

Taliban mad over alleged US strike

Say US officials

AP, Washington

The Taliban are unusually angry about the latest suspected U.S. missile strike in Pakistan, a sign a top militant may have died in the attack, officials and residents said Sunday amid reports the death toll rose by two to 24.

Elsewhere in Pakistan's north-west, an official said some 15,000 Afghans had left a tribal region the military is trying to wrest from insurgents, but that tens of thousands more had yet to meet a government ultimatum to get out by Sunday.

The U.S. has ramped up cross-border strikes on alleged al-Qaeda and Taliban targets along Pakistan's side of the border with Afghanistan, straining the two nations' anti-terror alliance.

The U.S. says pockets of Pakistan's border region, especially in its semi-autonomous tribal areas, are bases for militants attacking American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. It has pushed nuclear-armed Pakistan to eliminate the safe havens.

The frontier region is believed to be a possible hiding place for al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, and several Arab militants were said to be among the dead in Friday's strike in North Waziristan tribal region.

Two Pakistani intelligence officials said that over the weekend two people wounded in the attack died at a hospital in Miran Shah, the main town in North Waziristan. The officials sought anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media.

Based on information from informants and agents in the field, the intelligence officials said the Taliban appeared extra-perturbed over the

latest strike. The anger was a signal that a senior militant may have been killed, but that has yet to be confirmed, the officials said.

The insurgents were moving aggressively in the area while using harsh language against locals, including calling them "saleable commodities" a reference to people serving as government spies, the officials said.

Two local residents said Taliban fighters had warned people not to discuss the strike, including with the media, or to inspecting the rubble at the site. The residents asked not to be named for fear of Taliban retaliation.

The strike in Mohamadkhal appeared to be the deadliest of 11 reported cross-border operations by U.S.-led forces since Aug. 20. The area is a stronghold of Jalaluddin Haqqani, a veteran Taliban commander regarded by the U.S. as one of its most dangerous foes.

The U.S. rarely acknowledges such attacks, 1st Lt. Nathan Perry, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan, said he had "no information to give" about the reported attacks. He did not deny U.S. involvement.

The information is nearly impossible to verify independently because of the remote, dangerous nature of the areas.

Taliban spokesmen could not immediately be reached for comment Sunday. Neither could Pakistani government and military spokesmen.

Earlier, however, Pakistan army spokesman Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas said initial reports indicated that 20 or more people were killed. He said there was "speculation" that many were foreign militants, but cautioned that the army was still awaiting a detailed report.

Barapukuria

FROM PAGE 1

The authorities have not given the permission stating that the company should at first conclude the local tender and see if it has really failed to secure enough buyers.

The BCMCL incurred a loss of Tk 128 crore since it started production two years ago due to massive project cost escalation and low coal production.

When the mine project was approved in the early 90's, production cost was estimated at \$35 per tonne and the annual production target was set at two million tonnes of coal for 30 years.

The original project cost was less than Tk 800 crore and it was supposed to launch operation from 2000.

However, the Chinese Supplier's Credit financial package coupled with poor project implementation doubled the project cost to Tk 1,600 crore, while the annual production target nose-dived to 800,000 tonnes a year.

As a result, the coal production cost almost tripled.

While the project drained out huge money from the nation, it immensely profited Hosaif group chief Moazzem Hossain, who had been the local representative of all the Chinese companies concerned.

Brother of an ex-BNP parliamentarian from Feni, Moazzem is an accused in the Barapukuria case file by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Sources say prior to submission of the charge-sheet in the case, Moazzem was tipped off to leave the country.

Cadbury

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"Plasma Plus started the test yesterday. We may get the result within three to four days from that laboratory," said Dr Ashish Ratan Sen, deputy director (testing control) of the laboratory, to The Daily Star.

Following the warning message from the Health Advisor Dr AMM Shawkat Ali on Thursday for not consuming the Cadbury Chocolates for the time being, the BSTI has been collecting the samples of the chocolate since the Eid day and carrying out market surveillance.

Expressing concern over the melamine issue Dr Ashish Ratan Sen also said that deadly presence of melamine in food items might take a serious turn and it seemed the country would have to test melamine in other milk products like biscuits, liquid milk and ice cream, etc also.

He also said that BSTI would not be able to conduct testing of 50 fifty items and it is high time that facilities in other laboratories of the country were developed.

Melamine was found in 11 types of chocolates of Cadbury brand in China. Even in Canada it is found in the milk products. Hongkong-based Cadbury Asia Pacific markets the product.

Earlier, melamine was found only in Chinese powdered milk that had sickened 53,000 children and killed four in China.

As the melamine scare spread, the government of Bangladesh started to test melamine in powdered milk. The BSTI, the department of Chemistry of Dhaka University and a private laboratory have been conducting the testing.

