



Bangladesh cricket team captain Mashrafe Mortaza, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal and DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon inaugurating the Clean Dhaka 2016 campaign in Old Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO:
STAR

DSCC begins Clean Dhaka 2016

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It is the responsibility of city dwellers to play their due role in making Dhaka a clean city, said the mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation at an awareness campaign rally yesterday.

"The mayor and the city corporation alone cannot do it," said Mayor Mohammad Sayeed Khokon, while launching the awareness rally at Shakhariabazar as part of a year-long campaign styled "Clean Dhaka 2016".

He called upon all citizens of the old part of Dhaka to keep all wastes secure and dispose them at designated collection sites after dark.

Bangladesh national cricket team captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza expressed solidarity with the campaign and called on all to be more responsible.

8 killed

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counterpart Nawaz Sharif in an effort to revive bilateral talks.

Previous attempts at dialogue between the nuclear-armed neighbours have been derailed by similar incidents but, as Pakistani authorities condemned the raid, experts suggested the latest negotiations would prove more durable.

The assault -- a rare targeting of an Indian military installation outside disputed Kashmir -- is suspected to be carried out by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed Islamist group.

The possible involvement of Pakistan-based militants in the attack threatens to derail talks between the nuclear-armed rivals, who have fought three wars since independence in 1947.

"I congratulate our armed forces and other security forces on successfully neutralising all the five terrorists in 'Pathankot Operation'," Home Minister Rajnath Singh tweeted.

An Indian army source said "at least three security personnel have died" in the incident, with at least three others injured, adding that officers were still combing the base for residual explosives.

Modi, on a visit to the southern city of Mysore, responded to the attack on Twitter yesterday evening.

"Enemies of humanity who can't see India progress, such elements attacked in Pathankot but our security forces did not let them succeed," he tweeted.

Pakistan also moved to condemn the attack, and voiced optimism over continued dialogue with its long-time foe.

"Building on the goodwill created during the recent high-level contacts between the two countries, Pakistan remains committed to partner with India... to completely eradicate the menace of terrorism afflicting our region," Islamabad's foreign ministry spokesman said.

The Pathankot air base houses dozens of fighter jets and is important for its strategic location about 50 kilometres from the Pakistan border.

"They are from Jaish, Jaish has claimed responsibility," Indian army Lieutenant General Satish Dua told reporters of the attackers. AFP was not able to verify the alleged claim of responsibility.

Jaish-e-Mohammed, which is banned in Pakistan, fights against

Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal also made the call.

Khokon said he had received the go-ahead for repairing 300 roads of Old Dhaka and those would start by mid-January.

A procession from the rally later paraded the streets of Shakhariabazar and Tantibazar.

As part of the year-long cleanliness campaign, the mayor at a press conference on December 23 pledged to set up 57 waste transfer stations (intermediate collection centres), modernisation of Matuail landfill, build 25 fully-fledged public toilets, remove all illegal billboards, and free all the roads and footpaths from illegal occupation.

Replying to a question, the mayor had said finding space for waste transfer stations would be difficult in Old Dhaka.

Indian rule in the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir, where a separatist conflict has claimed up to 100,000 lives.

While Punjab has largely been spared such violence, however, it has not been immune.

In July, three gunmen said to be Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba militants killed seven people, including four policemen, in an attack in the Sikh-majority state.

Modi's December 25 visit to the Pakistani city of Lahore to meet his counterpart Nawaz Sharif indicated a potential thaw in tensions, and the foreign secretaries of both countries are to meet in Islamabad this month.

Pakistan opposition senator Sherry Rehman said the attack must not disrupt the planned dialogue.

"#Pathankot is about derailing peace. Don't let terror define our agenda. Pak-India talks must go on."

A protest broke out on the road leading to Pathankot base in the early afternoon as angry residents burned effigies apparently intended to resemble Pakistani militants, an AFP journalist said.

Sameer Patil, a security analyst at the Gateway House think-tank in Mumbai, said the attack was likely to be a cross-border strike possibly carried out in retaliation for the visit.

"There is substantial first evidence of Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba militants trying to sabotage the peace process," he told AFP.

India blamed Jaish-e-Mohammed for a December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament that killed 11 people, led to a massive military build-up at the border and brought the two countries almost to the brink of war.

