

# Singapore, Australia to boost intelligence sharing on jihadis

AFP, Singapore

Australia and Singapore vowed yesterday to enhance intelligence sharing in the face of growing fears about the threat posed by jihadist citizens returning home after fighting in Syria and Iraq.

Ministers from both countries warned of the rising risk posed by the returning fighters who are radicalised and have developed sophisticated skills to carry out terror attacks.

"In this context of counter-terrorism and counter radicalisation... we felt that we could exchange more information because these threats if they materialise will affect all citizens of all races and all religions," Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said at a joint press conference with Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop.

Senior Australian government officials led by Bishop are in Singapore for bilateral meetings.

Bishop said Canberra is "also in discussions with our counterparts in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines as this is not an issue that is isolated".

"If these foreign fighters as they are called, come back to Australia, come back to our region, then they pose a threat," she said.

"They are hardened, experienced extremists who have undertaken in a number of instances, terrorist activities overseas," she added.

Australia's assistant Defence Minister Stuart Robert said the enhanced information sharing with Singapore will cover "the areas of terrorism, extremism, foreign fighters and the growth of homegrown extremism".

The United States and Australia this month agreed to take concerns about jihadist foreign fighters in the Islamic State terror group to the United Nations.

The group has overrun parts of Syria and Iraq and have declared a Muslim caliphate in those areas.

As many as 150 Australians are said to be fighting alongside the group overseas, including at least one Sydney man and his young son who have posed for photos with a severed head.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott's government is hardening laws to make it

more difficult for citizens to travel from Australia to fight in the Middle East, and easier to arrest them on their return.

Singapore in July said it is aware of two Singaporeans currently fighting in Syria along with their families.

Authorities in October 2012 detained a man who attempted to travel to Syria to join the jihadists, while two others have had their movements restricted after their attempts to contact the militant groups.

Neighbouring Malaysia has detained 19 Islamic State-inspired militants who had allegedly plotted to bomb pubs, discos and a Malaysian brewery of beer producer Carlsberg.

In Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation, authorities estimate that 60 of its citizens have joined the fighting in Syria and Iraq.

The deputy chief of the Malaysian police counter-terrorism division, Ayob Khan Mydin, told AFP on Tuesday that the detained Malaysian suspects and their supporters had visions of establishing a hardline Islamic caliphate spanning Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore.

# In somber homecoming, Malaysia lays MH17 dead to rest

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Millions of black-clad Malaysians fell silent yesterday in tribute to their 43 countrymen killed in the MH17 disaster as the first remains were brought home and laid to rest amid deep sorrow and anger.

People across the country of 28 million observed a minutes' silence at 10:55 am (0255 GMT), shortly after a Malaysia Airlines jet landed with the remains of 20 people killed when MH17 was blasted from the sky by a suspected surface-to-air missile over Ukraine.

Five weeks after the July 17 tragedy, the coffins and urns were conveyed to white hearses in a solemn ceremony presided over by Malaysia's King Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah and Prime Minister Najib Razak at Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Muslim-majority Malaysia had declared a day of national mourning, with flags lowered to half-mast, and business, sport, entertainment and other events cancelled or toned down.

Residents of the capital Kuala Lumpur overwhelmingly donned black, with many Muslim women in flowing black robes and Islamic headscarves, as state television aired recitations from the Koran and photos of the dead.

"No words can express the sense of

loss in seeing the bodies return, my prayers are with the victims and families of #MH17," Najib said on his Twitterfeed.

Dozens of Malaysia Airlines cabin crew and pilots, wearing their work uniforms and holding Malaysian flags and white flowers, held an emotional vigil near the airport ceremony, some weeping, others praying for their lost colleagues.

Shazly, 40, a flight steward who gave only his first name, citing a company request regarding contact with the media, mourned for Nur Shazana Mohamed Salleh, 31, who joined the airline with him in the same 2004 recruitment class.

