

West strikes deep

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tional coalition set up to try to stop Gaddafi's assault on Libyans seeking an end to his rule, with a growing list of countries wary of attacks on ground troops that could kill civilians.

Fighting raged in rebel-held Misrata, where a medic said at least 109 people have been killed and more than 1,300 wounded in a week of assaults by Gaddafi's forces.

"Attacks by Gaddafi forces since last Friday have killed 109 people and wounded 1,300 others, 81 of whom are in serious condition," said the doctor working in the state hospital in Misrata, 214 kilometres east of Tripoli.

Gaddafi's tanks rolled back into Misrata under the cover of darkness and shelled the area near the hospital, which was also under fire from government snipers, residents and rebels said.

"The situation is very serious," a doctor in the western town said by telephone before the line was cut off, reports AFP.

A resident called Abdelbasset said around 6,000 workers and family members from Egypt and other African countries were stuck in the port, under the eye of two Libyan warships which moved in on Wednesday. "They haven't attacked but if they do, the thousands of workers will be the first victims," he said.

Clashes between rebels and besieging forces continued yesterday in the eastern frontline town of Ajdabiyah, said Abu Musab, who left the town by car with his family of 10.

"There is no water, no power and the bombing is random. Everyone has left," he said, adding that Gaddafi's forces were positioned to the east, west and south of the town.

NATO TO TAKE COMMAND
Nato will take command of the international coalition's military operations in Libya on Monday or Tuesday, a diplomat said yesterday.

"Nato countries are in agreement to launch final planning enabling it to take over the command from the coalition Monday or Tuesday," said the diplomat, who asked not to be named.

In Ankara, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu also announced the Nato takeover after a conference call with his US, French and British counterparts.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said yesterday after a conference call with his US, French and British counterparts that Nato will take command of the international coalition's military operations in Libya.

"The coalition formed after a meeting in Paris is going to give up its mission as soon as possible and hand over the entire operation to NATO with its single command structure," Davutoglu said, according to the Anatolia news agency, in responding to journalists in Ankara.

"In effect, Turkey's demands and concerns have been met," he added.

PLANE DESTROYED
France said it had hit an air base in central Libya early yesterday, the fifth night of Western air strikes, and had also hit a government plane after it landed at Misrata airport.

Al Arabiya television said coalition planes struck Sabha, a Gaddafi stronghold in southern Libya.

A Libyan official said fuel storage tanks and a telecommunications tower in Tripoli were among places hit by what state television called "colonialist crusaders." A target in the Tajoura district which a resident said was a military area was also hit twice on Thursday.

Libyan Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim said strikes had hit military and civilian compounds in the central Jufrah region and other targets in Tripoli, Misrata and south of Benghazi in the east, home to an emerging alternative

government.

Libyan officials took Reuters journalists to a Tripoli hospital to see 18 male corpses, some charred beyond recognition, saying they were military personnel and civilians killed by Western bombing overnight.

It was the first time foreign reporters had been shown alleged victims of the air strikes and it was not possible to verify how many were civilians. Libya says dozens have been killed; Western forces deny any have been killed in the strikes.

International aid organizations said they were struggling to deliver humanitarian aid supplies to areas most affected by fighting, but have managed a few low-profile shipments.

"APPALLING VIOLENCE"
The Libyan government denies its army is conducting any offensive operations and says troops are only defending themselves when they come under attack.

Asked what should be done if the air strikes fail to restrain Gaddafi, only seven percent of Americans favoured sending in US and allied ground troops in a Reuters/Ipsos poll released yesterday, and only 17 percent saw President Barack Obama as a strong and decisive leader.

Western commanders are hoping the rag-tag rebel force in eastern Libya will overthrow Gaddafi for them but there is now little movement on the eastern front line at Ajdabiyah.

The mood at rebel headquarters in Benghazi is muted after initial euphoria at sweeping almost unopposed through eastern Libya and winning the no-fly zone they had pressed for.