New Delhi later suspended all talks with Islamabad after Islamist gunmen attacked the city of Mumbai in November 2008, killing 166 people in attacks planned from Pakistan.

The two countries agreed to resume a peace process in 2011 but tensions spiked again in recent years, with cross-border shelling in Kashmir claiming dozens of lives since 2014.

Authorities had put Punjab on high alert Friday after five gunmen in army fatigues hijacked a car driven by a senior police officer, which was later found abandoned on a highway connecting Pathankot to Kashmir.

It was not clear if there was any link with yesterday's attack.

Saudi executes

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Province where Shias complain of marginalisation.

The interior ministry said the 47 men had been convicted of adopting the radical "takfiri" ideology, joining "terrorist organisations" and implementing various "criminal plots".

A list published by the official SPA news agency included Sunnis convicted of involvement in al-Qaeda attacks that killed Saudis and foreigners in 2003 and 2004.

Some of them had been convicted of taking part in May 2003 attacks on expatriate compounds in Riyadh that killed 35 people, nine of them Americans, the ministry said.

Others were involved in attacks the following year on a housing complex in the eastern city of Khobar, in which 22 people were killed, most of them foreigners, and other assaults.

Among them was Fares al-Shuwail, described by Saudi media as al-Qaeda's top religious leader in the kingdom.

Notably absent from the list, was Nimr's nephew, Ali. He was arrested at the age of 17 and allegedly tortured during detention before being sentenced to die, sparking fury from rights watchdogs and the United States.

All those executed were Saudis, except for an Egyptian and a Chadian. Some were beheaded with a sword while others were executed by firing squad, said ministry spokesman Mansur al-Turki.

Executions have soared in the country since King Salman ascended the throne last January, with 153 people put to death in 2015, nearly twice as many as in 2014.

Yesterday's executions were condemned by Iran and Iraq as well as the Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah, and drew protest calls.

"The Saudi government supports terrorist movements and extremists, but confronts domestic critics with

oppression and execution," said Hossein Jaber Ansari, spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry.

It will "pay a high price for following these policies," the official IRNA news agency quoted him as saying.

One of Iran's most senior clerics has predicted the fall of Saudi Arabia's ruling family following the execution.

Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami's comments came as Iran's foreign minister warned Saudi Arabia would pay a 'high price' for following policies that led to the execution of al-Nimr and 46 others for 'terrorism offences'.

Turki described Iran's reaction as "irresponsible".

"We are completely confident with what we're doing and we believe in it and do not care how others view our procedures, whether on justice or implementation of sentences," he said.

Tehran ally Hezbollah said Saudi Arabia's rulers are "global criminals" and denounced Nimr's execution as a "heinous crime".

Saudi justice ministry spokesman Mansur al-Qafari said "interference in the kingdom's judiciary is unacceptable".

Rights groups have repeatedly raised concern about the fairness of trials in Saudi Arabia, where murder, drug trafficking, armed robbery, rape and apostasy are all punishable by death.

Iran's Basij student militia, connected to the country's elite Revolutionary Guards, called for a demonstration today outside the Saudi embassy in Tehran.

In Saudi ally Bahrain, dozens of youths from the majority Shia population staged protests to denounce the executions.

The Bahraini government and the United Arab Emirates voiced support for the conservative kingdom, saying the executions were necessary to confront extremism.

Coal power loses steam

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about coal power among related offices for this sudden slow down in project implementation.

In October and December, while reviewing progress of coal power projects, the power ministry pointed out that none of the seven private coal power projects totalling 3500 mw capacity made any physical progress other than land filling although their initiatives have been taken two to three years back.

Similarly the government had entered into eight joint venture large coal power projects with different countries in the last one to three years totalling 8850 mw—of which, only the Rampal 1320 MW Power project has made some visible progress.

Besides seven public sector large coal power projects have been initiated. Of these only the Japan funded \$4.5 billion Matarbari power project is going ahead.

Power ministry sources said among the seven private coal power projects, five were given to Orion and two to S Alam Group between 2012 and 2013. However Orion did not sign the final agreements of three of these projects. S Alam also did not sign the final agreements.

In addition, there is a move to build a 150 MW commercial coal power project where the power plant developer would enjoy the freedom to sell power at a market price fixed through negotiations with consumers. This move has made some progress.