"She was a very jovial girl. She loved her job very much. She was very close with all her friends," he said.

"Life has to go on, even though it's very difficult for us to accept what has happened to our airline. They are our friends."

Some wore T-shirts bearing their colleagues' names and the Arabic phrase for "See you in Paradise." Fifteen crew were aboard.

Yesterday's remains included Ariza Ghazalee, 46, and her son Muhammad Afif, 18, part of an entire family of six wiped out in the disaster.

It was a far different homecoming than what they had planned -- the

family was repatriating to Malaysia after three years abroad, and Ariza's final Facebook post had said, "Starting our new migration. Praise God."

The special flight arrived from Amsterdam, where bodies have been taken for identification by Dutch authorities investigating the tragedy.

All 298 on board Amsterdam-Kuala Lumpur flight MH17 were killed, including 193 Dutch nationals.

The West accuses Russian-backed separatists of shooting down the plane, while Moscow blames Ukraine.

The remains were conveyed onward to their hometowns for memorials in mosques, churches and temples -- reflecting Malaysia's unique multi-ethnic make-up.

Many were quickly laid to rest amid grief and anger.

"Their loved ones can no longer hold them. Their bodies came back in boxes," an angry Abdul Rahman Nordin, a friend of Nur Shazana's family, said at a funeral for her and MH17 First Officer Ahmad Hakimi Hanapi outside Kuala Lumpur.

"Justice must be served. If courts find that the plane was shot down intentionally, then those responsible must be punished with the death sentence."

# Sorry state of DMCH

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The deputy director also revealed that a number of cameras offered no vision as the bulbs lighting some corridors were turned off.

"It is only logical to assume there were people posted at different points to turn off the bulbs throughout the escape route," he said.

His comments also bring to light the abysmal security system with no one employed to keep an eye on the monitor to observe what was happening around the hospital.

The monitor is set up inside the room of Brig Gen Mustafizur Rahman, the hospital's director. No alarm, however, went off even after views from some cameras were missing during the incident.

The incident also coincided with the time when there was no guard at the exit of the neonatal ward for about 15 minutes. The guard had to go to the next ward to pacify some patients' attendants brawling there, sources at the hospital said.

The guard, Nazimuddin, has been

closed to the headquarters, said Ansar Commander of DMCH Abdul Khaleque.

The twin boys were born on Wednesday morning to Runa Begum, a housewife, and Kawsar Hossain, a security guard of an apartment building residing at Mohammadpur in the capital.

Shahbagh Police Station's Sub Inspector Ferdous Alam Sarker, the investigating officer (IO) of the case, said a team of police are working to track the thief down.

"We have been provided photographs of the thief and law enforcers are working to find out her whereabouts," said Ferdous.

However, Kawsar Hossain, the baby's father, said the hospital authority deferred to come up with adequate help to recover the stolen baby.

"Nobody appeared until late Friday afternoon to explain to us what exactly happened to my missing boy," he said.

Kawsar, a resident of Mohammadpur, is a security guard at an apartment building and his wife

Runa Begum is a housewife.

Kawsar firmly believes hospital staffs are involved in the crime.

"I cannot believe how all security measures failed right at the moment when my baby was being taken away from the hospital," he added.

Baby trade at city hospitals

Trading of newborns is not uncommon at different city hospitals, including the DMCH. While incidents of theft are few and far between, selling newborns to childless couples happens almost regularly.

In Bangladesh about 10-15% couples are childless who crave for adopting a child, said Dr Sayeba Akhter, former head of Gynecology and Obstetrics at DMCH.

This percentage rate of childless couples creates the demand for newborns. In most cases, birth attendants and other employees at hospitals collude with racketeers who then dissuade pregnant women seeking abortion from killing the foetus.

The police apparently are clueless about the fate of the traded babies.

year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina formally offered financial assistance and expertise to Myanmar to assist it in resolving the Rohingya problem.

Bangladesh also proposed holding dialogues for enhancing security.

