that signed the peace pact with the then Awami League (AL) government, is not holding any programmes this time on the 10th anniversary of the pact.

Rupayan Dewan, a top PCJSS leader, told The Daily Star that they did not take up any programmes this time due to the state of emergency.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Adibasi Ondhikar Andolan, a forum for establishing rights of ethnic minorities in the country, organises a review meeting on 'implementation of peace accord' at the Satya Press Club in Dhaka today.

The external affairs minister, a Bengali, arrived early yesterday morning in an Indian Air Force plane carrying more than 36 tonnes of relief goods, including ready-to-eat meals, milk powder, medicines, water filters and blankets.

He visited two of the worst cyclone-hit areas, Shorokhola and Patharghata, after he met Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and the foreign adviser in Dhaka. Communications Adviser Maj Gen (retd) MA Matin accompanied Mukherjee.

MUKHERJEE DISTRIBUTES RELIEF

As part of his daylong tour of Bangladesh, Pranab Mukherjee distributed relief goods among the cyclone-affected people at Rayenda in Shorokhola upazila yesterday, UNB reports.

A helicopter of Bangladesh Air Force carrying Mukherjee from the capital landed at Rayenda helipad at 3:40pm. He went to an army camp at Rayenda School where local army commander Lieutenant Colonel Sayeed Siddiqui briefed him about the losses caused by cyclone Sidr in the district.

"We need a stock of 18.95 lakh metric tons of rice for food security over the next seven months," he said, adding that currently, the government has a reserve of eight lakh metric tons.

The agriculture ministry report said the November 15 storm has damaged standing crops on 5.53 lakh hectares of land across 30 districts. Of those, 4.18 lakh hectares of Aman crops.

For natural calamities in recent months, the production this year might be 14 lakh metric tons shy of the targeted 32.2 lakh metric tons.

Mukherjee said, "I have come here to convey sympathy to the cyclone-affected people on behalf of my government."

He expressed hope that the affected people would be able to overcome the losses caused by cyclone Sidr. He also visited an army-run water plant at Rayenda.

Mukherjee left for Dhaka at 4:08pm, concluding his relief mission.

Communications Adviser MA Matin, Foreign Secretary Mohammad Towhid Hossain, Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty and Jesseru GOC Maj Gen Rafigul Islam were present during the Indian minister's visit.

Aman

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Higher education

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vying for admission this year against only 24,051 seats. Obviously, about 2.25 lakh students may have to try at the private universities or go abroad. Some may have to get engaged in professional work or remain unemployed, ending their academic career.

The constitution also holds that elections should be completed within the extended timeframe and if the executive committee fails to do so, the committee will have to be relieved at the end of the extension period.

In the past the government has intervened in the FBCCI committee twice. In 1982, the then Syed Chamber of Commerce and Industry President MA Munir was appointed administrator, while in 1989, former FBCCI president Aktheruzzaman Chowdhury Babu was appointed administrator of FBCCI.

CA

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He said assistance from the relief fund is also being provided for other sectors.

"Your combined efforts will help the government provide relief for the affected people and activate their economic activities," he told the contributors.

The CA said the government has started rehabilitation work in various sectors, including agriculture, domestic animals and infrastructure.

He mentioned about Tk 130 crore soft loan for small traders, fishermen, livestock and poultry farmers, which will be distributed by micro-finance providing organisations through PKSF.

The CA said he had talked to the Bangladesh Bank governor and asked him to hold meetings with bankers to provide quick loans for the affected people for their faster rehabilitation. "And the work is getting accelerated following the governor's meetings with the bankers."

He said loans and grants will be given to the affected farmers, fishermen and small traders for their rehabilitation.

Those donated to the relief fund yesterday include Agriculture Secretary Md Nurul Amin, Kafco CEO M Qaiser Jamal, Supreme Court Registrar Iktedar Ahmed, Principal of Khulna Medical College Jalal Ahmed, Managing Director of Citibank NA Mamun Rashid, President of the Association of Cargo Agents of Bangladesh Captain Saifur Rahman, Managing Director of Hamdard Hakim Md Yusif Harun Bhuiyan and Vice-President of Bangladesh Scientific Equipment Traders' Association Md Nasiruddin.

The meeting however did not discuss the draft ordinance on appointment of the election commission.

The chief election commissioner himself drafted the ordinance to enact a law on appointment of the election commission, "Sohul informed.

Academics, however, said they do not think that all these measures of the caretaker government will benefit the nation if seats at the good educational institutions in the country are not increased.

Public universities like those in

CHT accord

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police and Ansar in the CHT.

As per provision of the peace pact, the government has to hand over control of local civil and police administration and the three hill district councils (HDCs) to the CHT Regional Council (RC). But it is yet to be done.

The accord was signed on December 2, 1997, ending two decades of bush war.

Want full execution of the accord, All pro-peace treaty forces have to unite for this."

When contacted, Shantu Larma said, "No comment now. I will tell you when time comes."

The leaders said vital clauses of the accord still remained unimplemented, breeding discontent and frustration among the CHT people, mostly indigenous.

On condition of anonymity, PCJSS leaders alleged that the previous alliance government had no intention to execute the accord. So, instead of taking any steps in this regard, it had violated the pact in various ways.

Noting that the main problem of the CHT concerns land, the leaders said the Land Commission has been formed to solve the complicated land disputes but it still remains dysfunctional. And land problem is getting more and more complicated, they added.

As per the roadmap announced by the EC on July 15, the countrywide task of preparing voter list with photos will be finalised by October next year.

Such a situation is also affecting relationship between the indigenous and Bangla-speaking people in the CHT, the leaders said.

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lashed back at Biman last week for the disorder and flight delays.

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The extended tenure of the present FBCCI executive committee ends on December 6.

Syed Moazzam Hossain, president of Bangladesh Indenting Association, commented that changes in the FBCCI after the present body's tenure expires on Dec 6, will be manifold like Jan 11's political changes in the country has.

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