

Taliban, other militants battle in Afghanistan

60 insurgents, 19 civilians killed

AP, AFP, Kabul

Gunbattles between the Taliban and another Islamist faction have left at least 60 fighters and 19 civilians dead in northeastern Afghanistan, as militants apparently fought over control of several villages where the government has almost no presence, officials said yesterday.

Fierce clashes were continuing Sunday, with militants using heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, the governor of Baghlan province said.

Local police official Zalmi Mangal said the battles in the northeastern province appeared to be a power struggle between local Taliban forces and the Hezb-e-Islami militia loyal to warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Violent clashes between anti-government Islamist factions are rare, although various militias have their own agendas and power struggles are relatively common.

But two Afghan police officials say dozens of Islamist militants are defecting to government forces during armed clashes with their one-time Taliban allies.

Provincial police Chief Kabir Andarabi says more than 100 fighters for the Hezb-e-Islami militia in the northeastern

province of Baghlan pledged to join the government Sunday after fighting erupted between them and the Taliban.

The regional police commander, Gen. Ghulam Mushtaba Patang, put the number of defecting fighters at 50 but said the situation is in flux and more could defect soon.

Mangal, the province's deputy police chief, said reports from the area indicate that at least 60 militant fighters were dead, 40 from Hezb-e-Islami and 20 from the Taliban. Our reports indicate that up to 19 civilians were also killed," Andarabi told AFP.

It was unclear how many total militants were involved, he said by telephone from a district near the fighting where government forces have rushed to observe and try to help any wounded civilians.

Police had not yet entered the area of the clashes as of midday Sunday, but were standing by with mobile hospitals to help any wounded, he said.

It was unclear what touched off the fighting, which erupted Saturday morning and continued late into the night, resuming Sunday, Mangal said. However, he said that Taliban fighters reportedly had moved into villages that traditionally were controlled by Hezb-e-Islami.

Indian

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Sripur, Naljur, Tamabil and Padua borders.

The Indians earlier attempted to catch fish in the Dibir haor and Kendri Beel several times, but failed due to resistance from the Bangladeshi civilians as well as by the BDR during the last one month.

On February 23, the villagers of Dibir haor and Kendri chased some 200 inhabitants of Indian village Muktapur, who had attempted to catch fish in the same swamp.

The Indians pumped out water from a part of the swamp defying the BDR on the same day.

BDR and BSF traded over 500 gunshots on 27 February on the same border.

BSF-BDR talks

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headquarters of the BDR led to the killing of its chief Major General Shakeel Ahmed.

The issue of terrorist camps especially those from the country's Northeast and which operate within the territory of Bangladesh and harbouring of some criminals wanted by India will also be taken up during the meeting.

During the last year's meet in the national capital, India assured Bangladesh that any "recalcitrant elements" of the BDR will not be allowed to enter the country and offered all possible help in restructuring of the paramilitary force.

BSF and BDR are counterparts along the 4,096-kilometre long India-Bangladesh border.

During the July talks at Dhaka both the countries exchanged lists of wanted "criminals and terrorists" believed to be hiding or detained in each other's territories.

Ministry okays

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use of heavy duty diesel plant consisting 35 units of Caterpillar diesel generator. But due to delay in tender process, the company could not secure these units. Instead, it has secured 41 units of Mitsubishi equipment.

The Thakurgaon project is supposed to be commissioned in June.

Otobi that won Bheramara 110MW diesel and Noapara 105MW furnace oil projects signed the contracts on February 4.

On February 9, it wrote to PDB regarding its Noapara project saying originally it had proposed to build the plant as a combined cycle one, but instead it wanted to build it with "Reciprocating engines with co-generation facility".

The Noapara project is supposed to be commissioned in November.

The PDB had originally planned to sign agreements for eight rental power projects totalling 530MW within early December with a view to ensuring extra power supply during the Boro irrigation period from early March.

Bribery rules

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to go through the same tests repeatedly from outside as the doctors get commission from those tests.

The Dialysis Centre that is supposed to remain open round the clock is closed by midnight. It remains closed on Friday too.

If the condition of a patient deteriorates and he or she needs immediate dialysis there is no way to get that support, complaint the patients.