As there is no structured security cooperation in place, Bangladesh will make a formal proposal for Security Dialogue and discuss a Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) over security issues.

To reduce tension between the border guards of the two nations, Dhaka last year suggested signing a Memorandum of Understanding to hold regular dialogues on security matters.

This proposal was tabled at a foreign secretary-level meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar, during the last Foreign Office Consultation in 2013.

The foreign ministry has been trying

to convince Myanmar for a year to create space for dialogues to build trust between the two countries.

To that aim, the government allowed a Myanmar frigate to cross the Naf river for the first time last year. The frigate stayed in Myanmar territory bordering Cox's Bazar for a month.

Officials at the foreign ministry said Bangladesh has been making all kinds of positive gestures as per the prime minister's directives "to build the best possible relationship with Myanmar".

Chiefs of the Bangladesh army, air force and navy have already paid visits to Myanmar while the Myanmar naval chief has visited Dhaka and its air chief is expected to visit Dhaka soon.

The meeting was scheduled for June 18 but was deferred by Myanmar after tensions ran high between the countries over the killing of Border Guard Bangladesh corporal Mizanur Rahman by Myanmar security forces on May 28.

# Shiite militiamen kill 70 at Iraq Sunni mosque

AFP, Baquba

Shiite militiamen gunned down 70 people in an apparent revenge attack at an Iraqi Sunni mosque yesterday, dealing a blow to government efforts to regain territory seized by jihadist-led militants.

The shooting in the Hamreen area of Diyala province will increase already significant anger among Iraq's Sunni Arab minority with the Shiite-led government, undermining an anti-militant drive that ultimately requires Sunni cooperation to succeed.

It came as government forces battled to regain ground in Diyala, and Washington warned of the dangers of the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group, which spearheaded an offensive that overran swathes of Iraq in June, and this week released a video of American journalist James Foley being beheaded.

Army and police officers said the attack on the Musab bin Omair Mosque came after Shiite militiamen were killed in clashes in the area, while other sources said it followed a roadside bomb near one of their patrols.

Doctors and the officers put the toll from the attack, in which worshippers were sprayed with machinegun fire, at 70 dead and 20 wounded.

The government turned to militiamen to bolster its flagging forces during the IS offensive, sparking a resurgence of groups involved in brutal sectarian killings in past years that will be difficult to dislodge.

Elsewhere in Diyala, Kurdish and federal security forces yesterday launched an operation aimed at retaking the Jalawla area from militants who seized it on August 11.

Federal forces backed by air support also clashed with militants in the Saadiyah area south of Jalawla, officers said.

## Questions

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3:50pm, exactly 20 minutes after the test started. One SMS contained answers of the first 50 questions while the other had answers of the rest 50.

Another aspirant, who is doing his Masters from Dhaka University (DU) and took the test for the senior officer's post yesterday, said, "As previously promised, some seniors of my university campus sent me the answers of all 100 MCQs through SMSs during the exam."

Though he initially was sceptic but was convinced of correctness of the answers after checking them with others sitting around him at Dhaka Teachers' Training College.

If what he claimed is proved true, this raises serious questions about the quality of vigilance in the exam halls.

Contacted, Pradip Kumar Dutta, managing director of Sonali Bank, said he had heard the "rumours of the question leak" and asked the authorities of DU's business studies faculty, which is conducting the recruitment tests, to look into it.

"The business faculty dean told me that some candidates sent out questions through their cell phones and then received answers from their accomplices outside. They also seized some mobile phones from different exam centres," he added.

Prof Shibli Rubayatul Islam, dean of the faculty, confirmed that they indeed had seized around 70 cell phones during the exam.

"It seems some candidates took snapshots of the question paper and sent it outside using their cell phones. Their aides from outside then sent them the answers," he said, adding that they were verifying the contents in the phones seized during the test.

When asked if the test would be cancelled, he replied in the negative.