Mustafa Gheriani, a construction contractor-turned spokesman for the Benghazi administration, summed up the main problem -- the capital, which is still under Gaddafi's iron grip:

"We thought Tripoli would fall."

408 more Bangladeshis flee Libya

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Influx of Bangladeshi workers into Tunisia and Egypt has increased further on Wednesday as some 408 more left Libya.

Foreign ministry sources said some 378 workers reached Ras Jdir border point of Tunisia while another 30 entered Al Salloum border check point in Egypt.

About 1500 Bangladeshis are awaiting repatriation at Ras Jdir border, a ministry press release said yesterday.

A consular team of the ministry has finalised all repatriation arrangements on Al Salloum border. The team is arranging the workers' repatriation within 24 hours of their arrival on the border.

It is anticipated that this flow of around 300-400 Bangladeshis through the Libya-Tunisia border will continue for the next few days, added the release.

The Bangladesh government, in coordination with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), will take necessary measures to fly them in.

Around 588 workers will arrive in Dhaka from Tunisia today. Of them, 288 will return on flights chartered by the Bangladesh government and IOM. National flag carrier Biman will fly in 300 passengers from Djerba, Tunisia.

Since the beginning of repatriation, 108 flights have operated so far. Of them 101 flights were jointly operated by the Bangladesh government and IOM, while Biman operated the rest.

So far, 31,441 Bangladeshi expatriates in Libya have been repatriated.

Bangladesh mission in Athens is making arrangements to send home 10 dead bodies of Bangladeshis from the mortuary of Hania General Hospital in Crete, Greece.

Haunted forever

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Science Annex Building.

Like every other day after work, they, all aged around 26, rushed to the campus for soaking in the latest on tension arouse from Yahya Khan's dilly-dallying over handing over power to prime minister-elect Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. At their den, they sipped tea, played chess and discussed passionately what was going to happen after Bangabandhu's March 7 speech: "The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation. The struggle this time is the struggle for independence."

They were feeling very uneasy and edgy. Something must have gone very wrong somewhere. It was only 10:00pm and the campus had gone to an early sleep. Very strange, thought Aly Zaker, an advertisement manager of the East Asiatic. But the horror that followed hours after was way beyond their wildest anticipation.

"Have you seen war movies like The Longest Day, Guns of Navarone or any other movie made on the Second World War? It beats all those," said Aly Zaker, now chairman of the Asiatic Marketing and Communications Ltd, recalling memories of 40 years back at his cosy office, the Asiatic Centre, in Banani.

Clad in a blue panjabi, Aly Zaker, also a leading theatre personality, seemed to have lost in that fateful night of the 25th. "I have never seen a city held hostage by sheer power of gunfire and sheer power of intentions to annihilate in my life, ever before."

Every war has two sides. But it was not a war then. So, the armless people never imagined soldiers equipped with sophisticated arms and armoury were about to pounce on them in their sleep and kill them like flies at the stroke of midnight.

At 10:15, it was lull before the storm. Aly Zaker and his friends --- Nurul Sagir (banker), Syed Lutfar Rahman (engineer), Mahmudur Rahman Benu (singer), and Kamal Udding Siddiqui (bureaucrat) -- decided to go out and explore.

They strolled to the Shaheed Minar and started to see a lot of soldiers there. They talked in hushed voice and decided to head off to Dhanmondi at Road Number 32, the house of Bangabandhu and heart of East Pakistan's politics, for getting a bearing on the happenings.

They flung themselves into a Jalopy car, Beetle, that Aly Zaker owned. Hardly any light was out there. Even the lights were dimmed in the teacher quarters. They approached towards Rokeya Hall, forgetting that students earlier felled a huge tree to barricade road against possible army action. Aly Zaker jammed on the brakes when a Pakistani army man came out of the shadow.

There were two trucks full of Pakistani troops. And they were chopping the tree off, making a small passage by then. Panicked, they managed to seek permission to drive through.