The private laboratory, Plasma Plus has already found melamine in Yashli 1 milk powder, which had been marketed in the country without registration.

AL appears

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"We hope that the election will be held in a free and fair manner on the date announced, and no unresolved matter will have any impact on holding of it," he said while talking to reporters in AL Acting President Zillur Rahman's Gulshan residence in the capital. Ashraf went there to meet Zillur after returning to the capital from his constituency in Kishoreganj.

He also said AL central working committee is planning to meet for bringing necessary amendments to the party constitution in order to get registered with the Election Commission. "We've already finalised our election manifesto," he said adding that they also started selecting party candidates for the national poll.

He demanded total withdrawal of the emergency for holding a credible election.

Ashraf said his party will help the government so that the election cannot be foiled, since the people of every electoral constituency have become enthusiastic about the national election.

He said the people are taking all out preparations for the parliamentary poll.

He also said they are fully prepared to contest in the poll. Saying the discussion about forming a grand electoral alliance under AL's leadership already advanced quite a bit, he added that the details of the formation will be finalised after AL President Sheikh Hasina's return home from abroad.

The AL leader warned that the people will not accept any failure to hold the promised election on the announced date.

About the much talked about proposed talk between Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia ahead of the election, Ashraf said such a talk will not be fruitful without a pre-set agenda.

Khaleda charged

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BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had been granted bail in the case from the High Court (HC) on September 10 this year for four months, while Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Shamsul Islam, and MK Anwar had been granted bail in the case from the same court till framing of charges against them.

The investigation officer (IO) also requested for showing Altaf Chowdhury and Dr Mosharraf Hossain arrested in the case as they had been arrested earlier in other cases, but yet to be shown arrested in Barapukuria graft case.

On September 25, the ACC approved the charge sheet against Khaleda and the other accused in connection with illegally awarding a contract for operating Barapukuria coalmine to a Chinese company.

On the charge sheet, the IO mentioned that the accused caused a loss of almost Tk 159 crore to the public exchequer by illegally awarding the contract to China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC), abusing their power.

The IO also mentioned that the charges brought against the accused were primarily proven and they will be brought to trial.

ACC Assistant Director Shamsul Alam filed the case with Shabbag police station on February 26 this year.

FUGITIVES

The IO showed M Saifur, Motiur Rahman Nizami, Barister Aminul Haque, AKM Mosharraf Hossain, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid, Nazrul Islam, SR Osmani, Mainul Ahsan, Sirajul Islam, and Moazzem Hossain as fugitives in the case.

He also appealed to the court for issuance of arrest warrants against them, and for orders to confiscate their properties, as they did not obtain bail from any court.

THE CASE

Shandong Ludi Consortium was selected as the lowest bidder tender for employing a contractor for production, management, and maintenance of Barapukuria coalmine in Dinajpur.

Suju Coal Mining Group Consortium was the second lowest bidder while China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) consortium's bid was the highest.

Following recommendations from a government committee on purchase, and approval of the erstwhile prime minister, an agreement for the work worth Tk 35.08 crore was signed between Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Ltd and Shandong Ludi Consortium on April 24, 2004.

Instead of submitting bank guarantees and performance guarantees as per the rules, Shandong came up with conditions irrelevant to the agreement. Among other irrelevant conditions

Women and Children Affairs Adviser Rasheda K Chowdhury later joined them at the communications ministry.

The meeting weighed up the government's strategies for negotiation with political parties, sources said.

"We'll brief you on this tomorrow (today)," Zillur told reporters at the education ministry.

The government is supposed to hold two rounds of dialogue, one with the BNP and the other with other parties, to reach a consensus on political reforms and election issues.

Jail term

FROM PAGE 1

10 years and also fine, sources in the EC Secretariat said.

Senior officials in the commission said it means that if any person steals a ballot paper out of the polling station instead of dropping it into the ballot box, they cannot exhibit it before people to question the election process.

In the past, recovery of ballot papers outside polling stations raised questions over the conduct of the polls concerned and keeping this in mind, the EC drafted this proposal, in addition to the existing provisions, to avoid such incidents during or after the December 18 parliamentary polls.

There are provisions in the Representation of the People Order (RPO) that impose strict restriction on defacing or destroying any nomination paper intentionally.

The RPO provisions say without due authority nobody can supply ballot papers to any person, destroy, take, open or otherwise interfere with any ballot box or packets of ballot papers being used for election purpose.

For violation of these provisions also, an individual might be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term, which may extend to 10 years and shall not be less than three years, and also with fine.

REGISTRATION OF PARTIES

Facing time constraints, the EC sent to the government the proposals to ease the procedure for political parties' registration mandatory to contest the parliamentary polls.

