



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina calls on her Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe at the UN headquarters on Monday.

PHOTO: PID

50 countries pledge 40,000 more troops

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According to UN statistics, 9,432 members of Bangladesh armed forces and police are now engaged in peacekeeping missions.

Since 1988, Bangladesh Armed Forces have participated in 54 peacekeeping missions in 40 countries.

At Monday's summit, US President Barack Obama said peace operations were "experiencing unprecedented strains" and deployed in "more difficult and deadlier conflicts."

"We know that peace operations are not the solution to every problem," Obama told the summit held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

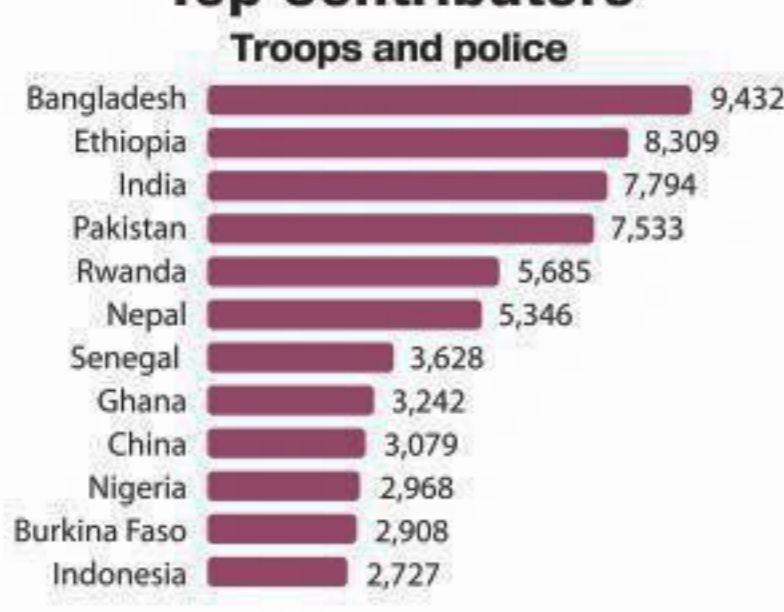
"But they do remain one of the world's most important tools to address armed conflict," he said.

The new contributions include helicopters, engineering units, field hospitals and bomb-detonating expertise that are desperately needed to bolster UN peace missions, says AFP.

Obama opened the summit by announcing a tally of 30,000 new troops for peace missions, but after leaders took turns at the podium to announce contributions, the total reached 40,000.

China scaled up its contribution, taking the lead in setting up an 8,000-

Top Contributors



Source: United Nations Peacekeeping

strong standby police force while Colombia made a first-time offer of as many as 5,000 troops.

A key player in peacekeeping in Africa, Rwanda offered two attack helicopters, two field hospitals, an all-female police unit and 1,600 new troops.

Indonesia boosted its participation with training and 2,700 new troops while India pledged 850 additional soldiers.

British Prime Minister David Cameron announced 70 troops for the UN-African Union mission in Somalia and up to 300 troops for South Sudan, where the UN mission is grappling with one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

Pledges rolled in from smaller nations such as Armenia and Fiji and bigger players like Brazil, Turkey, Germany and Australia.

The United States had hoped to draw more pledges from European countries that have gradually pulled their troops out of peacekeeping and contributed to the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan.

In the end, the European pledges remained modest, but officials stressed the importance of highly-trained troops from Britain, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy to peacekeeping.

In contrast, China -- which has strong economic interests in Africa -- offered more engineering soldiers, transport and medical staff and pledged to train 2,000 peacekeepers from other countries to carry out demining operations.

President Xi Jinping said China would provide \$100 million to the African Union to support a new African standby force and send the first peacekeeping helicopter squad to Africa.

In his address, Obama stressed that strengthening peacekeeping would serve "our common security" and pledged to double the number of US

officers serving under the blue flag.

There are just 78 Americans serving in UN peace missions but Washington remains by far the largest financial backer, providing 28 percent of the UN peacekeeping budget of \$8.3 billion.

Boosting troop contributions will help the UN tackle a wave of sexual abuse allegations that have hit its missions, notably in the Central African Republic.

The new commitments will give Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon the leeway to remove units whose soldiers face accusations and replace them without weakening a mission.

