

Nearly 150 people

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men and young children.

"They spared nobody. In fact, while some of the terrorists waited and set most of the corpses on fire, others proceeded to houses and shot indiscriminately at women who were preparing food," he said.

In two other villages near the town of Monguno, meanwhile, gunmen killed 48 people and injured 11 others, local lawmaker Mohammed Tahir and witnesses told AFP.

"They selected particular male residents from among the crowd of worshippers... and opened fire on them before setting the two villages on fire and razing them to the ground," Tahir said.

Another resident who managed to escape said the militants arrived in vans and on motorcycles.

"They killed 48 people and injured several others but many of us managed to escape amid volleys of bullets," said the resident who asked not to be named for safety reasons.

Kukawa is around 50 kilometres away from the two villages near Monguno.

All three are located near Lake Chad, which straddles Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon and has been a focal point of the unrest.

Boko Haram has intensified its campaign of violence since Buhari came to power on May 29 vowing to crush the jihadists' bloody uprising that has claimed at least 15,000 lives.

Since then, some 400 people have been killed in attacks blamed on the extremists, who have sworn allegiance to the Islamic State group, according to an AFP tally.

Boko Haram had captured scores of towns and villages in the north-east last year, but has since been pushed back by a four-nation military offensive that kicked off in February.

Despite their territorial losses, the insurgents have kept up their deadly raids, explosions and suicide attacks on "soft" targets such as markets and mosques.

A new regional fighting force comprising 8,700 troops from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin is due to deploy at the end of the month to try definitively end the insurgency.

But they will face huge challenges in countering the guerrilla tactics to which Boko Haram has increasingly resorted.

Middle-income

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In this connection, she said the BNP-led 20-party alliance could not slow down the pace of the country's development despite carrying out arson attacks and vandalism.

For further development of an independent and sovereign country like Bangladesh, the PM said, all would have to work with utmost sincerity from their respective positions.

Mentioning that Bangladesh was moving ahead on all fronts, she renewed her vow to turn the country into a peaceful abode in South Asia.

On upgrading the Cox's Bazar Airport, she said her government wanted to improve it to international standards considering the security of the vast maritime areas that Bangladesh gained from Myanmar and India.

The airport could be a hub between the East and the West, she said, emphasising further stretching of its runway to 10,500 feet to facilitate much larger aircraft.

"Landing of international aircraft is not only important from tourism perspective, but also for refuelling purpose," she said, adding that her government had taken steps to rehabilitate those affected due to the work.

At the function, the PM said it was her initiative to establish road connectivity among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN).

With the signing of the Motor Vehicle Agreement among these countries, she hoped that this road connectivity would be materialised within the next six months.

"As a result, trade and commerce would be expanded in this region. We can invest in joint venture with Nepal and Bhutan for hydropower or we could also purchase power as scopes are there."

Hasina, also chief of the ruling Awami League, said the people of Cox's Bazar would be benefited by the implementation of the Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor.

The rail network would now reach Gundum and it would further stretch to Kunming of China through Myanmar, she added.



Jordan TV's journalist Nepal Farsakh reacts after Israeli security forces sprayed her face with pepper gas, as she was covering a demonstration by Palestinians yesterday on a road leading to the Adam settlement, located near the West Bank village of Jabba, to mark the first anniversary of the killing of 16-year-old Palestinian Mohammed Abu Khder, who was snatched and burned alive by Jewish extremists after the murder of three Israeli teenagers. The murder by Palestinians of the three Israeli teenagers and the grisly revenge killing of Khder triggered events that led to war in the Gaza Strip in 2014.

PHOTO: AFP

APRIL CITY POLLS

No assault on journos, claims EC

PANKAJ KARMAKAR

An Election Commission's (EC) probe committee has found that there had been no incident of assault on journalists during the April 28 city polls.

The probe body has recently submitted its report to the EC's Secretary Sirazul Islam, claiming that journalists could not provide sufficient information and documents to prove their allegation of assault, said EC sources.

"As journalists' allegation was not supported by sufficient witnesses and documents, it was not possible to prove the incidents had occurred and identify the perpetrators," said an EC official, who worked with the probe.

However, the EC's Secretary Sirazul Islam said, "I have received the report

this week. Details of the report cannot be disclosed now. We will place the report before the election commissioners for further course of action."

According to media reports, at least 10 journalists were assaulted by ruling Awami League men during the polling hours. Some reporters were robbed of cash, mobile phones and handbags.

Following that, the EC on May 5 formed two committees to probe the incidents in Dhaka and Chittagong. Headed by additional divisional commissioners of Dhaka and Chittagong, each of the three-member committees included senior EC and police officials.