Around 2.2 lakh candidates took the test in 105 centres in the capital for 1,707 posts of the state-run bank.

## 'Alien thigh bone'

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spine" and a "human finger". The regularity of these 'finds' is of course testament not to the once-flourishing wildlife of Mars, but to the human brain's remarkable capacity to spot patterns in random noise.

This was a handy trait for our ancestors when identifying a potential predator among the primeval foliage, but in modern times it's more likely to lead only to those little 'huh' moments when we spot a face in some inanimate object.

Of course, there is some truth to conspiracy theorists' hopes of life on Mars, with scientists pointing out last year that the asteroid impact that killed the dinosaurs could have flung rocks carrying organic matter to the red planet some 66 million years ago.

Unfortunately, at this point (and for roughly 3 billion years prior) Mars was a barren place with no flowing water. However, if the micro-organisms from Earth had hitched a ride to somewhere a little more hospitable, like Europa then it could be a different matter altogether.

## DHAKA-DELHI TALKS

# Repatriation of Anup might be on agenda

STAR REPORT

The repatriation of Ulfa leader Anup Chetia, who has been behind bars in Bangladesh since 1997, might come up for discussion at the upcoming home secretary-level talks between Bangladesh and India.

The talks might be held early next month in Dhaka.

"India might raise Chetia's repatriation issue during the talks and we are ready for it," Senior Home Secretary Muzammel Haque Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

He, however, declined to make any further comment on the matter.

Leader of United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa), Chetia reportedly expressed his desire to be deported to India when an Indian High Commission official met him at Kashimpur High Security Central Jail on Thursday.

Preferring anonymity, several top staff at the jail said Indian official JP

Singh met the prisoner and asked him if he wanted to be deported. Chetia replied that he would like to.

The repatriation of Chetia has been under discussion between the two countries and the home secretaries will take it up again, Indian external affairs ministry spokesman Syed Akbaruddin told newsmen in the Indian capital yesterday, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Indian Home Secretary Anil Goswami is likely to visit Dhaka on September 1-2, but there is no official word on it.

Police had arrested Chetia December 21, 1997 in Mohammadpur, Dhaka. He was sentenced to three, four and seven years in jail for trespassing into Bangladesh, possession of forged Bangladeshi passports and foreign currency and possession of a satellite phone.

He prison term ended on February 25, 2007 and he has been at Kashimpur jail since 2012.

India wants Chetia back so that he could join other ULFA leaders in the peace talks with the government.

# Safety flaws pose risk

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that had remained grounded, said Caab officials.

Wishing anonymity, a top Caab official said the airline had fallen short of engineers necessary for maintaining its MD-83s, but it did not go for any recruitment.

The shortage of engineers is putting a heavy workload on the airline's staff, who may suffer from fatigue, according to the official.

United Airways, however, told The Daily Star that it had already corrected some of the flaws found in the inspection, and was working to fix the rest.

Questions were raised about the airline's aircraft maintenance and safety standards after the nose gear of one of its ATR-72 aircraft collapsed upon landing at Cox's Bazar Airport on July 20.

Though there were faults in the nose gear, they had not been corrected, apparently leading to the collapse, said a source with knowledge of the primary investigation into the incident.

The flight from Dhaka with 43 passengers and crew on board narrowly averted a disaster.

In August 2012, an ATR-72 aircraft of the airline narrowly escaped a crash on a domestic route after a part of its windshield blew away in mid-air at an altitude of 9,000 feet. The co-pilot was seriously injured in the incident.

Caab recently went tough on the private airline and decided not to renew its Air Operator Certificate (AOC), mandatory for airlines for operating flights, until it corrected the safety flaws.

In a letter to United Airways on June 26, Caab said it would not renew the airline's AOC because of safety flaws and dues amounting to Tk 84.19 crore.

However, the airline has been given a temporary AOC following a High Court order. The HC asked Caab to temporarily renew the AOC and also directed the airline to rectify the safety flaws by August 29.