In his address to the summit, French President François Hollande, who pledged to step up training of African forces, referred to the sexual abuse scandal, saying countries "must not allow the UN flag to be tarnished."

France is investigating allegations that 14 soldiers from its Sangaris military force sexually abused children in the Central African Republic in return for food, from December 2013 until June last year.

While the French troops were not serving in a UN peacekeeping mission, the Sangaris operation was authorised by a UN Security Council resolution.

26 Bangladeshis confirmed dead

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He said they would disclose the identities of the Bangladeshis "after further verification."

He also said another 138 Bangladeshi pilgrims have been missing since the stampede.

"Those who are missing may be injured. They have not been reported dead. But they are not in touch with their families or relatives," he told The Daily Star over phone.

According to the foreign ministry statement, bodies of the 26 dead Bangladeshi pilgrims were kept at the central mortuary in Makkah.

Besides, 33 other Bangladeshi victims of the stampede were undergoing treatment at different hospitals in Saudi Arabia, it added.

Meanwhile, the BBC yesterday reported that a Nigerian official said more than 1,000 bodies had been

taken from the disaster site to morgues in the city of Jeddah.

Indian, Pakistani and Indonesian officials were also quoted as saying they think more than 1,000 had died.

The Saudi authorities say 769 died in the crush and insist the higher figure is for all deaths at this year's Hajj.

Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj tweeted that the Saudi authorities had released photos of 1,090 pilgrims who died. Pakistani and Indonesian officials have also indicated that they have been sent more than 1,000 such images.

But the Saudi authorities say this number includes 109 people who died at the Grand Mosque when a crane collapsed on September 11 and all other deaths at this year's pilgrimage, some of them from natural causes, the BBC added.

The Saudi authorities so far displayed 1,100 photos of the dead at a mortuary, but many of them died of heatstroke and other natural causes during the Hajj, said the Arab News, a local newspaper.

Yesterday's Bangladesh foreign ministry statement also said: "The Saudi authorities are yet to release photos of all bodies of the victims of the Mina incident. They would release more photos and particulars of dead bodies for identification soon."

"Relatives, accompanying pilgrims and Hajj agents of the missing pilgrims have been requested to contact the Bangladesh Hajj Mission in Makkah [Room no 107, phone-00966-(0)125413980, email-missionhajj@gmail.com]."

Officials of the Bangladesh consulate in Jeddah along with the officials of the Bangladesh Hajj Mission

in Makkah and the medical and administrative teams for Hajj are working to identify the bodies of the pilgrims.

Bangladesh Hajj Mission's Counselor Asaduzzaman, who is in Makkah, told The Daily Star over phone that relatives of the missing pilgrims were visiting the central mortuary in the city to identify the bodies.

"The bodies will not be buried until they are identified," he said.

Asaduzzaman said bringing back any pilgrims' body to Bangladesh may take "some time" as it required "certain procedures".

Also, relatives can visit Saudi Arabia to see the bodies if they get visas.

"But, during the Hajj season, the Saudi embassy usually does not issue tourist visas, but under some special circumstances, it may," he added.

IS links not confirmed

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"Those suspected of recruiting for the extremist group have already been arrested."

The home minister said the authorities found no evidence that the IS, also known as ISIS, was involved in the killing. "The claim has not been confirmed."

He, however, added they were looking into all the aspects to find out the motive behind the murder of Cesare Tavella, an official of Netherlands-based organisation ICCO Cooperation.

Tavella, while jogging on Gulshan Road-90 in the high security diplomatic zone on Monday evening, was gunned down by a gang of three, witnesses say. He was already dead by the time he was taken to nearby United Hospital.

An Islamic State statement dated Monday said a "security detachment" had tracked and killed Tavella with "silenced weapons", according to the SITE intelligence group that monitors jihadist threats. It also warned that "citizens of the crusader coalition" would not be safe in Muslim nations, reports the AP.

Later, Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni said "we are working to

verify" the reported claim. The Italian embassy in Dhaka too said yesterday, "The responsibility for the murder claimed by IS yet to be verified."

This is the second incident of a foreigner being killed in the diplomatic area since 2012. Saudi embassy official Khalaf Al Ali was shot to death near his Gulshan house in March that year.

Tavella had been working as a project manager at ICCO since arriving in Bangladesh in May this year, said his colleagues.

