

Militants claim responsibility of Russian dam blast

AFF, Moscow

An Islamist group claimed yesterday it caused the disaster at Russia's largest hydroelectric plant, as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited the site and acknowledged 75 people were killed in the tragedy.

Russian investigators denied the claim by Riyadus Salikhiin, a militant group with roots in Chechnya, that it had hit the power station on Monday as part of a new campaign of "economic war" in Russia.

The claim, posted on rebel website Kavkazcenter.com, also said the group had carried out a suicide bombing at a police headquarters in Russia's Ingushetia region that killed two dozen people the same day as the dam disaster.

There was no way to check the veracity of the claims, which the website said it received by email. Officials insisted the dam tragedy was caused by a technical fault and there was no evidence of an attack.

"Russian security service explosives experts have found no trace of explosive material at the site of the accident," said Vladimir Markin, spokesman for the investigative committee of state prosecutors.

"Various theories for the cause of the accident are under investigation. However there has been no confirmation of the theory of a terrorist act," Markin said, according to newsgroups.

The rebel statement said militants had carried out an attack at the power plant in southern Siberia by placing an anti-tank grenade in the turbine hall on a timer and later detonating it.

"Praise to Allah, on August 17 an act of sabotage was carried out at the Sayano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric plant that had been carefully thought out and prepared for a long time," the statement said.

Putin, on a visit to the plant Friday, indicated that 75 people had been killed in the accident, which officials say took place when a massive flood engulfed the main turbine hall.

"We see what has happened, we know what has happened. There's no need to pretend that there's something unclear about this to someone," Putin said, after officials announced 47 people were killed and 28 missing.

"Steel can be restored but people will not be brought back. This is the biggest tragedy," Putin said.

Essentials' prices

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Despite holiday people thronged city kitchen markets throughout the day yesterday ahead of Ramadan, the month of fasting for the Muslims.

Karwan Bazar, the largest wholesale kitchen market in the capital, along with other kitchen markets was buzzing with shoppers. Heated exchanges between shoppers and traders over prices of essentials were seen in different places.

Especially the essentials that are consumed more during Ramadan are getting pricier, said both customers and sellers.

Price of green chilli climbed up to Tk 140-200 a kg yesterday although it was selling for Tk 100-150 just a day ago.

A trader in Karwan Bazar was selling green chilli for Tk 140 a kg yesterday while another trader in a nearby shop in the same market was selling the same quality chilli for Tk 170.

The chilli was selling for Tk 200 a kg in Ibrahimpur kitchen market, Tk 180 a kg in the Hatirpul kitchen market and Tk 160 a kg in Nimtoli Bazar.

Prices of aubergine of different varieties whose fried slices are a popular iftar item ranged between Tk 35 and 65 yesterday compared to Tk 30 and 50 per kg a day before. Price of potato went up to Tk 28-30 per kg, which was sold for Tk 26-28 a day ago.

Prices of both local and imported varieties of onion jumped in both the markets

The rebel statement said that also on Monday an "operation" was carried out to destroy the occupying police forces in Nazran, the main city of the increasingly violent Caucasus region of Ingushetia.

It said a suicide bomber broke through the gates of the police headquarters in a car "and then set off his explosives".

According to the latest official toll, 25 people were killed in the Nazran attack. Investigators did not immediately comment on the veracity of the Islamist group's claim of responsibility.

The dam disaster and the Ingushetia attack came amid mounting violence in Russia's overwhelmingly Muslim northern Caucasus region, where Islamists are waging an insurgency against the pro-Kremlin local authorities.

In the latest Caucasus violence on Friday, four policemen were killed in the capital of Chechnya in a double suicide bombing carried out by attackers riding bicycles, Russian officials said.

Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov praised the slain police who he said had given up their lives to prevent even greater casualties, the Interfax news agency reported.

Riyadus Salikhiin is on a blacklist of groups, maintained by the US State Department, which are not allowed entry into the United States because of their links to terrorist activities.

In June, the group claimed responsibility for a bomb attack that badly injured the president of Ingushetia, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov.

