

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

Western governments, including that of the US, raised serious concerns about the peace pact in the north-western Swat region and accused the nuclear-armed country of abdicating to the Taliban.

Sufi Mohammed's Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat Muhammadi and the NWFP government Feb 16 inked a controversial peace deal under which Sharia laws would be imposed in the Malakand division in return for the Taliban laying down their arms.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari had approved the imposition of Islamic sharia law in the Malakand division and Swat April 13, nearly two months after headline cleric Sufi Mohammad brokered a peace deal between the regional government and the rebel.

Although the government began setting up Sharia courts, the emboldened militants refused to disarm and instead expanded their control over Swat's neighbouring districts of Buner and Shangla.

Khoka

FROM PAGE 16 Asked if the chairperson gave any hint about appointing him as the convener or president of the next committee, Khoka said, "I do not know what the party will do but as a politician I am ready to perform any task given by the party chief."

A senior leader of the city unit BNP said, "Actually, Khoka has no alternative for running party activities in the city as all of his competitors are highly criticised for either corruption or terrorism."

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain dissolved the Dhaka city unit committee in June last year following conflicts within the party between reformist and pro-Khaleda factions. Khaleda was behind bars at that time.

The unit is now divided into two factions led by Khoka and Mirza Abbas.

After the 1/11 changeover Khoka attended several programmes organised by expelled secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. Mirza Abbas was in jail at that time and a court convicted him on corruption charges.

Followers of both Khoka and Abbas want to see their leader at the helm of the next city unit committee. Khoka's supporters allege that Khandaker Delwar is backing Abbas while Abbas' men have threatened that they would not tolerate any person who sided with the reformist faction after January 11, 2007.

Hasina

FROM PAGE 1 accountability in administration as making of a welfare-oriented administration could not be possible without it.

"Our government will not politicise the administration like the previous one. None would be spared if found involved in partisan activities", she said adding that her government wants to ensure maximum welfare of the people.

"We have come to power to bring changes with the Vision-2021 programme to be implemented by the government officials."

The premier said changing the day means change the fate of the poor by reducing gap between rich and poor. "We want to ensure the basic rights—food, clothing, shelter, education and treatment—of the people granted by the constitution," she added.

Hasina also told the function that Bangladesh could not attain its desired development yet as military and military-backed forces ruled the country frequently in the past with disregard for people's welfare, reports UNB.

Not only in Bangladesh but in many other countries of the world it has been proved that without democracy a nation cannot achieve its cherished development, the PM said.

"The unconstitutional governments used the administration and the country's institutions at their sweet will. That's why transparency and accountability was not established in the administration, which resulted in lack of development in the country," she said.

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

FROM PAGE 1 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 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 Joyntul 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

FROM PAGE 16 the opening ceremony and were given the two quarterfinals," revealed BCB media committee chairman Jalal 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.

Govt to build

FROM PAGE 1 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 Kartipakkha (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

The DoE conducted a survey and identified 903 industries and factories as polluters and published the list in a gazette notification on August 7, 1986. The number increased to 1,176 in another DoE survey in 1995.

Bela sought implementation of the gazette notification of the polluting industries to reduce industrial pollution, said Kabir.

"Records show the DG has not yet submitted the report to the court," he said. "Nor has the industries secretary ensured compliance with the environment law for new industries and factories in many cases since the court's direction."

The list of 903 polluting industries included 176 tanneries, five paper and pulp industries, 16 sugar mills, three distilleries, 57 iron and steel mills, 298 textile industries, five fertiliser industries, 25 insecticide and pesticide industries, 23 chemicals industries, 92 jute industries, three cement factories, 34 rubber and plastic industries and 166 pharmaceuticals.

Most of the industrial units are rated under "Red" category in the rules.

MPs readying

FROM PAGE 16 standing committee on food and disaster management ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Atiur Rahman Atique, a member of the committee, said they were informed that the circulars would be amended before June.

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.

The government is implementing 34,555 projects in 481 upazilas under 64 districts with an allocation of 3.61 lakh tonnes of food grains under the food-for-work programmes in the current financial year, said a food ministry report placed at the committee meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The report said the government has also allocated 3.67 lakh tonnes of food grains under test relief programmes for the present fiscal year.

In the inaugural session of the ninth parliament, lawmakers blasted the last caretaker government for amending the circulars to keep them away from implementation of the food-for-work and test relief programmes. They demanded that the food ministry scrap the circulars and engage them in the activities of these programmes.

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.

Tannery

FROM PAGE 1 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 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 ministers 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.

The decisions concern facilities including soft loan and Tk 250-crore compensation, he said.

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

Padma Bridge

FROM PAGE 16 University with its Vice-chancellor Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury in the chair.