As part of its investigation, the probe body of Dhaka last month recorded depositions of presiding officers, policemen and journalists.

At these hearings, polling officials and policemen said they did not see any incident of assault. The journalists, however, said they were attacked.

Because of these contradictory statements, the probe body asked the three parties (polling officials, the police and journalists) to come face-to-face at a hearing on June 1. But no journalist attended the hearing that day.

Finally, the probe body submitted their report this week.

The probe committee also came up with recommendations that include formation of a guideline or policy on working jurisdiction of journalists on polling day.

It also recommended that journalists be made aware of electoral code and conduct.

'Huji plans Qaeda merger'

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attempt to set up a link with AQIS could not be verified. Journalists had not been allowed to ask the arrestees questions when they were paraded before the media yesterday.

After becoming stronger by recruiting more operatives, they had a plan to work under AQIS, Rab claimed.

Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in last September had announced an Indian subcontinent branch of al-Qaeda for Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Myanmar.

Earlier, in a video posted on Jihadist Forum on May 2, AQIS claimed the responsibility for the murder of writer-blogger Avijit Roy.

In the video, AQIS leader Asim Umar said his organisation carried out the attack on Avijit and "other blasphemers" in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Rab officials, however, said they so far did not find any link between the arrestees and the murders and the AQIS claim. They said they would interrogate them further in remand about the murders and the claim.

Mufti Mahmud Khan told reporters that Maulana Mayeen Uddin alias Abul Jandal, a death-row in mate and a top Huji leader, had been communicating with the arrestees from jail.

The arrestees had been planning a Trishal-style ambush on a prison van to snatch away Mayeen from custody, he said.

In February last year, militants attacked a prison van in Trishal of Mymensingh and liberated three condemned JMB leaders from police custody. A policeman was killed in the attack. Two of the escapees are still at large while the other one was killed in a shootout.

Huji had wanted to free Mayeen by attacking and cutting the grills of Kashimpur Jail, Rab claimed, adding that realising it was very risky, they planned for an ambush.

On information that Huji men were gathering in the capital from across the country, several teams of Rab-4 detained them at Sadarghat, Airport Railway Station and Mirpur during the last two days.

The other arrestees were: Mohammad Saidul Islam alias Sayeed Tamim, Mosharraf Hossain, Abdur Rahman Bapary, Al Amin Ibrahim, Mozahidul Islam Nakib, Ashraful Islam alias Abul Hashem, Robiul Islam, Habib Ullah, Shohidul Islam, and Altaf Hossain.

Rab during its drive in a Mirpur house also seized bomb-making materials and manuals, and books on jihad.

Mufti Mahmud Khan further said the militants, including the arrestees, had also planned to rob arms from

law enforcers' arsenals and use them to create anarchy.

Rab claimed that a group of people in Saudi Arabia and Dubai had been providing financial support for their militant activities.

The elite force also claimed that the militants had sorted their operatives in three categories. The operatives they recruited fresh through personal contact or through social media were called the *Din Kayemer Sathi* (the supporters of the struggle for Islamic Sharia).

From the *Din Kayemer Sathi*, a selected bunch, who pledges to work for spreading their ideology and recruit people, would be promoted to *Bayate fi Sabilillah* stage.

The other sort is the *Shahidi Kafela*; the people endowed with "high religious spirit" and who would be "ready to sacrifice their lives for the struggle".

Arrestees

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Azad -- on remand in the cocaine haul case after investigators produced them before the court.

The trio were picked up by Customs Intelligence officials in Dhaka and Chittagong on Tuesday.

Tanvir said they would start grilling the three and another arrestee Sohel today.

Arrested on June 6, Sohel was placed on five-day remand by another Chittagong court on Monday.

The four allegedly made an effort to release the consignment of 107 barrels of oil that arrived at Chittagong port on May 12. The liquid cocaine was hidden in one of the barrels while the others contained sunflower oil.

The arrestees also tried to either re-export the consignment or send it back to Uruguay, from where it was loaded onto a ship, said Customs Intelligence officials.

The consignment was detected at the port on June 8.

Atiqur and his uncle Mostafa contacted with Sohel, an employee of Khan Jahan Ali Ltd, regarding the consignment.

The shipment was brought from Bolivia via Uruguay for Khan Jahan Ali Ltd. But the firm claimed that it never had any business with any Bolivian company.

The four were tipped off by Bakul Mia, a Bangladesh-born UK citizen. Investigators suspected that Bakul, a relative of Atiqur and Mostafa, has a lot of information about the liquid cocaine, said Customs Intelligences sources.