Riyadus Salikhiin calls itself a "martyrs' brigade" and was previously led by Shamil Basayev, the notorious Chechen warlord who masterminded the Beslan school hostage-taking of 2004 and was killed in 2006.

More recently the group has said that its commander is Chechen guerrilla leader Doku Umarov, head of the self-proclaimed "Caucasus Emirate" which wants to establish an Islamic state across Russia's North Caucasus.

In its statement Friday, the group said it had decided earlier this year at a meeting of its leadership to "activate an economic war against Russia on its territory."

"To carry out this task, sabotage groups were set up and sent to numerous regions of Russia with the aim of carrying out acts of industrial sabotage."

Bolt smashes

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at the Beijing Olympics. Bolt has become the only man ever to hold the 100 and 200 Olympic and world titles as well as the world records at the same time.

Panama's Alonso Edward was second with a time of 19.81 and American Wallace Spearmon third.

The top five sprinters all clocked under 20 seconds.

"I had nothing to lose," Bolt said. "I went out there and just did my best."

"I was kind of tired for yesterday, but in the warm-ups I was feeling good so I decided what the heck -- let's come out here and try for the world record."

"I ran hard and I got it, and I'm proud of myself. You could see the look on my face, I was really trying hard, I was digging, I was giving everything I got."

"It was all for the fans - I knew they were coming out (to see something special)."

Bolt, a day short of his 23rd birthday, was unfazed by a false start triggered by Frenchman David Alerte and played up to the cameras in his usual way.

Once the starter's pistol went off, the Jamaican bolted from the blocks and within 20 metres he had grabbed the lead he would never relinquish.

He raced down the straight well ahead of everyone else, with only the clock to beat. He caught a glimpse of his time just at the finish line and saw that 11 hundredths had been knocked off yet again.

Bolt had also demolished his own 100m world record on Sunday, taking off 11 hundredths to clock the stunning time of 9.58.

Gabtoli

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their utility for the last four years.

Amzad Ali, another cattle trader, said the cattle market goes under water just after a light rainfall that takes eight to nine hours to recede.

Ataur Rahman, a cattle trader of Rajshahi, said he brings around 120 cows to the market in a week and has to endure terrible conditions to sell the cows.

Although thousands of cattle traders come to the market, there is no arrangement for them to stay, he said.

A DCC official said there was a drain around the cattle market, which has now been rendered useless as its outlet near the river Turag is blocked by the sand traders. Many shops have sprouted on the drain, he added.

Sohel Hasib, director of Gabtoli cattle market, said, last year they had submitted at least 10 applications to the DCC to solve the problems of the cattle market but got no response.

He said broken tins of the roof of the sheds are now very risky and a cattle trader was injured seriously during the storm in April and had to take treatment in hospital for long.

Sohel said, as there is no proper drainage system in the market water logging is a festering problem.

Garbage gets piled up in the market every day as DCC cleaners rarely clean it, he added.

Around 3,000 cattle are brought to the market every day, of which around 1,000 cattle are sold a day.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said they would take proper steps in this regard after the rainy season.

"I'll send engineers to the cattle market immediately for inspection," he said.

Fireman dies

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Garib and Garib Sweater Company at around 11:30pm and soon spread across the entire floor.

On information, firefighters from Gazipur, Tongi and Kurmitola rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze at about 10:00am yesterday.

Kalam was electrocuted inside a warehouse on the floor at around 2:00am, said his colleagues.

Shafiqul Islam, a fireman of Kurmitola Fire Service, alleged he along with his two colleagues including Kalam got electric shocks three times while extinguishing fire and asked the factory authorities to disconnect the electricity supply.

Once again they got the shocks, which left Kalam dead, he said adding that he and his colleague Shahidul Islam narrowly escaped.

Doctors of a local clinic confirmed his death, sources said.

The extent of loss caused by the fire could not be known immediately.

Swine flu cases

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WHO earlier estimated that as many as 2 billion people could become infected over the next two years nearly one-third of the world's population.