"Go, go, jao," barked the army personnel.

Aly Zaker drove off to the New Market junction and turned right.

Not a single Pakistani army official or jawan could be seen on Dhaka streets since March 1. They just slipped into the background amid the people's upheaval. What brought them to the centre of the city? Even in the university area that was totally occupied by pro-Bangladeshi zealots? They asked each other and got worried only without any answer.

They stopped for a couple of minutes at the Iqbal Hall, now Zahurul Haque Hall. Sirajul Alam Khan Kapalik and a few others were there. Asked, Sirajul said, "Pakistani army is probably going to attack us." That was not much.

So, they drove down the road and reached Road No 32 at around 10:40. Bangabandhu's house was totally desolate. Until that afternoon, it was full of people. They were chanting slogans whenever Bangabandhu showed up at the porch, waved and went back in.

"What is the news, why has everything become quiet?" they asked in unison.

"Pakistani army is going to crack down. Bangabandhu has instructed everyone to go to war, wherever they are," came in the reply.

They got in the car and sped away. Aly Zaker dropped his friends at a deserted Mogbazar. Asking them to be careful, he zoomed towards Rajarbagh, where he lived with his elder brother. Their two-storey house was on the Momenbagh lane, some 130 yards from the Rajarbagh Police Station. Changing clothes, he joined his brother Ali Taher and sister-in-law Nasiba Taher for dinner.

But eating stopped abruptly at around 11:00 with a thunderous sound out on the street. Aly Zaker shot up and bolted out in shorts and T-shirt.

Scores of policemen - some in T-shirt, some in khakis, some in lungi and half shirts -- were there on the street with .303 rifles in their hands with a huge number of people around them.

The police urged everyone to go back for safety. "Can't you hear the gunshots? Pakistani army is coming," screamed one of them.

Yes. They all could hear those ominous sounds. It was like machinegun and cannon going off. BOOM, BOOM! CRACK, BOOM! CRACKKKKAAAATTT, BOOM!

"They already attacked Pilkhana (the headquarters of East Pakistan Rifles). Another column is coming towards us," someone declared.

Policemen became desperate to send people home, reminding them of the risks of getting killed. "We assure you that until the last bullet is exhausted, we are going to fight back," vowed a policeman.

A mission impossible for those skinny police men armed with only .300 rifles and sticks. But, how brave one could be when patriotism courses through the blood. Those magical words worked. Everybody ran back home.

And within few minutes, Aly Zaker could distinctly hear the CRACK and BOOM sitting in the house, where his younger sister also stayed along with her husband Tareq. This time the sound was even louder. He ran up to rooftop terrace with the brother-in-law at his heels.

They could see all what was happening from there. Tracer bullets lit up the sky from west side of the Rajarbagh Police Station. Firing of mortar shell silenced momentarily the BING BING of bullets. Another column must have attacked from the other side, which was Shantinagar. So, they had decided to come the normal way and Rajarbagh was not actually surrounded, thought Aly Zaker.

Within few minutes they realised guns being fired from the Motijheel Colony area, which meant they bypassed Rajarbagh from the other side of Motijheel and came to this side.

The CRACK and BOOM got louder, louder and louder. And they could bear it no more. So they came down to find his brother -- all scared and worried about them.

"Where have you been?" he asked at the top of his voice and immediately went on to take shelter under his bed, asking his wife to come along.

They lost track of time as the firing, shelling and bombing went on outside. Knocks on the door shook them up. It was 30 minutes past midnight.

Aly Zaker went down and asked, "Who?"

"I'm Momen Khan." The house of Momen Khan was across from the Rajarbagh Police Station. He along with his wife and daughter came to seek refuge in a relatively safe house on the lane. Allowed in, the frightened family quickly found safety under the dining table.

The police barrack was then had bamboo woven walls, tin-roof and pucca floors. All those, except for the main building office, were burning fast.

