

Pakistan army targets Uzbek base

BBC, ONLINE

Pakistani troops fighting the Taliban in South Waziristan have surrounded a key stronghold of Uzbek fighters, military officials say.

They say that the town of Kaniguram - one of the largest towns in the area - is also the "operational centre" of the Pakistani Taliban.

The army says its offensive against the militants is "making good progress".

But a US-based rights group warned of "catastrophe" if aid is not allowed in to help civilians trapped in the area.

In a statement released yesterday Human Rights Watch said that Pakistani authorities should ensure that civilians who cannot escape the fighting should have sufficient access to basic necessities.

The group cites reports of people trying to escape the fighting before the onset of a harsh winter.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled the conflict zone since hostilities broke out.

The army says that two medical camps have been set up for displaced families and existing basic health units are being upgraded.

The army has declared South Waziristan a closed military zone until the operation ends.

It also announced "substantial successes" on fronts in the Nawazkot and Razmak-Makeen areas, adding that 11 militants and one soldier had been killed in the latest fighting. But analysts say that stiff resistance being put up by militants indicate that all is not going to plan for the army.

Journalists have been denied access to the area and so cannot verify army reports of fighting.

FIGHT TO THE DEATH

The town of Kaniguram, which troops are currently battling for, has between 85-90,000 residents and is second only to the town of Wana in terms of its population.

The BBC's Syed Shoaib Hasan in Islamabad says that at least 1,500 Uzbek militants are thought to be there.

In the past Uzbek fighters have been led by Tahir Yuldashev, head of the the hardline Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Mr Yuldashev is believed to have been killed recently, but

UN inspectors

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"We visited the Fordo enrichment plant. Now we're going to analyse the data. And the DG (Director General Mohamed ElBaradei) will report in due time," Nackaerts told reporters on arrival at Vienna airport.

Asked whether the inspection had revealed any surprises, the official declined to comment.

He also refused to provide any details about the nature of the inspection.

The IAEA inspectors had arrived in Iran on Sunday for a first visit of the site, which is being built inside a mountain near the Shia holy city of Qom.

The disclosure of its existence on September 21 triggered widespread outrage in the West, which suspects Iran is enriching uranium with an ultimate goal of using it to make atomic weapons.

Tehran strongly denies the charge.

BDR, Nasaka

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about military build-up there is not true.

Myanmar border security force Nasaka also strongly denied the allegation at the meeting.

Nasaka Director U Aung Jing at the meeting told BDR officials they were constructing barbed wire fence on the Myanmar border in line with the international laws.

He said the aim of building fence is to prevent activities of the militants, infiltration of foreign citizens and stop smuggling on the border, adding that it would not harm Bangladesh.

The Myanmar team leader assured Bangladesh side that Myanmar would not do anything that could deteriorate brotherly relation between the two countries.

The meeting also discussed in detail the issues of infiltration of Rohingyaas into Bangladesh, abduction of Bangladeshi fishermen from Naf River, stoppage of smuggling at the border and exchange of prisoners.

BDR Chittagong sector commander Col Didarul Alam Chowdhury led the 15-member Bangladesh team while Nasaka-6 headquarters Director U Aung Jing led the 15-member team of Myanmar.

the Taliban have denied his demise and for the moment there has been no word on a successor.

Our correspondent says that even without a leader, the Uzbeks will know this is a fight to the death for them.

While a few Uzbek militants have been living in Kaniguram for years, most arrived after being evicted from Wana by pro-government Taliban commander Maulvi Nazir in March 2007.

Pakistan's military establishment holds the IMU primarily responsible for the re-orientation of the formerly Afghanistan-focused Taliban towards Pakistan and its security forces, analysts say.

The Uzbeks are said to be the driving force behind the ideology of "fighting the enemy who is closer first" - in this case the Pakistan army.

Taliban town

Our correspondent says that this fact - and the urban nature of the battle - means that fighting in Kaniguram is likely to be intense and casualties high.

The majority of the residents of Kaniguram are of the Burki tribe - who dominate the area. But there are also members of the Mehsud and Wazir tribes.

The town is notable for hosting a substantial number of militants loyal to the Pakistani Taliban led by Hakimullah Mehsud.