Azad, a manager of Cosco (Bangladesh) Shipping Lines, helped Atiqur and Mostafa in a failed attempt to release the consignment from the port.

PROPOSED CURB ON PRESS

Japan news editors lash out at govt

AFP, Tokyo

Two Japanese newspaper editors on Thursday warned that democracy and press freedom were under threat after a conservative lawmaker said media opposed to Tokyo's hawkish military policy should be punished.

Hideo Onishi, a member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was reprimanded last week by the party after he and other LDP lawmakers called for restrictions on press that oppose the government's defence policy.

AL fears fair

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doesn't want to go to the polls also because it knows that it will face a debacle in it."

She claimed people in the three city polls had shown the AL-led regime an example of how they could turn it down.

Khaleda alleged that the leaders and activists of the 20-party alliance were being sent to jail for no reasons, while the ruling party men were not detained even after committing crimes such as killing, robbing and stealing.

The BNP chief further claimed that the AL men in collaboration with a section of law enforcers were running illegal human trafficking business in the country. "They are trafficking hapless and jobless people abroad, promising the victims of providing good jobs there."

Senior 20-party alliance leaders, intellectuals, Islamic scholars and Pakistan's deputy high commissioner in Dhaka attended the iftar party chaired by Islami Oikya Jote chief Abdul Latif Nezami.

Suspended BMP

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Zillur after he was found involved in the creation of a joint bribe fund to expedite the promotion of 230 Barisal cops.

On June 29, 10 lower-ranked Barisal policemen were suspended over the allegation.

A total of 230 Barisal police members contributed between Tk 30,000 and Tk 50,000 each and set up a joint fund of around Tk 77 lakh. The money was to be given to "top officials" to quicken their promotion that has been due since last October.

Of the money, Tk 17 lakh was deposited with a joint account of ASI Anisuzzaman, Nayek Kabir Hossain and driver Bablu at a Dutch-Bangla Bank branch in Barisal. The three are among the suspended cops.

They handed the rest of the money over to Zillur to "manage" their promotions, which the deputy commissioner acknowledged.

ISIS weaves web of support in Gulf

REUTERS, Kuwait/dubai

When a Saudi Arabian man flew to Kuwait in the early hours of Friday to carry out the country's worst militant attack, a bomb vest, Kuwaiti-style Arab robes, a place to prepare, and a car and driver to take him to his target were all lined up for him.

The vest had been ferried across from Saudi Arabia a few days before in a complex operation suggesting Islamic State now commands a capable network of militants, propagandists and sympathisers on the Arabian peninsula, a security source said.

Among those Fahd Suliman Abdul-Muhsen al-Qabaa contacted when his overnight flight via Bahrain landed, one had a family tie to Islamic State and another links to al-Qaida attacks in Kuwait a decade earlier, a security source and Kuwaiti media have reported.

Hours later, CCTV cameras recorded the young man entering Imam al-Sadeq mosque, his figure made portly by the bomb-laden vest concealed beneath his robe. He paused briefly to examine the 2,000 Shia Muslim men prostrated in prayer, then detonated the device.

The timing of his entry, when few in the mosque were in a position to ask intrusive questions of a stranger, was another sign of the attention to detail of the cross-border team, which also appears to have coordinated propaganda around the attack.

The killing of 27 people was Kuwait's deadliest militant attack, and the most lethal in any of the six hereditary-ruled Gulf Arab states since bombings in Riyadh killed 35 at the start of an al-Qaida campaign in Saudi Arabia in May 2003.

The assault has raised concerns about the number of young Saudi men willing to travel to attack Shias in smaller Gulf Arab states and so make good on a threat by Islamic State to step up violence in the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Officials worry this could be a model for future bombings in the energy-rich Gulf states: A bomber drawn from Saudi Arabia's large pool

of radicalized Islamists who flies or drives into a neighbouring state — Gulf Arabs enjoy visa free travel between their countries — and works with a local cell.

Aimen Dean, a Saudi former al-Qaida insider who now ruins a Gulf-based security consultancy, said Islamic State's cells posed "a more flexible threat" that would be harder to track down than those deployed by al-Qaida in its 2003-06 campaign.

This was in part due to the spread of encrypted messaging systems, enabling dispersed groups of militants to be directed from abroad, whereas al-Qaida in Saudi Arabia in 2003-06 was centrally managed and therefore easier to infiltrate, he said.

Friday's bombing was one of three attacks on civilians on three continents that day that drew worldwide condemnation - the others were in Tunisia and France — and happened almost a year to the day after Islamic State declared a caliphate.