At about 3:30, there was another knock on the door. Chill went down their spine. It must be Pakistani army, they thought.

Onus was on two younger guys. They came down the stairs.

"Apnara ke? (who is there?)," they asked, trembling.

"Amra police, bhai (we are the police, brother)," was the answer.

Opening the door, they saw two men in the half darkness, both wearing lungi and a rifle in hand.

"We ran out of bullets. Many of our comrades died. If we continue to stay there, we will die too." Their voice was thick with sadness.

They came with request to hide the rifles somewhere as they could not move with those. Someday they would come back, collect the rifles and liberate the country.

"If you can, spread it around that the police have not let you (countrymen) down." And they left.

Aly Zaker held both rifles in hand. Numbed, he suddenly gave in to pent-up emotions. He started to cry. Kneeling down to the floor, he cried his heart out like a child. After a while, he got up and went out into the lane. Seeing no-one around, he ran towards a nearby swamp. He quickly threw the rifles in it and rushed back home.

The firing went on until about 4:35 in the morning. Now the big guns had stopped. There were no more shelling from canons or tanks. The sun started to emerge after some time. Announcement in Urdu could be heard from city streets, asking everyone to stay at home as curfew was imposed. Shoot at sight was read out.

So, they had nothing to do, except for going through an agonised wait. Fears lurked in the back of their mind that Pakistani soldiers might go on a door-to-door hunt. They only hoped that the massacre-mongers would think getting into lanes and by-lanes of Dhaka would be risky.

They continued to live on their nerves. The long day of the 26th eventually wore off, heralding yet another uncomfortable night. They could not contact anybody as phones were not available then. They tried in vain to listen to Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, the voice of an emerging country.

And little could they know about the extent of massacre carried out last night at the Dhaka University, Pilkhana, Kamalapur Railway Station, Sadarghat Launch Terminal and old part of the city. The killers in uniforms murdered anything and everything in those areas, even not sparing stray dogs on the streets.

Holed up in the house, Aly Zaker became mum. His newly-married brother was nervous about the uncertain days ahead. "Don't worry, everything will be alright," said Aly Zaker, drifting back into silence.

At one point, he came to realise what he wanted to do now. He would just get away, leaving the country at first opportunity.

Aly Zaker came out of his house on the morning of the 27th, when the curfew was lifted for few hours.

He did not dare to look around, as army was there. The police barracks were just in ashes. Charred human bodies could still be recognised from distance. He started walking down to Mouchak.

His friends too scurried towards Rajarbagh, thinking he might have died. They slowed a little, but then rushed to hug each other, laughing and crying together. They were just so happy to be alive.

Walking, they saw ransacked offices, bullet holes on every wall and totally dishevelled Café Taj at Moghbazar. Ashes were just everywhere, but the streets were clean.

They heard continuous sounds of tanks, lorries and other vehicles on the streets during the curfew. The West Pakistani killers must have cleaned up the roads in two days to show the world nothing was wrong in Dhaka, they thought.

They decided to have a look at the Dhaka University. So, they hopped in rickshaws and went to the Jagannat Hall, where they found stone-faced soldiers on guards.

"Bhago yahase! (get lost from here!)," they barked.

They could not go inside the university area. But from distance, they could saw bodies being thrown into the army trucks.

Shocked, they decided to go back home. On the 28th they were ready to leave Dhaka and go to their family home in Nabnagar, Brahmanbaria. Ali Zaker's friend Nurul Sagir did a great job driving family members to the bank of Buriganga River in several trips.

On the way there, soldiers stopped the car, asking: "Kaha ja rehhe ho? (where're you going?)"

"Apna gao me ja rahe he (going to our village)," Sagir, who looked like a Punjabi, would say.

They were crossing the river on a country boat, and Pakistani troops fired a few random shots as they neared Jinjira. They narrowly escaped.