The costly machines at the hospital remain unclean posing risk of infecting patients with various diseases.

Patients who are enlisted to get regular dialysis for six months have to pay Tk 20,000 at a time, which is quite impossible for poor patients.

The director, however, said it is the decision of the health ministry to take Tk 20,000 at a time.

"It is true that it is difficult for poor patients to manage the amount at a time but in comparison to the private hospitals it is much less," he added.

He acknowledged that the number of nurses is inadequate at the hospital compared to the workload that has increased with the passage of time.

"Some 81 nurses are working at the institute currently and we need at least 30 more. When the hospital came into being in 2002 we had only 12 dialysis machines to support 12 patients at a time, which is now 42," he said.

We also started kidney transplant last year that involves more manpower as the number of patients is now twice as many, he added.

Int'l women day

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International Women's Day has been observed annually since 1910 when an international conference of women in Copenhagen decided that a day should be marked to press for equal rights for women's.

The decision followed a socialist women group's demonstration in New York in 1908 demanding pay rise, shorter working hours, voting right and an end to child labour.

The theme of this year's day is "Equal rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress For All."

President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and leader of the opposition in parliament Khaleda Zia gave separate messages on the occasion.

Various women and rights groups across the country are marking the day today with elaborate programmes.

After inaugurating the programme against acid violence, ASF Executive Director Monira Rahman said in the last 100 years the world achieved a lot, but it is a matter of regret that violence against women, especially in countries such as Bangladesh, is still widespread.

Referring to a WHO study in 2005, she said 57.5 percent of women in Bangladesh are sexually and physically tortured. In reality, the rate is much higher, she said.

Monira Rahman said there were 490 incidents of acid throwing in 2002. The number came down to 145 in 2009.

PM criticises

FROM PAGE 1
Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury chaired the discussion.

Hasina, also president of AL, alleged the BNP-led opposition would continue conspiring as their birth was through conspiracy after the assassination of Bangabandhu.

"They tried to spread the ideologies of the defeated forces after the assassination of the father of the nation in revenge for their defeat in 1971. But they have failed to do so after misleading one or two generations," she said, paying rich tributes to Bangabandhu, four national leaders and those who made sacrifices for the country's independence in 1971.

The AL chief added, "The people of Bangladesh will move forward to safeguard their rights as they never bowed down to any conspiracy or pressures." She urged all pro-Liberation War forces to get united to attain economic freedom to build a poverty and hunger free country as dreamt by Bangabandhu.

Saying that her government has been moving forward to that end, the premier said the image of Bangladesh has been dignified largely in the globe since AL assumed office.

She added, "Forget what we (leaders) got or did not get, rather think what we gave the country and work for building a prosperous country."

On proclamation of the Liberation War, she said it is Bangabandhu who had the sole power to declare independence of the country.

"Bangabandhu knew at what time the proclamation would have to be made and he did it at the right time when he was arrested by the Pakistani occupation forces."

AL leader Asaduzzaman

Ansar-like unit

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before a three-member jury formed by several rights groups.

"Why the Adivasi people should suffer when Bangladesh is an independent country, not a part of Pakistan anymore? If I could speak your language fluently, I would be able to describe how much we suffer in the hills," said Lolita Chakma, a widow, in her deposition before the jury led by Rabbani.

"Who will look after me now? Where should I go? How can I survive?" asked Lolita, who lost her house in an arson attack in Khagrachhari.

"The problems in the hills would not be solved unless the land commission is made effective. We hope that the government would take immediate steps to solve the problems permanently," said Jayanta Odhikari, executive director of CCDB.

The programme was jointly organised by National Coalition on Adivasi affairs, Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolon, and VSO.

Convener of Sajek Bhumi Raksha Committee Gyanendu Chakma and lawmaker Hasanul Haque Inu were also present.

She said men's participation is of immense importance in resisting violence and this is why they organised the men's rally.

"I don't believe the acid throwers are men. They are cowards and worse than the beasts. We have to resist them," said world famous magician Jewel Aich.

Writer and journalist Anisul Huq said, "In our national anthem we sing, we cry when the face of the mother grows pale. But our mother's face is really pale today."