Of the three, the Kuwait attack appears the one mostly clearly directed by the militant network, to judge by Islamic State's rapidity in asserting its role, and possibly by the connections of the individuals allegedly involved.

A source familiar with US investigations into the attack said Qabaa was seen as a serious member of IS' Saudi affiliate.

Kuwaiti officials are studying CCTV footage of the Nuwaiseeb border post, where the vest was brought in from the kingdom.

Responsibility was claimed within hours by the group's "Wilayat of Najd" branch, and a posthumous audio of Qabaa followed shortly after. The Wilayat of Najd had also claimed two bombings of Shia Mosques in Saudi Arabia.

Najd, the central and northern part of Saudi Arabia, is the heartland of the kingdom's ultra-conservative religious traditions and was also the birthplace of Qabaa.

An article about Qabaa, from Qassim region in Najd, published by the Saudi-owned daily al Hayat, paints a picture of a college dropout and loner who took up militant causes.

ISIS destroys statue outside Syria's Palmyra museum

AFP, Beirut

Islamic State group jihadists have destroyed a famous statue of a lion outside the museum in the Syrian city of Palmyra, the country's antiquities director said yesterday.

Maamoun Abdelkarim said the statue, known as the Lion of Al-Lat, was an irreplaceable piece and was apparently destroyed last week.

"ISIS members on Saturday destroyed the Lion of al-Lat, which is a unique piece that is three metres (10 feet) tall and weight 15 tonnes," Abdelkarim told AFP.

"It's the most serious crime they have committed against Palmyra's heritage," he said.

The limestone statue was discovered in 1977 by a Polish archeological mission at the temple of Al-Lat, a pre-



Islamic Arabian goddess, and dated back to the 1st century BC.

Abdelkarim said the statue had been covered with a metal plate and sandbags to protect it from fighting "but we never imagined that ISIS would come to the town to destroy it."

ISIS captured Palmyra, a renowned UNESCO World Heritage site, from government forces on May 21, prompting international concerns about the fate of the city's antiquities.

So far, the city's most famous sites have been left intact, though there are reports ISIS has mined them.

Most of the pieces in the city's museum were evacuated by antiquities staff before ISIS arrived, though the group has blown up several historic Muslim graves in recent weeks.

Wild monkeys come out

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parishad member, said almost every day one or two groups of monkeys comprising five to 10 at a time go into their village looking for food. He hails from Krishnapur village.

Jalaluddin, a villager from Santoshpur, told this correspondent over the phone yesterday that a group of monkeys was roaming around his village as he spoke.

Local forest officials say they do not have sufficient funds to feed the hungry animals. The wild monkeys are now dependent on food provided by villagers and tourists.

Santoshpur Beat Officer Solaiman Hossain said the forest office only had a small budget to feed the monkeys.

The wild animals can be saved if the government declares the forest a sanctuary, he suggested.

Santoshpur and the adjacent Madhupur forest areas in Madhupur upazila of Tangail were once famous for a variety of wild animals like tigers, leopards, deer, bears and many different species of birds.

Many of these animals are now extinct in the area and only a few varieties of monkeys are all that is seen from time to time. Even their numbers are on the decline now, sources claim.

Still, hundreds of visitors from far and wide throng the Santoshpur and Madhupur forests every day to see these monkeys, a local forest official said.

Ayub Ali, who has a fruit orchard near Santoshpur forest, said the monkeys often go into the orchards in

search of food but the fruit gardeners drive them away.

Locals say an influential quarter of the community has cleared parts of the forest and developed fruit orchards there. This has restricted the areas available to the forest animals who now venture out into areas inhabited by people in search of food.

Ninety-year-old Alhaj Elimuddin is a witness to the glory of the old days when wild animals were aplenty in these forests.

He said when he was a boy he regularly saw leopards, peacocks, bears, deer and different types of monkeys, including hanuman (langur), and also a variety of reptiles in the area. But now a few monkeys are all that are found in forest areas in Mymensingh and in Madhupur under Tangail district.

Gobinda Roy, Mymensingh Divisional Forest Officer, said the government allocated Tk 25,000 in the last fiscal year for around 300 acres of Santoshpur and Rasulpur forest areas of Muktagachha upazila.

He claimed that there was no shortage of food in the forest areas as thousands of tress had been planted in the areas over the last few decades through social forestry programmes.

Tapan Kumar Dey, conservator of the Forest Wildlife division, said people do not bring food for wild animals these days. However, the monkeys should not face any major food shortages in the current month as fruits are aplenty on the trees now.

"We will be planting fruit trees like banana, chapalis and papaya for birds and animals in the forest," he added.