Hours of tiring walk and two days on boat finally landed them in their village, where Aly Zaker met a lot of university students. They shared hair-raising stories of a massacre in Tantibazar, at Victoria Park and in Sadarghat. People, who were waiting to board launches, were killed indiscriminately.

The more he heard about those brutal incidents the harder got his resolve for working to free the country. On April 12, he decided to cross the border to India and eventually ended up with the Bangladesh government in exile at Mujibnagar.

He started working as a producer of English language programme. Every evening, for the next nine months till the liberation of Bangladesh, Aly Zaker appeared before his world audience with a one-hour programme on war updates.

Robert Blake

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of the organisation says Prof Mohammad Yunus was holding the post of managing director of the Grameen Bank for the last 10 years in violation of rules of the central bank.

The issue is under trial in the High Court, and any comment on that is unwarranted and against the diplomatic norms.

Blake's remark also undermined the country's sovereignty, said the press release.

The signatories are Prof Kabir Chowdhury, president of advisory committee; Justice Mohammad Gholam Rabbani, executive committee president, and general secretary Kazi Mukul.

The US failing to stop the trial [for war crimes] of Jamaat leaders, whom it backed in 1971, is now striving to stop trial of Yunus, says the press release.

Woman killed

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thugs who strangled her later to confirm her death," she said.

Shefal suspects that the criminals might have planned to kill Reena due to an earlier feud, as they inquired the locals about her whereabouts before entering the house.

Demra police said they were yet to confirm whether it was an incident of robbery leading to the murder, or planned killing.

Meanwhile, a construction worker Joyal Abedin, 29, was found dead on the third floor of a six-storey building under construction at West Tejturibazar yesterday morning.

The deceased had been living at the construction site along with three other workers who went missing following the incident, Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Tejturibazar Police Station said.

The OC suspect missing workers might be involved in the killing though the motive could not be ascertained.

Dhaka Medical College Morgue sources said the body bore three stab wounds including one on the head.

PM wants end to state power grab

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the 1,030 amendment proposals they had placed on the thanks-giving motion.

The speaker put all the proposals for vote in one go and it was defeated in a voice vote.

The speaker argued that it would take at least five nights to dispose of all the proposals had he put them for vote one by one in line with the opposition's demand.

The opposition walked out after the voice vote.

The prime minister, who gave the concluding speech on the discussion on the thanks-giving motion, urged opposition lawmakers to join parliament in the next session when a bill to amend the constitution will be placed.

In her hour-long speech, she also replied to dozens of allegations raised by the opposition bench against the government.

She launched a counter attack on the main opposition BNP and blasted the party for "misrule between 2001 and 2006".

In response to opposition demands for putting former president Iajuddin Ahmed, former chief adviser to a caretaker government Fakhruddin Ahmed and former army chief Moeen U Ahmed on trial for their roles in the emergency period, she said it is the BNP who is demanding this, adding, "Then why are they not filing case against them. The court is independent. And it is their

duty to file the cases."

On the issue of transit, she said transit agreement with India was signed during the regime of Ziaur Rahman in 1978. "All successive governments renewed it. So it is nothing new," Hasina said.

On the use of indecent language in the House, particularly by female lawmakers, the premier requested them to maintain decency while speaking.

She also thanked the speaker for exercising restraint in the face of indecent language used against him.

Hasina said the speaker could have ordered the sergeant-at-arms to get those lawmakers out of the House or have them expelled.

On lawmakers being absent during House proceedings, the premier suggested that the speaker deducts Tk 100 from their remunerations for each day of their absence from parliament proceedings.

She also spoke of her government's development activities.

Earlier, participating in the discussion, BNP senior lawmakers Moudud Ahmed and Jamiruddin Sircar blasted the government for its "wrongdoings".

They also questioned the government's move to hold trials of war criminals.

After passing of the thanks-giving motion, the session that began on January 25 was prorogued.

Champs gone

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tournament. The southpaw, who has been terrific in the tournament so far, struck eight boundaries while a cool and collected Raina, who hit a massive six off Brett Lee to end Australia's chance of a comeback, also hit a couple of boundaries.