Kaniguram itself is surrounded by mountains, the highest of which towers to 12,000 feet. There is a network of tarmac roads connecting it to the rest of the region, but they generally remain blocked in winter.

South Waziristan is considered to be the main sanctuary for Islamic militants outside Afghanistan.

Pakistan launched its offensive after a wave of militant attacks, believed to have been orchestrated from South Waziristan, killed more than 150 people in October.

DMP plans

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clock check posts at various points.

The letter has also been sent to traffic police officials for helping the crime division in the special drive.

Meanwhile, the government has put all 67 jails in the country on red alert, and asked law enforcement and intelligence agencies to beef up security measures to thwart any subversive act.

The government decision came on Monday against the backdrop of the appeal hearing in Bangabandhu murder case and arrests of a few family members of Bangabandhu murder convicts.

Additional forces were deployed in all sensitive areas and establishments including airports, the Supreme Court, railway stations, bus and launch terminals, shopping malls and markets.

Tigers roar back

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With Taylor out for 21, Zimbabwe lost the plot irrevocably with Razzak in full flow. Even first-match hero Elton Chigumbura struggled to find his feet before becoming the ninth batsman out leaving the score at 217.

Bangladesh also had their share of problem after openers Tamim Iqbal (26) and Zunaed Siddiqui (23) gave them an ideal start, flaying 44 runs off 23 balls. But once Zunaed was undone by a slower delivery from Chigumbura, the home side lost two more quick wickets.

Ex-captain Mohammad Ashraful was again totally out of sorts. He was out chasing a delivery outside the off stump with his feet firmly planted at the crease.

But the dismissal of Tamim brought the best out of Bangladesh with Shakib in full cry and Rokibul Hasan playing the perfect foil at the other end.

When Shakib batted it looked so simple that others could only envy. He treated the pacers and spinner with disdain playing trademark cut shots that pierced the field like a tracer bullet. The southpaw hammered 15 fours and three majestic sixes. He reached his fourth hundred with his trademark cut shot down to the point boundary for four and then hit the winning runs with another boundary to long off.

Rokibul scored an unbeaten 39 that contained four hits across the rope. The third match will take place at the same venue on Saturday.

Huda, Mohiuddin

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The court at that point said he [Mamun] had already concluded his submissions for Huda.

Five condemned convicts in the case-dismissed army personnel Syed Farooqur Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Mohiuddin Ahmed, AKM Mohiuddin and Bazul Huda--are now behind bars.

Four of them were caught during the last Awami League rule. AKM Mohiuddin was brought back from the US in June 2007 by the caretaker government.

Quoting from confessional statements of convict Syed Farooqur Rahman, Mamun said Mohiuddin was not present at the Bangabandhu residence on August 15, 1975, and neither was he involved in any conspiracy.

He said that the day before the carnage Farooqur incited his colleagues, saying Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, then president of the republic, would proclaim monarchy and cede the country to India.

Farooqur also told them they would topple the government of Sheikh Mujib and establish an Islamic republic under the leadership of Khandaker Mustaque Ahmed.

Besides, he [Farooqur] said Bangabandhu would be taken to the cantonment so he could not make any announcement.

Prodded, a band of army men attacked the Dhanmondi house-32 and killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others the following day.

Mamun however said statements by other convicts and witnesses do not bear out Farooqur's statement.

Mohiuddin in his statement said their goal was to have Mujib stand trial, not to kill him, and there was no conspiracy, Mamun argued.

If they had planned to kill Bangabandhu, they would not have brought him downstairs. They would have killed him immediately on the first floor, he added.

The court said the points raised by Mamun had already been put down at the High Court.

Adjourning the hearing till 9:30am Sunday, the SC bench told the defence lawyer he would be allowed an hour more to wrap up his arguments.

Bomb hoax

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executed on false charge. Asked about his identity, the person shouted at the NBR official and disconnected the line, Sirajul said.

Two minutes later, Aftab Zahan Khandaker, deputy commissioner (taxes) of Taxes Zone-8, received another such call.

Aftab Zahan said, "Around 3:25pm, a caller from cellphone rang up my land phone in the office and introduced himself as one Lt Col Rashid." The man claimed that there had been remote controlled bombs around the building.