Heleen Saaf van der Beek, country representative of ICCO Cooperation, filed a murder case with Gulshan Police Station yesterday, not mentioning any name or number of accused.

Talking to reporters at the police station, she said Tavella's colleagues were extremely shocked at his death. "We will miss him. We extend our deepest condolence to his family and his dears and loved ones."

Meanwhile, an autopsy conducted yesterday at Dhaka Medical College morgue confirmed that Tavella was shot three times from behind.

Kazi Mahammed Abu Shama, acting chief of forensic department at the medical college, said two bullets

pierced the back and one of them exited through the chest. Another bullet passed through the left hand. The forensic team took out the one that remained in the body.

Yesterday, the Detective Branch of Police took over the case from Gulshan police. A special team comprising officials from different units was formed to assist the investigators.

Several persons, including a witness, have been quizzed.

Law enforcers collected a laptop from Tavella's flat in Gulshan-2 and another laptop and two pen drives from his office in Gulshan-1, said a DMP official of Gulshan zone.

Lucky Ahmed Sunny, manager of the building that houses the flat, said the Italian man used to leave for office around 8:00am and come back around 5:30pm. He used to go for jogging twice or thrice a week.

An additional deputy commissioner of DMP told The Daily Star that they collected CCTV footage from some buildings near the crime scene but the cameras do not cover the place.

They are now collecting clips of other CCTV cameras on different roads in Gulshan area, he added.

Ensure peace

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of the UN General Assembly.

The PM said Bangladesh's commitment to UN peacekeeping is strong and steadfast and it stands ready to go further.

Bangladesh is adopting a national peacekeeping strategy to better respond to the evolving needs of the UN peacekeeping missions on the ground and at policy level, she noted.

"The national peacekeeping strategy paper is now at the final stage. As the leading troops and police contributor, Bangladesh stands ready to go further."

"In Mali, DR Congo and Central African Republic, Bangladesh was the quickest to deploy troops under blue helmet," mentioned Hasina.

Recalling Bangladesh's commitments in last year's summit, she said her country is committed to providing infantry battalions, formed police units, utility helicopters, engineering and maritime units, and other enabling assets to address the existing and projected gaps in peacekeeping missions.

The PM said Bangladesh recognises the need for the modernisation of peacekeeping operations with new technologies.

Bangladesh has established

Bangladesh Institute for Peace Support Operations and Training (BIPSOT). The institute is being developed as a centre of excellence for training peacekeepers, especially the women members, she added.

Bangladesh, said Hasina, is pledged to provide customised training and technical support to other troops and police contributing countries. "Bangladesh is also committed to protecting civilians and promoting gender and human rights issues."

She called for "zero tolerance" towards sexual misconduct by peacekeepers saying that highest priority should be given to the safety and security of peacekeepers.

The summit was jointly hosted by Bangladesh, the USA, Japan, Pakistan, Rwanda, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Ethiopia and the UN.

Leaders of over 50 countries from around the world attended the meeting. They committed to mobilise a strong and modern UN peacekeeping force with 1.20 lakh troops.

The Bangladesh PM, US President Barack Obama, Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, the UN secretary general and leaders of six other countries co-chaired the summit.

Verdict on BD-Aus series

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read: "There is reliable information to suggest that militants may be planning to target Australian interests in Bangladesh."

The Bangladesh government even offered the Australian cricket team the kind of security usually reserved for VVIPs.

But the fate of the series apparently lost considerable ground when CA's head of security Sean Carroll, Australian team manager Gavin Dovey and team security manager Frank Dimasi left Dhaka late Monday night.

The BCB was expecting Dovey and Dimasi, who are full-time members of the Bupa Support Team that accompany Australia's men's squad around the globe for their fixtures, would stay back to avoid a back-and-forth trip assuming that the tour would go on.

But thighs changed quickly when an Italian national was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Dhaka's diplomatic zone at Gulshan on Monday night. And immediately after that

Australia's concern has been mirrored in the United Kingdom and the US, who have freshly warned their citizens in Bangladesh. It turned more complicated when on Monday night when SITE, an intelligence group website, posted an unverified claim by the Islamist terrorist group ISIS of killing 50-year-old Cesare Tavella.