Talking to The Daily Star, he said "I have already got a copy of the report with a design of the bridge to be formally made public with the presence of our all donor agencies on April 30," adding, "Already we have funds in hands. Once we get more funds from donor agencies we will start construction of the bridge."

Earlier on January 13, the minister said construction of the proposed bridge would start in 2011 on river Padma connecting Mawa in Munshiganj with Janzira in Madaripur.

The volume of land to be affected by the bridge construction in Madaripur district has already been assessed, said the minister and added that it is yet to be done for Shariatpur and Munshiganj districts.

He said Bangladesh is now facing the challenge of becoming a middle income country with limited agricultural land against the increasing population, adding, "the country need land both for agriculture and establishing basic infrastructures."

Abul Hossain stressed the need for more industrialisation as Bangladesh is at the 'crossroad' of a new development path' to become a middle income country.

The three-month long postgraduate certificate course on 'Management of Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation' (MLARR), designed by Brac University in collaboration with the World Bank, DFID and AusAid, will start from May 17.

Australian High Commissioner in Dhaka Justin Lee also spoke on the occasion.

Hot spell

FROM PAGE 16 drinks from roadside stalls as they may carry water-borne viruses due to the unhygienic conditions of the stalls.

Talking to The Daily Star, the senior scientists of ICDDR,B said that 60 percent of the patients coming to the ICDDR,B are suffering from severe diarrhoea and a significant number are also suffering from cholera.

Meanwhile, more than 512 patients sought treatment at ICDDR,B in the city from yesterday afternoon.

ICDDR,B has been experiencing almost three times its usual patients. Doctors however say that around 30 percent of patients seeking treatment at the hospital could be treated at home.

Prof Shahadat Hossain, senior scientist and head of Longer Stay Unit of the centre of ICDDR,B said most patients are rushing to the hospital out of panic.

The number of patients who sought treatment at ICDDR,B was 7,085 in January, 7,949 in February, 19,116 in March and 19,477 in April till yesterday.

In April 2006 13,150 people were admitted to ICDDR,B, 8,457 in April 2007 and 13,932 in April 2008," Dr Shahadat said.

A total of 2,240 patients were admitted to hospitals in 48 districts in the last 24 hours, the control room of the Health Directorate said.

WHO helpless

FROM PAGE 16 "If a person has been exposed or infected... the person might not be symptomatic at the airport," he said. "We learn as we go on. SARS was a huge learning experience for all of us."

The WHO raised its flu pandemic alert level from three to four on Monday night -- signalling a "significant increase in the risk of a pandemic."

Keiji Fukuda, acting WHO assistant director-general for health, security and the environment, said late Monday that given the widespread nature of the virus, all corners of the world are at potential risk.

"I think that in this age of global travel, where people move around in airplanes so quickly, there is no region to which this virus could not spread," Fukuda said.

The outbreak was too "widespread to make containment a feasible" strategy, he added.

Nevertheless, he stressed that the UN health agency did not recommend closing borders or restricting travel.

"With the virus being widespread... closing borders or restricting travel really has very little effects in stopping the movement of this virus," he said.

Fukuda's line was echoed by the European Union health commissioner Androulla Vassiliou who said that while precautionary measures were advisable, "at this juncture I don't see any point on restricting travelling."

But reflecting the split in how to deal with the outbreak, France joined Britain in advising against all but essential travel to Mexico.

The sense of gloom was compounded by predictions from leading experts that a pandemic was now all but inevitable.

"It is very likely we are at the beginning of a pandemic. We are near there," said Yuen Kwok-yung, head of microbiology at the University of Hong Kong.

And Dmitry Lvov, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Virology, said: "The risk of a pandemic in the world is very high."

The Mexican government meanwhile said the probable national death toll from the virus had risen to 152, while the number of cases under observation reached 1,614.

Faster and more effective laboratory tests for the flu were to begin Tuesday, Health Minister Jose Angel Cordova said.

"We're in the decisive moment of the crisis. The number (of deaths) will continue rising," Cordova said.

Mexico City, home to around 20 million people, remained eerily quiet with the capital's zoos, museums, churches, courts and many restaurants closed.

British tour operators, including Thomas Cook, halted holidays to Mexico after two people who returned to Scotland from a honeymoon in the resort town of Cancun fell ill with the swine flu virus.

Apart from Britain, the only confirmed case of the virus in Europe was in Spain but while suspected cases were being

Bhola arms

FROM PAGE 1 Hassan Saifuddin Badal, Moulana Muhammad Russell, Jasim, Abdul Halim, Abul Kalam, Mohiuddin, Kawmi Madrasa Oikya Parishad leader Moulana Mufti Mohiuddin, Humayun Ahmed, a local primary school teacher Abul Kalam and Mizanur Rahman are the other charge-sheeted accused.