"We, as a nation, cannot be proud when people worldwide come to know that the youths of our country throw acid on girls," he said.

Former chief justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman, also the chief adviser to a caretaker government, said, "We must be very careful so that our behaviour in no way hurts the acid victims."

Drama personality Ramendu Majumder read the women's day declaration, while musical band Panchamshur and singers Tapu, Kana, Joy, Beauty, Dipta, Rumi and others sang at the programme. Candlelight in the evening created a milieu of adoration.

Artist Qayyum Chowdhury, Prothom Alo Trust Chairman Muhammad Aziz Khan, Prothom Alo Joint Editor Abdul Qayum Mukul and ASF Chairperson Parveen Mahmud also spoke on the occasion.

Noor recited a poem on Bangabandhu's March 7 speech to the appreciation of the audience.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, Advisory council member Suranjit Sengupta, presidium members Matia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Abdul Latif Siddique and Rajiuddin Ahmed Raju, Jahangirnagar University Vice-Chancellor Prof Sharif Enamul Kabir, AL leaders Mohammad Nasim, MA Aziz and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, among others, spoke.

Earlier in the morning, Sheikh Hasina placed floral wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the city's Dhanmondi. Ministers and party leaders were present there.

Various organisations, including Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad Central Command Council, Muktiyoddha Oikya Parishad, Awami Hawks League, Jatya Ganatantrik League and Bangabandhu Chhatra Parishad, also placed floral wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu.

Different socio-political organisations observed the historic day across the country.

JS session

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30-hour discussion on the motion piloted for giving thanks to President Zillur Rahman for his address at the beginning of the session on January 4.

But till Thursday, the House already held a 30-hour and 21-minute discussion on the motion with 187 lawmakers participating in it in 26 sittings, parliament secretariat officials said.

Of them, 167 lawmakers belonging to the Awami League-led grand alliance spoke for more than 26 hours and 20 legislators from the BNP-led opposition for around four hours, they added.

Most of the lawmakers spoke paying no heed to the rules of procedure of parliament.

With the return of opposition lawmakers to the House on February 11, the discussion got a new dimension as lawmakers from the treasury and opposition benches locked their horns, generating much heat in the House.

Use of indecent and unparliamentary words by legislators was going on for the last few sittings of the House as they did not follow the rules of procedure while speaking.

On Wednesday, a number of AL and BNP legislators leaped out of their seats and rushed towards each other aggressively, creating chaos in parliament for around 10 minutes.

Without microphones, the lawmakers, particularly those elected to reserved seats, shouted loudly and exchanged indecent and vulgar words, most of which are unprintable.

The speaker on Thursday decried the behaviour of these lawmakers inside the House, and termed the incident unfortunate and shameful for the nation.

CU prof

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Chancellor Professor Dr Abu Yusuf demanding appointment of Tania Afser Champa, said the sources.

When contacted, CU BCL acting president Abul Mansur Jamsed said that they wanted to press home their demand.

But the BCL leader said he did not know that Professor Hasanuzzaman was kept under lock and key and that some agitating activists might have done this.

When contacted, Professor Hasanuzzaman alleged that a few teachers also might have a hand behind the incident.

Ship-breaking

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The committee, headed by the forest and environment secretary, will take necessary steps regarding ship-breaking.

Deputy Attorney General Nazrul Islam Talukder told the HC during hearing of a petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) for stopping dismantling of toxic ships.

He also said the government is sincere to follow its directives for framing rules on ship-breaking.

The HC bench of Justice Md Iman Ali and Justice Md Abu Tariq yesterday fixed today for further hearing on the petition.

The government has recently informed this court that a total of 172 ships were imported for scrapping last year.

Following the petition, the HC on January 26 directed the government to submit a report within three weeks on the number of ships imported for scrapping since it delivered a verdict of a case in this connection on March 17 last year.

It also asked the government to state in the report how pre-cleaning of ships outside the territory of Bangladesh was ensured before importing those.

Iqbal Kabir Litan argued for Bela.

Forest Dept

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ducks migrate to wetlands of Bangladesh during winter. They will also attach rings to other 30 species of birds.