The caller threatened Aftab to blast the building in protest at the ongoing trial of Bangabandhu murder case.

Following the bomb threats, panic gripped both the buildings and most of the officials rushed out from their offices.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (PR) Walid Hossain of DMP told The Daily Star that they had beefed up security in the areas by deploying several police patrol teams.

Police said they were trying to trace the callers.

Rejoinder

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the said meeting at Hawa Bhaban and taking part of 15 Jamaat men in the attack on Awami League rally is totally false, baseless and confusing," read the rejoinder.

Ali Ahmad, head of Jamaat's publicity wing, said their ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami in a statement immediately after the blasts had condemned the attack and called for arrest of the people involved.

The rejoinder said Jamaat still demands a fair and neutral investigation and exemplary punishment to those responsible for the grisly attack.

Our reply While our story mentioned presence of a high-level Jamaat leader at the Hawa Bhaban meeting, it did not say Jamaat-e-Islami as a party was involved in firming up the conspiracy there.

For the report, The Daily Star talked to many law enforcement officials engaged in the August 21 probe. It also spoke to some sources in the Harkat ul Jihad Al Islami, the banned outfit whose leaders are the main accused in the grenade blast case. All confirm involvement of the high-level leader and some individuals.

300 Bangladeshis

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After that those workers went to Al Riyadh Maintenance and Contracting Establishment Company but the company said it did not hire them and so they are not responsible for their work permits.

The workers then complained to the Bangladesh embassy prompting its officials to contact Al Riyadh Maintenance and Contracting Establishment. The company, however, said it hired 508 workers two years back from Bangladesh and that in recent times it had not issued any demand letters for workers.

The company's general manager alleged that may be any of the recruiting agencies might have made fake demand letters to send workers, adding that he had information that under such arrangement 300 workers were sent to Saudi Arabia, the letter said. These workers spent Tk 4 lakh each, it noted.

In another letter to the ministries concerned on August 29, Bangladesh Ambassador in Saudi Arabia M Fazul Karim also said the recruiting agency Al Shikder International also sent workers under similar arrangements.

Though the ambassador blamed recruiting agencies, businessmen said none could do it if the Saudi embassy in Dhaka was not involved in it.

Asked about the matter Saudi Ambassador in Dhaka Abdullah Al Bussairy said, "There was no error in the database of visas. It can never happen that double stamping was done against one visa."

Sometimes companies issue demand letters, but hire workers within a span of two years when they need them, as the demand letters are valid for two years. But the recruiting agents sometimes send workers without companies' consent when workers are not required. That eventually causes troubles, Bussairy said.

"This may happen in this case. But I did not receive any

Climate change

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She sought financial assistance from the international community for Bangladesh to face the wrath of natural calamities.

The French minister invited the prime minister to visit France on the eve of attending the Copenhagen climate conference.

The two sides discussed various other bilateral, regional and international issues of concern.

French Ambassador in Dhaka Charley Causseret, Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office Mollah Waheduzzaman and Ambassador Ziauddin were present.

Rental power

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dealing with the aggressive ones who had bagged multiple bids but failed to deliver projects on time, PDB this time set a rule that one successful bidder will be allowed to bag a maximum of two bids.

A top PDB official said such a high participation in the bid was the result of relaxation in the tender criterion allowing investors experienced in installing only 'captive power' generation to participate in the bid. Captive power plants are basically off-grid generators installed for industrial use.

The sources said if captive power developers were barred from participation, PDB would have drawn around 30 to 40 bids.

Other factors include PDB's handling of this tender process in a transparent manner till date, floating the tender through its own website, and also support from local banks for many bidders, the sources added.

Rental power plants are different from conventional plants because the investor must own plant equipment in its stock -- ready to be installed and uninstalled on short notices. That is why the tariffs for rental power are typically higher than other types of plants.

The diesel plants will have three years rental agreements, while the comparatively cheaper HFO plants will have agreements of five years.

The PDB conference room was packed with bidders' representatives throughout the day yesterday. Officials started opening the bids at noon in front of them, to announce the names of the bidders and their readout prices. The process was continuing till filing of this report at 8:00pm.

Two expert committees will later review the readout prices and other aspects of the bids to select competent lowest

complaint about it."