Australian newspapers, focusing on the murder of the Italian citizen and fresh security alerts by the UK and US in Bangladesh, have already feared that the tour might be scrapped in a day or two. Australian newspapers also quoted an unnamed Australian football federation official as saying that they are monitoring events in Bangladesh ahead of Soccer's scheduled World Cup qualifying fixture against Bangladesh in Dhaka on November 17.

At the moment, though, it looks like Bangladesh cricket is destined to bleed unless the Aussies brave the security fear and travel to a country that loves the game more than anything else.

Foreign missions

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in Dhaka of Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella...

"Our thoughts are with Mr Tavella's family, friends and colleagues as well as with the Italian authorities, to all of whom we convey our deepest condolences."

"Those responsible for this act must be brought to justice... We will stand firm in upholding the values of solidarity and life," a spokesperson of the EU External Action in Brussels said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, EU Ambassador to Bangladesh Pierre Mayaudon condemned the incident "in the strongest possible terms" and urged the law enforcement agencies to promptly investigate "this barbaric aggression" and bring the perpetrators to justice.

"Cesare Tavella had come to Bangladesh for helping the poorest of the poor which makes this crime even more horrific," he said.

In a separate statement, British High Commissioner Gibson said he was dismayed at the violent murder.

"It was a horrifying and cowardly crime against an aid worker working for the people of Bangladesh, helping the most vulnerable. I extend my deepest condolences to Tavella's family and friends," he added.

The Italian Embassy in a notice, written in red fonts, to Italian nationals, said: "It's still not clear the motive behind the murder -- crime or terrorist act -- of the aid worker Cesare Tavella... The responsibility for the murder claimed by ISIS is yet to be verified. As a precautionary measure, therefore, the Italian Embassy calls upon all the fellow countrymen to avoid places (hotels, restaurants, clubs, international schools) and events which are normally frequented or attended by foreigners."

In a Facebook post, the Netherlands Embassy in Dhaka said: "We strongly condemn this violent attack and urge the law enforcement agencies to promptly investigate this barbaric aggression and bring the perpetrators to justice."

Tavella was employed by the Netherlands-based ICCO and was managing a food security project financed by the Netherlands Embassy. "He started his work in May 2015, he did an amazing job. He was well respected and liked," the Facebook post said.

TRAVEL ALERTS

The Canadian government on its official website mentioned that there is a "threat of terrorism" in Bangladesh.

"At the end of September 2015, the Australian and [the] United Kingdom Governments informed their citizens that there is reliable information to suggest that militants may be planning

to target Western interests in Bangladesh," it said.

On Monday night, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security of the US State Department advised US citizens in Bangladesh to review security practices.

"The US Embassy in Dhaka advises US citizens resident in Bangladesh to review their security practices and take whatever precautions they determine are prudent. As always, remain vigilant regarding your personal security and be alert to local security developments. It is always advisable to keep your security and situational awareness levels high," it said.

Following the shooting of the Italian aid worker on Monday evening, the US Embassy instructed its staff to "shelter in place" till yesterday morning. American International School in Dhaka too remained closed yesterday.

Meanwhile, the British government further updated its travel advice.

"The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has claimed responsibility [for the Italian's murder]; a number of international schools and expatriate clubs have closed for the day on 29 September as a precaution; you should be particularly vigilant at this time," says the advice posted on the UK government's website.

"There is reliable information that militants may be planning to target western interests in Bangladesh," it said and advised the UK officials to limit their attendance at events where westerners may gather, for example in hotels or conference centres.

Earlier on Monday, the UK issued a similar travel alert for its citizens, saying militants may be targeting westerners in Bangladesh in late September. The same day, Italian aid worker Tavella was gunned down in Gulshan-2 area of the capital.

Turkey kills 30 Kurdish rebels

AFP, Ankara

The Turkish military killed more than 30 Kurdish fighters overnight in a cross-border raid in northern Iraq where outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants are holed up, the president said yesterday.

"We carried out cross-border operations overnight. Over 30 terrorists were killed," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a televised speech.

Turkish warplanes have pounded PKK bases in several regions in northern Iraq and earlier this month, its special forces crossed into Iraq to pursue Kurdish militants as part of an "anti-terrorist" campaign to flush the PKK out of its strongholds at home and abroad.