Of them, the last five are still at large.

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) found the arms factory inside the madrasa-cum-orphanage on March 24.

During the bust, they arrested four suspected militants—Abul Kalam, Abdul Halim, Jasim and Moulana Mohammad Russell.

Initially, Faisal was not made accused in any of the two cases filed in connection with the arms recovery.

Two days after the arms seizure, his relatives in Dhaka and UK claimed he had been detained since March 25. The law enforcement agencies, however, kept denying arresting him.

After days of mystery, Rab finally declared on April 6 that they arrested Faisal, 42, along with his close associate Badal in Gazipur in the early hours that day.

The charge sheet is based on confessional statements made by Faisal, Badal and Moulana Russell, and the information gleaned in interrogations.

Both Faisal and Badal in their statements said Mohiuddin had long been building up stock of the weapons.

Sheikh Muhammad Ali, deputy assistant director of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-8, filed the two cases on March 24—one under the arms act and the other under Anti-Terrorism Act 2008.

Eleven people were made accused in the cases.

SI Rafiqul said Faisal's name was included in the charge sheet after he confessed to having knowledge of the arms and ammunition stash.

probed in Germany and Austria.

A total of 44 people are thought to have been infected in the United States while Canada has six cases.

And in a further illustration of its global reach, Israel and New Zealand both confirmed their first swine flu casualties.

In Asia, Thai medical authorities placed a woman in quarantine in hospital while South Korea investigated a "probable" victim. Australia meanwhile probed 70 possible cases.

WHO officials in China said they were investigating several people with suspicious symptoms, but played down the chances that any were likely infected.

"Swine flu is an international problem now, it's crossed two continents, it's got to be dealt with by international agreements," said British Prime Minister Gordon Brown as his government called a meeting of its COBRA crisis cell.

Five suspected cases of swine flu in Austria

AFF, Vienna

Austrian officials said Tuesday five suspected cases of swine flu have been detected in the country, one in the north and four in Vienna.

A hospital in Steyr, Upper Austria, confirmed a television report that a 28-year-old woman just back from a trip to Mexico had been quarantined after exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

An initial test to establish whether she was indeed infected with swine flu was inconclusive and the results of a second test by the Institute of Virology in Vienna were still outstanding.

Health Minister Alois Stoeger at a new conference later Tuesday said four other suspected cases had been reported in the Austrian capital.

These four people had also recently travelled to Mexico and the likelihood was that they had caught the virus from other humans rather than animals, Stoeger said.

Further tests were being carried out to establish whether they were indeed suffering from swine flu or H1N1 virus with the results due Wednesday.

Melting woes

FROM PAGE 16 impacts of melting ice on the Arctic and mountain areas worldwide.

Nobel Laureate Al Gore and Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Store were co-hosting the daylong conference in Tromsø, the polar city of Norway, on the eve of ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council to be held today.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Ambassador to the Nordic countries Muhammed Azizul Haque and director to the foreign minister Nazrul Islam attended the conference.

Former US vice president Al Gore in his presentation said climate change is hitting hard which is much more than it was anticipated past. The glaciers have been shrinking rapidly particularly for the last five years.

"Each one meter rise of sea level would displace one hundred million people and make them climate refugees," said Al Gore urging the global leaders to act quickly and positively to reduce impact of the climate change.

Citing a new scientific discovery, Al Gore said, the glacier melting is resulting in release of the methane gas from underneath the ice sheet.

"If releasing of the methane gas continues it would double the effect due to climate changes we could imagine," he said.

Gahr Store said climate change is happening faster and in a dramatically more visible way in the Arctic and Antarctic than anywhere else on the earth.

Citing recent studies, Gahr said, almost three degrees Celsius have risen on the Antarctica Peninsula, making it the most rapidly warming region in the Southern Hemisphere.

He hoped that the global leaders will come with stronger policies to reduce global emission of greenhouse gases saying its strong and rapid decreases must be our main message to the UN climate change conference to be held in December.

The conference brought together ministers, climate scientists and journalists aiming to produce a joint statement of the Arctic region and the Himalayan nations as an outcome of the conference that can provide input for the climate conference to be held in Copenhagen in December, 2009.

4 BDR men held

FROM PAGE 1 BDR headquarters.

The arrested BDR men are deputy assistant directors (DADs) Abdul Jalil and Mirza Habibur Rahman and sepoy 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 Kahar 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.

AL factions clash

FROM PAGE 16 imposed at 4:20pm following the clash that left 10 persons injured, police sources said.

Police said Md Hazrat 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 Foyzal Alam Biggan, President of Parbatipur Upazila Hotel Sramik League also a former Bar Adesh 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 H