It was Australia's second successive defeat and the most painful after their record unbeaten run of 34 undefeated World Cup matches. It also ended Ricky Ponting's dream of being the only man to win the World Cup as captain thrice, despite a valiant century.

While the defeat effectively ended Ponting's Cup career, his long-time rival Sachin Tendulkar is still in the hunt for a maiden World Cup trophy. The legend missed out on his much-anticipated hundredth international century, igniting hopes of a dream quarterfinal century with a well-compiled 53 before being caught behind off speedster Shaun Tait with the score on 94 for two.

AFP adds, Ponting scored his first international century in over a year as the champions put up 260 for six.

The star batsman's 104 was his first hundred in 39 international innings since he made 106 against the

West Indies in a one-day international in Brisbane last year.

Ponting, who'd managed just 102 runs at 20.4 in five previous innings this tournament, had come into the match amidst reports he could be quitting international cricket completely after the World Cup.

However, the 36-year-old Tasmanian demonstrated his enduring class in a 118-ball innings featuring one six and seven fours.

He was out late when he reverse-swept Ravichandran Ashwin straight to Zaheer Khan at short third man.

David Hussey, recalled in place of the dropped Steven Smith, made a useful 38 not out and helped Ponting add 55 for the sixth wicket after Michael Clarke, Michael Hussey and Cameron White all fell cheaply.

Back-up spinners Ashwin and Yuvraj Singh took four wickets between them with left-arm quick Zaheer taking the other two wickets.

But lead off-spinner Harbhajan Singh's 10-wicketless overs cost 50 runs. Ponting survived lbw appeals on 86 from Zaheer Khan and on 91 from old adversary Harbhajan, a particularly strong shout.

But as India had used up both their reviews, they were

no comeback against the umpires' not out verdicts.

Together with Haddin, Ponting shared a second-wicket stand of 70.

Australia, after winning the toss and making India field in the heat of the day, got off to a steady start through openers Shane Watson and Haddin.

But a change of ends for Ashwin had them roaring again when he bowled Watson for 25 after the all-rounder was beaten by the turn as he attempted a violent slog-sweep.

Soon after Ponting came to the crease he appeared to exchange words with Harbhajan before umpire Ian Gould intervened.

Wicketkeeper Haddin completed a 57-ball fifty by sweetly striking Munaf Patel through midwicket for his sixth four.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard of the World Cup quarterfinal between India and Australia at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday:
AUSTRALIA
Watson b Ashwin 25
Haddin c Raina b Yuvraj 53
Ponting c Zaheer 86
b Ashwin 104
Clarke c Zaheer b Yuvraj 8
M Hussey b Zaheer 3
White c b Zaheer 12
D Hussey not out 38

Johnson not out 6
Extras: (lb-2, w-9) 11
Total: (Fro 6 wkts in 50 overs) 260
Fall not bat: Krejza, Lee, Tait
Fall of wickets: 1-40, 2-110, 3-140, 4-150, 5-190, 6-245

Bowler O M R W
Ashwin 10 0 52 2
Zaheer 10 0 53 2
Harbhajan 10 0 50 0
Patel 7 0 44 0
Yuvraj 10 0 44 2
Tendulkar 2 0 9 0
Kohli 1 0 6 0

INDIA
Sehwag c M Hussey b Watson 15
Tendulkar c Haddin b Tait 53
Gambhir run out 50
Kohli c Clarke b D Hussey 24
Yuvraj not out 57
Dhoni c Clarke b Lee 7
Raina not out 34
Extras: (lb-3, w-16, nb-2) 21
Total: (For 5 wkts in 47.4 overs) 261

Did not bat: Harbhajan, Ashwin, Zaheer, Patel
Fall of wickets: 1-44, 2-94, 3-143, 4-168, 5-187

Bowler O M R W
Lee