Meanwhile, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Secretary Elias Ahmed said the government was inquiring about the matter and will take stern actions if agencies are found responsible for such irregularities.

Future trial

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The meeting was called as BDR in its proposal just a few days ago also suggested holding of a coordination meeting immediately.

The meeting is also expected to review whether there will be any legal complication, if future mutiny like offences in BDR are to be tried under the Army Act 1952.

One of the officials who is expected to be present at the meeting told The Daily Star that there will be no legal complication as the decision will be applicable to future incidents.

Talking to The Daily Star, Faruk Khan said the government decided to try any future mutiny or other offences in BDR under the army act.

The trials of serious offences like killings and lootings during the recent BDR mutiny however will be held in speedy trial tribunals on completion of investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department of police.

The BDR DG will lead the upcoming trials in the six divisional cities.

SC clears

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Muzammel Hossain passed the order after hearing a government petition moved by Attorney General Mahbubey Alam.

The judge asked the government to file a regular leave-to-appeal petition with the SC against the HC order within seven days.

The attorney general yesterday told The Daily Star that after receiving the SC order, there was no bar to sending Babar on remand.

Upon a petition by Babar, the High Court on Wednesday directed the authorities for interrogation at the jail gate in the August 21 grenade attack case, if necessary.

On the same day, the trial court in Dhaka stayed till November 1 an order it had passed earlier in the day placing Babar on a five-day remand.

On October 26, Babar was shown arrested in the August 21 grenade attack case.

Twenty-three people including Awami League leader Ivy Rahman were killed and 300 others injured in the grenade attack on an Awami League rally at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004.

Tough action

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order at the home ministry.

Ashraf, also general secretary of the ruling Awami League, said the party would also take disciplinary action if any of its leaders or workers are found involved in criminal activities.

Tender manipulation and extortion topped the agenda of the cabinet body meeting, which also discussed the bomb attack on AL lawmaker Fazle Noor Taposh, trial of Bangabandhu murder case and BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) mutiny trial.

The meeting asked the ministries and departments concerned to contact local police stations before the dropping and opening of tender documents, said Sahara, who chaired it.

She also sought cooperation from people in combating tender manipulation.

"Nobody will be spared," said Ashraf when asked if the government would take action in case it is found that tender manipulators belong to the ruling party.

On trial of BDR mutineers, Sahara said it is expected to start early next month. The trial will be held in courts in the six divisions under the BDR Act, she added.

The government has decided to constitute a special tribunal following the Supreme Court's opinion on trial of crimes such as killings and looting during the mutiny, the home minister added.

Over 3,500 people, including BDR personnel, have been accused of the February 25-26 mutiny and killings and looting at the border force's Pilkhana headquarters and many outposts. Of them, about 1,000 BDR men could be tried by the special tribunal for killings and looting, meeting sources said.

The meeting was attended by Law Minister Shafiq Ahmed, Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Post and Telecommunications Minister Raziuddin Raju and senior officials of the home ministry and law enforcement agencies.

PM to lead

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Reform of the Commonwealth'. Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said the Commonwealth's strength lies in unity. Commonwealth countries have differences in race, ethnicity and religion, but are united for the common values of pluralism, liberalism, democracy, legal system and political institutions.

"Bangladesh is fully committed to all these values," she told the roundtable organised by Media Initiative for Public Policy (MIPP).

The minister said Bangladesh is steadily contributing to different Commonwealth bodies including Ministerial Action Group, Foundation, Parliamentary Association, Business Council, Fund for Technical Cooperation and Youth Forum.

Dipu Moni said the member states made a commitment to ensure freedom and democracy, peace, the rule of law, and eradicate poverty and inequalities.

"In the Commonwealth, we need more common actions and efforts, greater unity of focus and collective efforts," she said.

Former Foreign Secretary Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury, acting British High Commissioner Duncan Norman, acting Indian High Commissioner Mukta Tomar, acting Pakistan High Commissioner Afzal Mahmud and Shareen Srabon Tilottoma, representative from the Commonwealth Youth Programme spoke at the seminar.

Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelly, a leading think tank, moderated the seminar which was presided over by MIPP president and AP Bureau Chief Farid Hossain.

Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury said the CHOGM should focus on the climate change issues that affect most of the Commonwealth member states and will leave a huge number of climate change refugees.

Chowdhury hoped that Sheikh Hasina in her statement will strongly voice the concern of Bangladesh to be worst affected by the changing climate and seek technological assistance.

Mukta Tomar said 49 of the 53-member Commonwealth are developing countries facing conflicts, poverty, hunger, food and energy scarcity and menace of terrorism and a common political will and collective efforts can resolve it.

Iraq blasts

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inquiry into the double attack on Sunday ordered the arrest of 11 officers of various ranks and 50 members of the security forces responsible for the protection of Salhiya," he said.

The health ministry said on Thursday the toll from the attacks claimed by al-Qaeda but blamed by the government on members of the outlawed Baath party stood at 153 people killed and more than 500 wounded.

Among those arrested, said Atta, are four senior army officers and seven senior policemen, including the chief of police of Salhiya under whose jurisdiction the justice ministry, one of the targets of the attacks, falls.

Also rounded up, he added, are the commanders of 15 security checkpoints in Salhiya.

Baghdad's Governor, Salah Abdul Razzaq, on Monday blamed negligence or even collusion by the security forces for the bombings in the heart of the capital, Iraq's deadliest day in more than two years.

"It's a human failure... It can only be negligence or collusion," Razzaq told AFP, noting that footage showed a white Renault truck carrying two tonnes of explosives

driving up to the justice ministry building.

The logo of the Department of Water in Fallujah, a former insurgent bastion west of Baghdad, was painted on the side of the truck, he said. "How did it get from Fallujah to here?"

Trucks are barred from entering Baghdad, especially Salhiya neighbourhood, during daylight hours.

Razzaq said that the vehicle that was blown up in front of the other target, a provincial government building, was a Kia minibus.

Defence ministry spokesman Major General Mohammed al-Askari told AFP earlier this week that security forces raided two houses in Baghdad, where they found bomb-making materials, and made arrests, but did not specify how many.

"It looks like the same materials used on Bloody Wednesday," he said, referring to August 19 bombings at government ministries in Baghdad that killed around 100 people.

Askari said the evidence found confirmed the bombers were linked to al-Qaeda and supporters of the Baath Party of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein.

Iran set to respond

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from the International Atomic Energy Agency and its envoy to the watchdog said he expected to be involved in further negotiations.

But Ahmadinejad insisted that his government, for so long on a collision course with the West over its refusal to heed repeated UN Security Council ultimatums to suspend uranium enrichment, was keen to strike a deal.

"We welcome fuel exchange, nuclear cooperation, building of power plants and reactors and we are ready to cooperate," the president said in a speech in Iran's second city of Mashhad broadcast live on state television.

He said the West had previously talked of "halting and suspending everything, but now they are talking about fuel exchange, nuclear cooperation, building nuclear power plants and reactors. They have moved from confrontation to cooperation."

He said that as a result "the conditions for nuclear cooperation are ready."

"Now the IAEA is returning to its actual position which is to help independent nations and to create healthy relations with other nations," he said, referring to the UN watchdog, which just completed an inspection visit to a second uranium enrichment plant Iran is building south of the capital.

Alluding to the three sets of UN sanctions imposed on Iran over its failure to suspend uranium enrichment, Ahmadinejad said the West had previously adopted a policy of "confrontation and threats, but today it has changed its attitude and we welcome it."

"We accept any hand extended to us in trust and honesty, without any plot or lie. But if that proves not to be the case, our response will be the same as we gave to (US president George W) Bush and his cronies," he said to cheers from the crowd.

Uranium enrichment is the sensitive process that lies at the heart of Western concerns over

Iran's nuclear programme. It can produce fuel for nuclear reactors or, in highly extended form, the fissile core of an atomic bomb.

Under the terms of the deal drawn up by the IAEA and already approved by Western governments, Iran would export to Russia more than 1,200 kilos (2,640 pounds) of its 3.5 percent low-enriched uranium (LEU) for refining up to 20 percent purity to fuel a Tehran reactor that makes medical isotopes.

France would then fashion the material into the fuel rods for the reactor.

Iran had originally been expected to respond to the proposals by last Friday but delayed its response amid conflicting views within the regime.