This year the team will strap satellite transmitters to 20 species of migratory birds that travel through Siberia, China, Nepal and India.

The satellite device weighs only five grams each, which is only three percent of the birds's weight.

The forest department yesterday in a statement says there were 620 species of birds could be found in Bangladesh just a few decades ago.

The number, however, came down to less than 477 species -- 301 local and 176 species of migratory birds.

Eminent bird expert and founder of Bombay Natural History Society Dr Saleem Ali first introduced bird ringing or banding to locate their migration routes and habits. The organisation conducts the research every year.

The migratory birds are believed to have been spreading the virus of avian influenza throughout the world for the last few years.

Forest department has also conducted several workshops and meetings where they decided to attach rings and satellite transmitter to birds to conduct a research on migratory birds.

The bird expert team is comprised of Dr Tapan Kumar Dey of the forest department, Inam-ul-Haq and Dr Anwarul Islam of the Department of Zoology, Dhaka University (DU) while students of DU are helping them.

The Ministry of Environment and Forest has permitted the forest department to conduct the research on 500 migratory birds.

Govt to import

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As per a proposal from the food ministry, Singapore-based Indo-Sino Trade Pte will supply the bulk rice from Myanmar at a rate of US\$ 395 per ton.

The total import will cost Tk 68.73 crore. The Indo-Sino Trade syndicate won the contract "as the lowest bidder," said an official of the cabinet division.

Future of NU

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minister said addressing a discussion meeting on education at Rangpur Carmichael College yesterday morning.

"If the allegations are proved, we may have to shut it (NU) down," Nahid said.

In his speech, the minister called upon the students, teachers and guardians to work together to make Bangladesh poverty, corruption and unemployment free.

He said the government has been working to formulate an education policy based on practical and vocational knowledge, which is the demand of life and time.

Policy faces

FROM PAGE 1
There will however be some amendments to incorporate provisions guaranteeing the rights of the indigenous women and of those physically or intellectually challenged, she added.

"We will also include a provision to ensure women's rights to information."

The minister was talking to The Daily Star yesterday, on the eve of the 100th International Women's Day.

Meanwhile, rights activists and experts say the government's efforts towards a new women's policy will boil down to how it addresses the question of equal share in property or assets.

Catering to certain quarters, governments in the past had skirted around the issue of equal shares in inheritance.

Women rights leaders however hope this administration will not waver from its goal to reinstate the 1997 policy, much lauded at home and abroad for reflecting the aspirations of the women from every stratum of the society.

Drawn up on the basis of recommendations from activists and thinkers alike, the policy provided for equal inheritance rights.

Bangladesh Mohila Parishad President Ayesha Khanam said it is understandable that the 1997 policy warrants some adjusting to include contemporary issues and concerns.

She told The Daily Star she hopes the revised one will help establish gender equity.

Since independence, there have been three national policies formulated for women's development.

During her previous stint as prime minister, Sheikh Hasina announced the first one on March 8, 1997.

That policy included, among others, a provision for direct election to the reserved seats for women in parliament.

But in May 2004, the BNP-led

four-party alliance government excluded many a positive provision. It also struck out the words "property", "hereditary", "rights to land" and "share".

The exclusions done without any discussion caused resentment among women and human rights activists.

In 2008, the caretaker government cancelled the 2004 women policy and approved a new one, restoring the provision for direct election to the parliamentary seats for women.

Though it included women equal property rights, it avoided the word "hereditary".

The 2008 policy had drawn the ire of Islamic clerics and religion-based political parties for including equal rights to property.

Experts observe that declaration of a policy is not enough. It is always the implementation that matters.

To execute the policy appropriately, the government should form a Commission on Status of Women to gauge the position of women in economy, politics, administration, and above all in social systems.

The state minister for women affairs said a national action plan would be undertaken with short-, mid-, and long-term agenda to ensure women's empowerment and eliminate gender discriminations.

Razia Begum, secretary of the ministry, said the policy has been restructured and updated in line with the recommendations of a national-level consultancy.

Salma Ali, a rights leader, hopes it will eventually lead to abolishment of the laws that perpetuate gender discriminations.