If the revised RPO is amended according to the new proposals, political parties will not have to hold national councils to amend their constitutions to meet the registration criterion.

Parties unable to hold councils now can register with the EC on making provisional changes to their constitutions. But their highest policymaking bodies must pass a resolution to have the changes approved at national councils within six months of the first session of ninth parliament.

According to the time frame, political parties willing to get registered must apply to the EC by October 15.

The EC has planned to complete the registration process in October.

they proposed raising the value of the contract.

Even though legally there was no room for allowing anything beyond the signed agreement, the energy and mineral resources ministry suggested that Petrobangla examines the proposals of Shandong, which caused delays.

The government did not go for re-tendering on grounds that there was not enough time for that.

Following manoeuvrings in favour of CMC, the company cut a deal with the government on June 4, 2005, 14 months after the deal with Shandong.

According to tender rules and Public Procurement Regulations 2003, the second lowest bidder, in this case Suju, was supposed to be awarded the job. But the deal went to CMC whose offer was over Tk 158 crore higher than Shandong's.

Suju's bid had been cancelled for not renewing its bid bond, but the company was later shown as an associate of CMC in the contract.

Khaleda Zia was accused in the case as she had been responsible for the ministry in question and any decision had been supposed to be taken with her full knowledge.

Hosaif Group did not participate in the bidding directly, it was the local agent of both the lowest and the highest bidders.

In fact, the Chinese companies worked in collaboration with each other throughout the tender, and Hosaif Group Chairman Moazzem Hossain used his connections to pull off the deal, the first information report of the case read.

Hossain Zillur

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"We're working for positive results," he said on the government's understanding with political parties about reforms and elections.

He ruled out any scope for going back to the days preceding the political changeover on January 11 last year.

He said everyone was working spiritedly to achieve the ultimate goals of qualitative change in politics, a free and fair election and participation of all parties in it.

"We've only three months left in office...we've got to make best use of it to finish all the tasks," he said.

The meeting at the education ministry was the first for the government to formally instruct officials on their duties before and during the elections.

Earlier in the day, Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader, IGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal, Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur discussed the latest political development.

Women and Children Affairs Adviser Rasheda K Chowdhury later joined them at the communications ministry.

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Mirza Azam

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violating the Emergency Power Rules (EPR), a vacation bench of the HC comprising Justice Mohammad Anwarul Haque and Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury passed the order.

Counsel for the petitioner advocate Motahar Hossain Sajju yesterday told The Daily Star that there was no legal bar to the release of his client, since he secured bails in all the cases against him.

Police arrested Mirza Azam on charge of violating the EPR soon after his release from jail on bail on September 18 last in connection with a case filed by the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) accusing him of amassing illegal wealth.

The same day the Paltan thana police filed a general diary and arrested Azam from near the GPO crossing in the city when he, along with his party-men, was making an attempt to break the EPR section 16 (2), according to the prosecution.

The HC had earlier granted him bail on September 16 for three months.

On July 16 this year, Azam was first sent to jail after Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court here denied him bail on surrender.

Mahasaptami

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and supplication of the devotees through Bodhon rituals during the Mahashashthi puja.

Durga is welcomed with much fanfare amidst the beats of Dhak. Unveiling the face of the idol is the main ritual on this day.

Kalaparambho, the ritual performed before the commencement of the puja preceded Bodhon, Amorton and Adhibas.

On Mahasaptami today, the devotees will recite hymns and offer flowers seeking blessings from Durga the Durgatashini -- saviour of humankind from all evils.

According to the lunar schedule, Mahasaptami puja will start by 9:57am today.

Around 22,000 mandaps have already been set up across the country including 165 in Dhaka. Last year the number of mandaps was 20,000.

Bakshibazar, Shankharibazar, Tantiabazar, Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University, Ramna Kali Mandir, Dhakeswari Mandir, Thataribazar, Ramkrishna Mission, Pranab Math, Siddeswari Kali Mandir, Dayaganj, Rayerbazar, Rajbarah, Rishipara were a few of the prominent mandaps that have been given a decorative look with colourful designs and lights.

Meanwhile, extra law enforcers have been deployed around the puja venues to ensure security and to avoid any untoward situations during the Durga puja festivities.

Adviser for Law and Religion AF Hassan Arif and Manik Lal Samaddar, special assistant to the chief adviser, Home Secretary Abdul Karim, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Nayeem Ahmed, Rapid Action Battalion Director General Khandker Hasan Mahmud are scheduled to visit Mohanagar Puja Mandap at Dhakeswari Jatiya Mandir today, says a press release of Mohanagar Sarbojanen Puja Committee.

Bangladesh Puja Udyapan Parishad (BPUP) Adviser Major Gen (ret) CR Dutta Beer Utmam at a press conference yesterday said the increase in number of mandaps this year indicates communal unity among people in the country.