PRIVATE COAL POWER:

TOTALLY STALLED

Officials pointed out that two of the Orion's projects in Khulna and Mawa remained stalled although the company has developed the project sites and invested in building the plant's equipment. This delay is caused by a slow bureaucracy in getting environmental clearance for both the projects.

"At the review meetings it was overwhelmingly felt that there should be a One stop service for the power companies as these projects get tangled by issues with multiple authorities," said an official.

"It was also felt that the officials of the Department of Environment (DoE) should be given training on coal power projects for their better understanding so that they do not sit on environmental clearance," the official said.

A classic example of how the DoE delays environmental clearance is issuing Orion Power with a conditional environment impact assessment (EIA). Orion applied for the EIA for its 522 megawatt Mawa Power plant in July 2013. The plant was supposed to go in operation from March last year.

But the EIA was issued in July 2015 with a host of conditions including that Orion must install flue-gas desulfurization equipment. Installing such equipment would increase project cost and therefore, Orion asked the government to provide it with a supplementary tariff saying that without this additional tariff, its project would not be viable.

Similarly Orion had also applied for the environmental clearance for its 565 mw Khulna power plant in July 2013—but till now the EIA has not been cleared. The Khulna project was supposed to begin operation from March last year.

"When the same authority cleared the EIA for the Rampal power plant, it naturally raises the question why are they sitting on the Orion project? If they have questions, they can simply get clarification and move forward," said the official.

Orion's other three projects are in Meghnaghat and Anwara in Chittagong.

Besides, the S Alam Group that was

issued a Letter of Intent (LOI) in September 2013 completed the project's feasibility study only recently and has submitted its EIA for clearance.

JOINT VENTURES: NO STEAM

Amid controversies of being located too close to the Sundarbans, the 1320 mw Rampal power project is the lone joint venture coal scheme to make some visible progress. Project officials said that construction contract would be signed with a company this month. This project is a joint venture between the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) and National Thermal Power Company (NTPC) of India.

At this rate, the Rampal plant will start operation from December 2019.

But other than the Rampal plant, hosts of bids saw little progress.

The BPDB signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Chinese CHDHK for a 1320 MW plant in April 2014. But they have yet to sign a joint venture agreement.

Similarly the BPDB's MoU with Malaysian Tenaga signed in September 2014 has not yet been followed up by any joint venture agreement.

Other joint venture projects that have not made visible progress are: South Korea Kepko & BPDB 1320 mw; Singapore & BPDB 700 mw in Maheshkhali; North West Power Generation Company Ltd (NWPGL) & CMC of China in Patuakhali 1320 MW; RPCL Munshiganj 350 MW; and Coal Power Co & Sumitomo Japan 1200 mw in Matarbari.

GOVERNMENT BIDS

Among the government bids, the very high priced \$4.5 billion Matarbari 1200 MW power plant plus a deep sea coal terminal project has secured finances and EIA clearance. The consultant for the project is now being appointed and it would come into operation after 2022.

Other than this, a 1320 mw project in Maheshkhali has been given environmental clearance. The land for this project will be acquired soon and a consultant is being appointed.

Other projects that are moving at snail's pace are: ADB financed 1320 MW Chittagong plant; Pakua EGCB 1320 MW; Ashuganj 2X660 MW; North Bengal Super Thermal Power plant 1200 MW; and Barapukuria 275 MW Third Unit.

3 JMB men sent to jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

A Chittagong court yesterday sent three suspected activists of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to jail after their five-day remand had ended.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rahamat Ali passed the order after detectives had produced the three before his court, said Assistant Commissioner (Prosecution) Nirmalendu Chakrabarty.

Earlier, the Detective Branch (DB) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) interrogated the JMB men -- Naimur Rahman Nayan, Faisal Mahmud and Shawkat Russell, all students of physics at Chittagong University -- for five days in connection with a case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act with Karnaphuli police.

The trio were arrested on December 26 in different spots of the port city.

After gleaming information from them, detectives raided a den of JMB's Chittagong Regional Commander Md Fardin in Hathazari's Amanbazar area the next day and recovered a sophisticated rifle, camouflage uniforms, bullets, explosives and bomb making materials.



The huge Ijtima ground in Tongi is being prepared for the Biswa Ijtima. The first phase of the world's second biggest Muslim congregation begins on January 8.

PHOTO:
PALASH KHA