

# 70 militants killed in Pak operation

Offensive against militants expanded

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, AP, Islamabad

At least 70 militants were killed by the security forces while nearly 450 terrorists were holed up in Buner area, Pakistan's interior ministry chief Rehman Malik said yesterday, adding "we will not tolerate them anymore."

Pakistan deployed troops and bombed Taliban positions in a district near the capital Tuesday, the military said, in an expansion of an offensive against militants seemingly emboldened by a much-criticised peace deal.

The operation in Buner follows urgent calls from the United States for Islamabad to step up its fight against the militants, who moved into the region this month from the nearby Swat Valley. They set up checkpoints, patrolled streets and warned locals to abide by strict interpretations of Islam.

It will cause major strains on an already shaky peace deal in the Malakand region, to which Buner belongs. The truce has been widely viewed in the West as a surrender to militants slowly expanding their grip over the nuclear-armed nation.

Malik told reporters at least 70 militants had been killed in the Dir operation so far, while 450 others were still present in

Buner, GeoTV reported.

On the possibility of nuclear weapons falling in Taliban hands, Malik said Pakistan's nuclear assets were safe.

He said that Lower Dir was under the complete control of security forces. However, the extremists were still active in Buner district, Dawn reported.

Addressing a seminar, Malik categorised the Taliban elements, who were active in Buner and Lower Dir as extremists.

He said, "We will not tolerate them anymore."

He said there has been an attack on the Frontier Constabulary in the past 24 hours and there have been reports of shops being looted.

"Some of the Taliban were forcing the villagers to join them," he was quoted as saying.

He added that all efforts are being made to contain the activities of these extremists who are threatening the villagers about imposing their system by force.

He warned, "No one will be allowed to challenge the writ of the government."

He reiterated that if peace was not restored in the region, the Swat peace agreement would be scrapped.

The fresh offensive by the security forces has come as

## 4 BDR men held

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BDR headquarters.

The arrested BDR men are deputy assistant directors (DADs) Abdul Jalil and Mirza Habibur Rahman and sepoys Selim Reza and Kajol Ali.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) made the arrests acting on information and also verifying the video footages.

Later, the four BDR personnel were placed on a seven-day remand each after the CID produced them before a Dhaka Court with a prayer for a 10-day remand for each of them.

In the forwarding report placed before the court, investigation officer of the mutiny case and CID senior assistant superintendent Abdul Kader Akand has mentioned that Selim and Kajol killed most of the BDR officials during the mutiny.

About the two DADs, the report said they led the Feb 25-26 carnage inside the Pilkhana headquarters of BDR.

According to the Rab, the arrested BDR soldiers were also involved in the mutiny planning.

Sources said jawan Selim asked the senior officers, including the slain Director General of BDR Major Gen Shakil Ahmed, to come out of Darbar Hall at around 10:22am on February 25 and opened fire on the officers. Later another jawan appeared on the scene and spread bullets on the senior officers, killing almost all of them on the spot.

During interrogation, many BDR jawans said jawans Selim and Kajol led a group of 10 to 12 BDR men in looting firearms from the armoury near the quarter guard inside Pilkhana on February 25.

Another group of 10 to 12 BDR jawans led by Altaf and Jasm also looted arms and ammunition from the armoury on February 25.

Moreover, DADs Jalil and Habib were among those who went to the Banani residence of an important person to provide the man with leaflets mentioning the demands of BDR jawans prior to the BDR Darbar.

Besides, DAD Jalil was also one of the members of the team, which met with prime minister Sheikh Hasina at her Jamuna residence while the mutiny was going on.

During interrogation of earlier arrested BDR jawans, investigators also came to know that jawans Selim and Kajol were present in two meetings of jawans from where the jawans planned to stage the mutiny to realise their demands.

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested the four after screening them out from the BDR jawans and handed them over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) yesterday after primary investigation.

Meanwhile, the army personnel yesterday recovered another firearm from Pilkhana during their search.

## AL factions clash

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imposed at 4:20pm following the clash that left 10 persons injured, police sources said.

Police said Md Hazzar Ali 75, son of late Md Zahurul Haque of village Mondolpara of Parbatipur Sadar upazila was critically injured and undergoing treatment in Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

According to police and local residents the clash erupted when a faction of the local unit of AL led by Foyas Alam Biggan, leader of Parbatipur Upazila Hotel Sramik League also a former Banadesh Chhatra League (BCL) leader, at 2:00pm descended upon fruit vendors who set up their shops on the disputed piece of land, and drove them away from there.

As the news of the attack spread, another faction of the party led by Md Amzad Hossain, Organisational Secretary of Parbatipur upazila AL, who had the possession of the land and rented it out to the fruit vendors, rushed to the scene with his gang and retaliated.

In the ensuing clash both groups attacked each other with sharp weapons and sticks, creating a panic in the entire upazila headquarters area, which forced all shopkeepers to pull down their shutters.

Biggan and his supporters also set ablaze some roadside shops and looted a number of them during the clash. Later Parbatipur fire fighters doused the fire.

Police arrived at the spot

after being informed and charged batons to disperse the clashing goons. Around 4:20pm Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Parbatipur Protob Chandra Biswas imposed section 144 to bring the situation under control.

Police officials quoting witnesses said the two factions of AL have long been clashing over the piece of land owned by the mosque.

Mosque sources said there are 23 decimals of land owned by the mosque, and Azad faction of AL grabbed 3 decimals.