DPUJ leaders demanded that the government ensure equal rights of people of all faiths, giving Durga puja state status, four-day vacation on this occasion and celebrating Janmashtami of Sri Krishna at state level.

Ex-BNP MP Hashem

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CASE AGAINST SALAHUDDIN

ACC Deputy Director Shahfiqu Rahman Bhuiyan, also the IO of the case, submitted the final report to the Dhaka CMM Court saying the charges brought against Salahuddin, his wife Shamsunnahar and their son Robin were not proved.

The case was filed against the three with Shyampur Police Station on June 25 last year on charge of misusing government relief materials.

VIP protection

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DMP Commissioner Naim Ahmed told The Daily Star, "As the DMP does not have sufficient number of vehicles, it has to requisition private vehicles."

Sources said all the police stations and branches of the police department lack sufficient number of vehicles. Police do not conduct patrol duty on time and cannot rush to places timely due to this reason.

According to sources, the DMP inaugurated two new police stations on September 22 and the inauguration of six more police stations is in the pipeline. The DMP was given only four pickup trucks for these stations.

AKM Hafiz Akhter, (DC-Transport and Estate), told The Daily Star, "The two new police stations were given one new pickup truck each. They were also given one old pickup truck each, which were taken from other police stations."

According to sources, the DMP with around 23,000 policemen has only 540 vehicles and most of them are very old. Only 45 of these vehicles are new and the new ones are generally used for protecting VIPs.

Pak MPs on Militancy

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in the wake of a string of attacks across the country, including a suicide bombing last month that destroyed the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, killing 60 people.

It also comes amid a spate of strikes by suspected US drones on alleged al-Qaeda and Taliban hideouts in Pakistan, which have raised tensions between Washington and Islamabad, a key ally in the US-led "war on terror".

Zardari made the decision to hold the briefing at a meeting Saturday with army chief General Ashfaq Kayani and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, the government said in a statement Sunday.

General Kayani discussed with President Zardari the ongoing strife in tribal areas and the ways to address the issue of terrorism and extremism," the statement said.

The joint session of parliament will open on Wednesday at 5:00 pm (11:00 GMT), it said.

Gilani has asked the leaders of the National Assembly and the Senate to ensure that all lawmakers attend what he called a "very important session".

Army and intelligence officials are expected to discuss military operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Pakistan's lawless tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan.

The session is expected to be devoted to building consensus on the government's anti-terror strategy, as some right-wing religious parties oppose the military campaign and instead favour negotiations with the militants.

The United States has stepped up attacks on militants in Pakistani territory since a new civilian government came to power in Islamabad in March and the incidents have become an issue in the US president's

Extortionists storm

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The criminals shot security guard Babul at the entrance of the hotel as he tried to shut the collapsible gate hearing gunshots.

When the hotel employees screamed for help, the gunmen sprayed bullets indiscriminately leaving the three pedestrians injured.

The wounded were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

Abul Hossain said before the Eid the criminals demanded money from hotel owner Alamgir Hossain who refused to meet their demand.

Police suspect that the same criminals made the attack.

34 killed

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Nanayakara said four other rebels and a soldier were killed in clashes in the Vavuniya and Welioya regions.

Soldiers overran five rebel bunkers in the Mullaitivu district Saturday, killing five rebels, the military said.

The clashes left nine rebel bunkers in government hands, it said in a statement.

Rebel officials could not be contacted for comment because most communication lines to guerrilla-dominated areas have been severed.

Most independent observers and reporters are barred from the war zone, making it difficult to verify the military's claims.

Tamil Tiger rebels have fought since 1983 to create an independent homeland for the country's ethnic minority Tamils who faced marginalisation by successive governments controlled by ethnic Sinhalese.

More than 70,000 people have been killed in the violence.

20 killed in Afghan

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Sakhi Dad Mujahid, was held carrying a satellite telephone containing the phone numbers of top members of the ousted fundamentalist regime including its supreme, Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Afghan officials said at the time he had been a secretary to Mullah Omar under the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule.

The United States invaded Afghanistan in late 2001 and toppled the hardline Taliban government for harbouring al-Qaeda leaders. Despite their efforts, the most senior leaders of the Taliban and other radical groups have escaped capture.

Meanwhile, up to 23 suspected militants were killed in a series of operations by Afghan and foreign troops in Afghanistan, officials said Saturday, as a senior sports official was found dead.

The body of Alikhail, the head of sports for the eastern province of Paktika who went by only one name, was found dumped by the side of the road Saturday, a day after he was kidnapped by Taliban rebels, a provincial official said.

"The Taliban killed him," the official, who asked not to be identified, told AFP.

The insurgents -- in government between 1996 and 2001 -- regularly target officials of the new administration in their violent campaign.