Health officials and drug makers are looking into ways to speed up production of a vaccine before the northern hemisphere enters its flu season in coming months. Estimates for when a vaccine will be available range from September to December.

Delegates from Bangladesh and Myanmar appealed for help in procuring vaccines or making them more affordable for poorer countries, saying they were left vulnerable while rich nations pre-ordered most of the available stock.

"Developing countries like us, we have to fight this war without vaccines," said Mya Oo, deputy health minister of Myanmar. He urged pharmaceutical companies to consider selling the vaccines to developing countries at just above cost.

WHO's flu chief, Keiji Fukuda, said the agency was working hard on the issue, and noted that two drug makers had pledged to donate 150 million doses of vaccine to poorer countries by the end of October. He said more research was needed to determine how vaccines will be priced.

"Among the many pandemic response issues, this is probably the most critical issue: how we mobilize the vaccines, how we get them to developing countries," Fukuda said.

WHO has stressed that most cases of swine flu are mild and require no treatment, but the fear is that a rash of new infections could overwhelm hospitals and health authorities, especially in poorer countries.

Shin said governments must act quickly to educate the public, prepare their health systems to care for severe cases and protect those deemed more vulnerable to prevent unnecessary deaths.

"We only have a short time period to reach the state of preparedness deemed necessary," Shin said. "Communities must be aware before a pandemic strikes as to what they can do to reduce the spread of the virus, and how to obtain early treatment of severe cases."

Pregnant women face a higher risk of complications, and the virus also has more severe effects on people with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, autoimmune disorders and diabetes, WHO chief Margaret Chan said in a video address.

The last pandemic the Hong Kong flu of 1968 killed about 1 million people. Ordinary flu kills about 250,000 to 500,000 people each year.

Swine flu is also continuing to spread during summer in the northern hemisphere. Normally, flu viruses disappear with warm weather, but swine flu is proving to be resilient.

BNP may not join

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withdrawing only those cases filed against them while the cases against opposition activists are still being tried. How can we go to the House in such a situation?" he asked.

The BNP secretary general said the ruling Awami League that jeopardised democracy in 1975 does not believe in democratic system.

"After assuming power this time, they soon transformed the country into a prison by murdering and torturing opposition leaders and workers," Delwar alleged.

He criticised the government stance on the Tipaimukh Dam and also the withdrawal of temporary army camps from Chittagong Hill Tracts.

"The government is busy catering for those who brought them to power. They are not protecting the rights of the people," he said.

He also alleged that the ruling party is engaged in extortion and terrorism and curbing of the opposition's right to speak.

Delwar demanded proper trial of all political killings including those in the August 21 grenade attack on an AL rally.

Meanwhile, the BNP high-

ups plan to hold programmes marking the anniversary of the release of party Chairperson Khaleda Zia and her son Tarique Rahman.

A senior party leader told The Daily Star yesterday that the programmes would be announced soon.

Besides, the party and its front bodies will arrange iftar parties during the Ramadan to create public opinion against the present government on different issues including Tipaimukh dam and deterioration in law and order.

Khaleda, also the leader of the opposition, was released on bail on September 12 last year while Tarique, staying in London now, got released on September 3.

After his release, Tarique in a statement announced quitting politics and left the country for London.

Party leaders said they plan to announce programmes including discussion meetings, milad-mahfil and processions marking the first anniversary of the release of Khaleda and Tarique.

Both were arrested in 2007 in anti-corruption drives conducted during the tenure of the military-backed caretaker government.

11 more cases

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we have succeeded in our plan as the virus was found in the country six weeks after the pandemic started," said Prof Mahmud.

The health ministry has also claimed that the public health system is well equipped to handle a large outbreak with enough stock of Oseltamivir (Tamiflu), the drug proven effective against H1N1 virus that causes the flu.

Screening measures have been beefed up in the country's 11 land ports recently with neighbouring India reporting 36 deaths from swine flu and over a thousand confirmed cases of the disease.

Prof Mahmud said presently the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research has the only laboratory in the city for diagnosing swine flu while another lab at ICDDR,B is ready to extend support.