Around Monday midnight some people damaged a part the boundary wall of Natun Bazar Jamey Mosque sparking tension among the mosque going Muslims and the AL factions.

After the incident the mosque committee informed State Minister for Forest and Environment Md Mostafizur Rahman Fizar about it, and the state minister instructed the UNO to resolve the problem.

Md Mirza Abdus Salam, the officer-in-charge of Parbatipur police, said the situation was under control last night.

Kalequzzaman Mukul, a member of the mosque committee, said the state minister would hold a meeting last night and the mosque committee to resolve the dispute, but till filing of this report late last night the meeting did not take place.

Establishment and Administration Affairs Adviser to the PM H T Imam spoke on the occasion as special guest while BPATC Rector Md Abdus Salam Khan gave welcome speech.

## HC weighs

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Advocate Manzill Murshid, a lawyer of the Supreme Court, filed the contempt petition as public interest litigation in the wake of a series of reports published in The Daily Star stating that the Buriganga waters have been seriously polluted as the industries ministry and the DoE have not taken any measures.

Murshid told The Daily Star he filed the petition since the respondents did not take legal steps in preventing pollution following the HC judgment.

Hearing of the petition might be held at the HC today, he added.

Upon a writ petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), the HC division bench of Justice Md Joymal Abedin and Justice ABM Khairul Haque on July 15, 2001 delivered a judgment with some directives for controlling industrial pollution.

In that judgment, an HC bench ordered the DG to ensure compliance with the environment conservation rules at the industrial units and factories under "Red" (highest polluter) category within one year and report compliance to the court within six weeks thereafter.

The bench also ordered the DG to ensure adequate and sufficient measures to control pollution at the industrial units and factories under categories of "Orange Ka and Kha" within two years.

The court in 2001 also ordered the industries secretary to ensure that no new industrial units and factories be set up in Bangladesh without arranging adequate measures to control pollution as required by the Environment Conservation Act, 1995 and the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997.

Bela lawyer advocate Iqbal Kabir said yesterday's HC bench observed that records don't suggest the DG reported in compliance with the court.

### Cricket WC

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the opening ceremony and were given the two quarterfinals," revealed BCB media committee chairman Jalun Yunus.

India will host the final and one semifinal while Sri Lanka will stage the other semifinal.

The other two quarterfinal will each be hosted by the two co-hosts.

India will host 29 of the 49 matches across eight venues and Sri Lanka will host 12 games in three venues.

The World Cup's organising committee also decided to shift the tournament secretariat from Lahore to Mumbai. BCCI's chief administrative officer Ratnakar Shetty was appointed the event's managing director in place of Pakistani banker Salman Butt. The organising committee, headed by ICC vice-president Sharad Pawar, will include an operations and planning group comprising the Bangladesh Cricket Board senior vice-president Mahbubul Anam, Indian board secretary N Srinivasan, Sri Lanka's Duleep Mendis and Shetty.

The food ministry in its report also said the government has taken various measures to ensure food security in the country. According to the report, as of April 18 the current stock of food grains is 9,59,870 tonnes, of which 7,98,280 tonnes rice and 1,61,590 tonnes wheat.

## Govt to build

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month.

A different report submitted by the housing ministry to the committee, said 11,104 residential plots will be created in three residential projects - Uttara, Purbachol, and Jhilmili.

The government will also build over 1,03,280 different types of apartments in those housing projects.

The report added that 62,000 of those apartments will be built under Purbachol Project, 21,000 will be built under Uttara Project, and 20,280 will be built under Jhilmili Project.

The state minister said the apartments will be distributed through a 'transparent process'.

The ministry report also said an additional 3,380 apartments will be built in Mirpur and Mohakhali for government employees.

The committee asked the chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) to submit a detailed report on how many and which apartment buildings were built on lands that were developed by filling up sections of lakes in the city's Gulshan, Banani and Uttara areas.

It also decided to publish a list of government residential plots which were re-allotted during the last BNP-led four-party alliance government and the successive immediate

## Tannery

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cancelled the deal on allegations that the firm had submitted false documents about its experience.

The WBDC JV then went for a legal battle on cancellation of awarding the deal to it. So, the government cannot go for a fresh tender until it is over, the official pointed out.

Setting up the CETP will take around 15 months when work on it starts.

In view of the environmental and health hazards it posed, the government took the initiative to relocate Hazaribagh tannery units to Savar in 2003. And it is scheduled to hand over a 200-acre industrial estate for this to the tanners by next year.

Asked about this, Industries Minister Dilip Barua said shifting of the tannery industry from its present site to Savar is being delayed due to a legal battle. "We will go for re-tender on CETP when the case is over."

The government has already completed building necessary infrastructure at the new industrial estate. And it has already given 195 plots to 154 tannery owners, the minister said.

Tanners demand just setting up of the CETP, and have agreed to shift their factories when it is there, he mentioned.

But tannery owners are demanding some more facilities including compensation to run the industry at the new site.

Tipu Sultan, former chairman of Bangladesh Finished Leather Goods Industry Association, said the decisions of a government-formed committee for leather industry during the BNP-led alliance rule are yet to be implemented.

Senior officials of the food ministry told the meeting that the ministry has started allocating 250 tonnes of food grains to each lawmaker, who will distribute the food grains among social and educational institutions in their constituencies for their development, Atique said.

Shifting of the industry will involve Tk 4,500-crore investment, he said. "We hope to get necessary support from the present government."

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