Caab officials said United Airways had corrected some of the flaws under tremendous pressure from the regulator.

"Our inspection came up with eight major findings. Things were not up to the mark. Caab is now monitoring the airline continuously. No leniency will be shown from now on," Caab

Director (Flight Safety and Regulation) Nazmul Anam told The Daily Star.

"We are doing it all for the safety of passengers and the airline," he said.

Md Kamrul Islam, assistant general manager (marketing support and public relations) of United Airways, said the regulator conducts inspections as part of regular monitoring. It sometimes finds safety flaws and the airlines always corrects those.

"We have already rectified some of the problems that came up in the audit findings. We are working to fix the rest within the deadline given by the court," he told this correspondent recently.

About the Cox's Bazar incident, he said a probe team from the aircraft manufacturer would come to Dhaka soon to pinpoint the cause of the gear's collapse.

United Airways, the largest among the country's four private airlines, operates on six international routes and seven domestic routes with a fleet of 11 aircraft.

The other three are Novo Air, Regent Airways and US-Bangla Airlines.

## Robbers kill

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stormed into the house of Syed Ahmed Shawdagar, a local businessman, at Rangmahal in the upazila at around 2:00am, said Provash Chandra Dhar, officer-in-charge of Chokaria Police Station.

Seeing the robbers with firearms, Nilufa screamed for help. They fired two rounds of bullets that left her dead on the spot.

The gang took the members of the house hostage at gun point and looted 15 bhories of gold ornaments, cash and other valuables worth about Tk 10 lakh, the OC said.

The robbers also beat up Khurshed Alam Bhutto, 30, son of Shawdagar. A case was filed with Chakaria Police Station against seven people, including one Hayat Ullah, a local robber and an accused in several criminal charges including murder, the OC said.

Later, police launched raids at different parts of the area and arrested Hayat in this connection.

The injured Khurshed is now undergoing treatment at Chakaria Upazila Health Complex.

# US warns on jihadist

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General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the group "has an apocalyptic end of days strategic vision that will eventually have to be defeated."

Dempsey warned the jihadist vision of a wider Muslim caliphate could "fundamentally alter the face of the Middle East and create a security environment that would certainly threaten us in many ways."

"Can they be defeated without addressing that part of the organisation that resides in Syria? The answer is no," he said, when asked if the campaign against the group could go beyond Iraq.

He spoke of a "very long contest" that could not be won by US military prowess alone, but only with regional support and that of "the 20 million disenfranchised Sunnis that happen to reside between Damascus and Baghdad."

He was referring to the alienation of many Sunni Muslims from the Shiite-led government in Iraq and the Alawite-dominated regime in Syria.

The US military said it had conducted 90 air strikes in Iraq since August 8, more than half of them in support of Kurdish forces near Iraq's largest dam on the Tigris river north of militant-held second city Mosul.

The murder of Foley has stoked fears in the West that the territory the militants have seized in Syria and

northern Iraq could become a launchpad for a new round of global terror attacks.

The US State Department said it estimated there were about 12,000 foreign fighters from at least 50 countries in Syria.

Harf said the United States estimates that IS has received millions of dollars in ransom payments this year alone. Most are believed to have been paid by European governments.

In the execution video, released online, a black-clad militant said that Foley was killed to avenge US air strikes against IS.

The man, speaking with a clear south London accent, then paraded a second US reporter, Steven Sotloff, in front of the camera and said he would die unless President Barack Obama changes course.

Sotloff is a freelance journalist for Time magazine who was captured on August 4, 2013.

The scale of the threat from IS became clear in June when the group, then known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, seized Mosul, a city of some two million people, prompting hundreds of thousands of its residents to flee.

The jihadists went back on the offensive earlier this month, attacking mainly Christian and Yazidi Kurdish areas east and west of Mosul, in operations that triggered a new exodus of civilians that helped prompt the US air strikes.