"We collect samples from our 13 surveillance stations and carry out tests at our institute. But we start treatment of patients with specific swine flu symptoms before the lab results come," he said. "The problem is there is a lack of awareness and this could be dangerous."

Patients with swine flu-like symptoms--fever above 104 degrees Fahrenheit, cough or other respiratory symptoms, runny nose, pneumonia--are presumed to carry the virus.

The H1N1 virus spreads mainly through coughing and

sneezing. Touching something that contains the virus and then touching the mouth or nose is also risky.

Experts suggest avoiding crowded places or close contact with ill people. They have urged people to keep at least an arm's distance from people with the symptoms.

"Do not shake hands or hug. Do not spit outdoors. Cover the nose and mouth with tissue paper when coughing or sneezing. Avoid touching in the eyes, nose or mouth. Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing," they say.

Prof Mahmud urged people with sneezing and coughing for more than seven days to consult doctors and limit their interaction with others. Children might be contagious for longer, he added.

H1N1 is a new contagious influenza virus first detected in the US in March. The virus is new to pigs, humans and birds. It consists of genetic materials from influenza viruses of birds, humans and pigs. Humans have no protection against it.

Army man

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Shayestaganj Bazar after buying foods for his colleagues.

Police recovered the body and sent it to hospital morgue for autopsy.

A case was filed with Srimangol railway police station.

Culprits

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and more information will be derived through proper investigation.

The premier said she wants that the agencies investigating the incident locate the places where the attackers received training and from where the grenades were brought.

She also questioned why the law enforcement agencies remained inactive during the attack and how same type of grenades used in the attack made their way to the Dhaka central jail.

Hasina also wondered how 24 grenades went missing from the huge cache of illegal arms hauled in Chittagong.

The AL president said the previous BNP-led coalition government staged a drama arresting Joj Mia in a bid to hide the real culprits.

She said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia proved that she patronised the perpetrators by making BNP leader Abdus Salam Pintu's younger brother Sultan Salauddin Tuku, one of the main accused in the grenade attack case, Chhatra Dal president.

Hasina accused the BNP-Jamaat coalition of patronising militancy and terrorism to eliminate political opponents.

She said the patrons of militancy are still active and have been conspiring against the pro-liberation war forces.

Hasina said her government is committed to building a developed and prosperous digital Bangladesh for changing the fate of the poor in the country.

She also directed the party activists to help the families affected by the grenade attack.

The premier said she wants to keep the pledges for which the people voted them to power.

Flash flood

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water from upstream and rainwater submerged low-lying areas of 40 villages at ten unions in Lalmonirhat.

The water level in the rivers Teesta and Dharala, which flowed above the danger mark on Thursday, came down at 4:00pm yesterday, but the flood situation in Lalmonirhat is yet to improve.

As all the gates of Gajoldoba barrage in India were opened at noon on Thursday, upstream water caused Teesta and Dharala to rise resulting in flash flood, said an official of Lalmonirhat Water Development Board.

The Hatibandha town protection dam is under threat posed by the heavy current of Teesta.

Lalmonirhat deputy commissioner sanctioned 50 metric tonnes of rice as relief for the flood affected people in Lalmonirhat on Thursday evening.

The relief is insufficient for the 60,000 flood affected people, locals said.

Hartal called

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noon when she went to the jungle to collect firewood.

Police recovered her body from neighbouring indigenous village Modonmohanpara on Tuesday night.

Central Chhatra Parishad president Mohammad Alamgir Kabir and Panchhari Upazila Samo Odhikar Andolan president Dr Habibur Rahman in a press release urged people to make the programme a success and demanded the authority take stern action.

Tension prevails between indigenous people and Bangalee settlers in the areas and many indigenous people of the village left their houses fearing a clash, sources said.

Poisonous gas

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Two others also fell sick in the incident.

The dead were identified as Farid Ali, 35, and Arif Hossain, 27, of Cinema Hall para of the town while the sick were Suruz, 22, and Harun, 45.