In 1973, a five-year plan was formulated for war-affected women of the country. It was followed by a two-year plan for 1978-80 and five-year plans for 1985-90 and 1990-95.

Iraqis vote

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The cities of Fallujah, Baquba, Samarra and several other areas were also hit by mortar rounds or bombs, many of them exploding near polling stations.

An al-Qaeda group, which sees the election as validating the Shia-led government and the US occupation, warned on Friday that anyone voting ran the risk of being attacked, heightening an already tense security situation.

Baghdad's streets were all but deserted of vehicles bar those ferrying thousands of police and soldiers, as people journeyed on foot to polling stations across the capital.

"We don't care about the bombs. The people will vote," said Abbas Hussein, jangling a set of brown prayer beads with his index finger coated in thick purple ink, signalling he had voted earlier in Mansur, a Sunni district.

The violence, which came despite 200,000 police and soldiers deployed in Baghdad and hundreds of thousands more across the country of around 30 million citizens, killed 38 people and wounded 110, an interior ministry official said.

Twenty-five of the dead perished when a rocket flattened a residential building in the north of the capital, and all the other deaths were in or near the city.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said the attacks "are only noise to impress voters but Iraqis are a people who love challenges and you will see that this will not damage their morale."

Khaled Abdallah, 35, was one of the thousands who queued up in the Sunni bastion of Fallujah to cast his ballot.

"My vote today is a defiance of al-Qaeda," he told AFP.

Sunni Arabs boycotted nationwide polls in 2005 in protest at the rise to power of the nation's long-oppressed Shia.

Fresh move

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and benefits of lawmakers, the speaker of the parliament, the chief justice and the SC judges.

The finance ministry last month gave its nod to the law ministry's proposal for amending the Supreme Court Judges (Remuneration and Privileges) Ordinance, 1978, the Supreme Court Judges (Travel Allowances) Ordinance, 1976 and the Special Medical Attendance Rules, 1950, to raise salaries and privileges of the SC judges.

The cabinet on November 11 last year approved the Seventh Pay Scale for some 1.2 million employees and officers on the government payroll, with retrospective effect from July 1, 2009.

The move to increase salaries and privileges of the president, premier, ministers, lawmakers and SC judges was made to maintain consistency in pays and privileges between them and the civil servants, said cabinet division officials.

majority.

That boycott deepened the sectarian divide and heightened unrest which killed tens of thousands of Iraqis in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion and which has only eased in the past two years.

The election will usher in a government tasked with tackling myriad problems, including still high levels of violence, an economy in tatters and a culture of endemic corruption.

Seven years after the war, much of Baghdad remains bomb-damaged, most homes receive only a few hours of mains electricity a day and lack clean drinking water, and a quarter of the Iraqi population is illiterate.

The United States hopes the election will bolster Iraq's democracy, making it a beacon in a region where free and fair elections are the exception, and pave the way to a smooth pull-out of American troops.

Criminal

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criminal Emon, was accused in five murder cases, said police.

Witnesses said a group of criminals chased Sajib and fired five shots at him on Mitali Road.

Sajib's elder brother Mainul Islam Rajib told The Daily Star that his brother had links with Emon but he distanced himself from Emon's gang in recent times.

"They killed my brother because he deserted them," said Rajib.

Officer-in-charge of Hazaribagh Police Station said the reason behind the killing was internal feud between the gang members.

War crimes trial

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tribunal, however, could hold the trials in phases.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Harun-ar-Rashid, coordinator of the Sector Commanders' Forum, said they don't think Ashraf's statement reflect the government's final policy on the issue.

Let the government set up the tribunal first and then it will decide on the number of war criminals to be tried, he added.

He cited the examples of war crimes trials in Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Liberia. He also mentioned the Nuremberg Trials.

Ashraf, also the LGRD and cooperatives minister, said only a small number of people were brought to justice there for war crimes.

The AL general secretary said only three to four war criminals were tried in Yugoslavia; a small number of war criminals were tried during the Nuremberg Trials, a few in Rwanda while only one in Liberia.

He said, in their election manifesto, they pledged to hold the trials of war criminals and they