Police and fire brigade sources said, Budo Sheikh of Cinema Hall area hired the four to clean a well at his house.

Farid and Arif went inside the well at about 3:00pm and started to clean it. At about 3:15pm, they began to yell saying that they are having breathing problem.

As Suruz and Harun went inside the well to save them, they also began to feel suffocation and soon all of them lost consciousness.

On information, a team of fire brigade rushed to the spot and rescued the four.

They were rushed to the Chuadanga Sadar Hospital where the doctors declared Farid and Arif dead at about 4:00pm while Suruz and Harun are under-going treatment at the hospital.

Suruz and Harun are now out of danger, the doctors said. Police and fire brigade sources said the air trapped inside the well became poisonous, as its cover remained shut since the construction of the well four years ago.

Police were deployed on the spot.

US drone strike

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recovered," said the official, who had earlier put the death toll at nine.

"Those killed in the drone attack were all militants. Some of them were Afghan Taliban, others were local militants," another official said. There was no high-value target, he added.

Residents said militants surrounded the compound after the attack and a tractor was used to remove the debris.

The compound targeted was a Taliban office, some residents said, adding that Afghan militants also used to visit.

Friday's strike was the third in the rugged tribal terrain since a US drone missile reportedly killed Pakistani Taliban chief and feared warlord Baitullah Mehsud in neighbouring South Waziristan on August 5.

The US military does not, as a rule, confirm drone attacks but its armed forces and the CIA operating in Afghanistan are the only forces that deploy drones in the region.

Residents of Miranshah said they heard a huge noise, which shattered windows and blew out doors in the town.

Dandey Darpa Khel, some two kilometres (about one mile) north of Miranshah, is known to have hideouts belonging to an Afghan Taliban leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, and was hit in a missile attack last October which killed 11 people.

It also has offices of Mehsud's Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) based in South Waziristan.

Shortly after Friday's strike, militants opened fire on a military checkpoint near Miranshah, residents and local officials said.

The firing continued for some time and security forces retaliated, an official said, adding that three militants were killed and two paramilitary troops wounded in crossfire.

Islamabad publicly opposes suspected US strikes, saying they violate its territorial sovereignty and deepen resentment among the populace. Since August 2008, around 51 such strikes have killed more than 517 people.

But many analysts and observers believe that the government gives tacit support to the punishing attacks, as it shares the US goal of eliminating Mehsud's network, blamed for scores of deadly attacks in nuclear-armed Pakistan.

The Pakistani military in

late April launched a major offensive against the Taliban in the northwest, targeting the rebels in the districts of Swat, Buner and Lower Dir after the insurgents advanced perilously close to the capital Islamabad.

Meanwhile, Pakistani security forces killed at least 12 militants on Friday in a restive tribal region near the Afghan border, the paramilitary Frontier Corps said.

The troops carried out the operation against militants in the Michni area of Mohmand tribal region.

"Twelve militants were killed and four of their hideouts destroyed during the operation," the Frontier Corps said in a statement. "The troops also seized heavy arms, ammunition and explosives during the operation."

Last month the military claimed to have cleared the area of the Taliban threat, and vowed to turn their attention to the mountainous tribal belt along the Afghan border where Mehsud and his Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan have thrived since 2007.

Pakistani and US officials accuse Mehsud of masterminding the 2007 assassination of ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto and a string of other attacks that have killed hundreds of people here over the last two years.

Washington alleges al-Qaeda and Taliban rebels who fled Afghanistan after the 2001 US-led invasion are holed up in the semi-autonomous tribal belt.

Food aid

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Cyclone Aila in the coastal districts will be given gracious relief (GR), Abdur Razzaque said.

"The lists of VGF card holders should be prepared in such a manner that only one person of a family gets a card," said a food ministry letter to the Directorate General of Food.

Khagrachhari

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Chairman Ruhity Karbary said his office could not proceed due to some complication over land. But land registration of about 250 families has been completed and documents will be handed over to them by September 15, he added.

"To resolve the issue, the officials are working hard and we shall give the landless people documents of permanent settlement by October," he said.

Afghan polls

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