

Syrian rebels approach IS-held town

REUTERS, Istanbul

Syrian rebels backed by Turkey and a US-led coalition are closing in on the Islamic State-held village of Dabiq, the site of an apocalyptic prophecy central to the militant group's ideology.

Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebel groups have been pushing southwards into Islamic State's territory in an operation backed by Turkey since Aug 24, and have taken villages near Dabiq in recent days. A rebel leader said the plan was to reach Dabiq within 48 hours, but cautioned Islamic State had heavily mined the surrounding area, a sign of its importance to the group.

Although Dabiq, a village in relatively flat countryside northeast of Aleppo, holds little strategic value, it is seen by Islamic State as the place where a final battle will take place between Muslims and infidels, heralding Doomsday.

The group has named its online English-language magazine Dabiq and in April and May sent about 800 fighters there to defend it against advances by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said yesterday.

"If matters proceed as planned, within 48 hours we will be in Dabiq," Ahmed Osman, commander of the Sultan Murad FSA group, said in a voice recording sent to Reuters.

However, Islamic State has heavily mined the area, making progress around Turkman Bareh slower than in other areas, said Osman, adding that 15 deaths among insurgent ranks in the past 24 hours were caused by mines and mortar fire.

The US-led coalition against Islamic State is actively supporting the rebels as they advance "to within a few kilometres of (its) weakening stronghold" of Dabiq, Brett McGurk, Washington's special envoy for the coalition, said in a Tweet.

Islamic State has exploited the five-year-old Syrian civil war to seize swathes of territory.

Washington believes taking Dabiq could strike at Islamic State morale as it prepares to fend off expected offensives against Iraq's Mosul and Syria's Raqqa, the largest cities held by the jihadists, officials from a coalition country said.

Turkish warplanes hit Islamic State targets in the areas of Dabiq, Akhtar and Turkman Bareh, destroying nine buildings including a command post, gun positions and an ammunition depot, a statement by Turkey's military said yesterday.

The latest fighting marks an escalation since Turkish troops crossed the border into Syria on Aug. 24 to back opposition fighters battling Islamic State in an operation Ankara says is aimed at removing the border threat

Khaleida, Tarique

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defaming Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman via Facebook posts.

Abdul Kader Sujan, information and research secretary of Awami League Chittagong district (South) unit, lodged the case with the court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate ASM Shahidullah Kaisar under section-57 of the Information and Communication Technology (Amendment) Act-2013, said court sources.

Another accused in the case is Chowdhury Irad Ahmed Siddiqui, son of expelled BNP leader Chowdhury Tanbir Ahmed Siddiqui.

Complainant's lawyer Abul Hashem said the case was filed against the three by name while the people who liked the facebook posts were also sued. However, the number of unnamed accused who liked the posts was not mentioned.

In the case statement, the complainant mentioning him as a dedicated activist of the AL claimed that on directives from BNP chairperson and its senior vice-chairman, Irad threatened Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with life in a Facebook post on September 25.

On September 15, the accused also posted another status in Facebook, defaming Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, according to the statement.

Mentioning Irad as a member of the BNP central executive committee in the case statement, Sujan said Irad could not alone make such kind of statements.

"It is sure that as per the directives from BNP leader Khaleida Zia and her son Tarique, Irad made such kind of comments. That is why the two have also been accused in the case," said Sujan while talking to the media on the court premises.

According to BNP sources, Irad does not hold any post in the party. Making such kind of remarks in Facebook, the accused are plotting to create an unstable situation in the country, the plaintiff also mentioned in the case statement.

The court took cognizance of the case and heard the complainant's statements. But the court still did not give any order on it, said Sujan's lawyer Hashem.

WB secretly funds

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received funding from banks and investment funds supported by the World Bank's private-sector arm, the International Finance Corporation, according to the report.

In response to questions from AFP, Frederick Jones, an IFC spokesman, said the global lender took the report seriously.

"It raises important long-term questions about how we need to create stronger markets for clean energy and create incentives for countries and the private sector not to invest in coal, but rather in renewable energy," he said.

Jones added that since 2005 the IFC had already invested more than \$15 billion in renewable energy, energy efficiency and other areas, and had mobilized \$10 billion more.

However, Jones conceded that IFC policy did not prohibit equity clients from funding coal plants, meaning the institution might be indirectly exposed to the industry.

"This is despite the fact that IFC loans to financial services industry players are not intended to finance coal-related projects and targeted lending is 'ring-fenced' to prevent this, according to Jones.

The report's release coincided with the start of this week's high-profile annual meetings of the Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as the world's finance chiefs gather to discuss efforts at poverty reduction.

Campaigners in recent years have been sharply critical of the IFC's support for third parties in the financial services sector, such as banks and investment funds, saying they can represent an end-run around environmental and social safeguards that apply to projects directly supported by the IFC.

Financial-sector lending now accounts for 52 percent of the IFC's long-term commitments, according to IDI, which jointly produced the report with other advocacy organizations including the Bank Information Center and Accountability Counsel. Founded in 2011, IDI is an advocacy organization focusing on human rights and ethics in development.

SEEKING COMPENSATION TOUGH The IFC does not identify the end recipients of financing received by such intermediaries.

That can make it difficult for people harmed by such projects to demand compensation or seek redress, the report said.

However, through an analysis of records, the report identified 56,127 megawatts of new coal capacity funded indirectly by the IFC.

These included the planned 1,360-megawatt Rampal power station in Bangladesh, to be situated on the edge of the sprawling Sundarbans mangrove forest, which is home to endangered species and supports the livelihoods of two million people.

The report said the World Bank

itself declined to support the project, which could threaten the Sundarbans with air and water pollution. But six local banks, all IFC-financed, agreed to support the project instead.

The report also cited power construction in the Philippines, where coal burning is estimated to result in almost a thousand premature deaths annually and where more than thirty environmental activists were killed in 2015 alone.

IFC-financed banks have supported at least 20 new coal projects since 2013 in the Philippines.

They include the proposed 540-megawatt Lanao Kauswagan power station, which is expected to begin operations next year and may threaten marine life in nearby Pangail Bay and the livelihoods of fishing communities, Inclusive Development International said.

"While the IFC has tried to distance itself from the projects funded by its intermediaries, the fact is that these banks are brazenly disregarding the IFC's environmental and social requirements," David Pred, IDI's managing director, said in a statement.

Three militant

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in militancy and only three surrendered. He said the rest must surrender or face action.

Additional DIG Ekram-ul Habib of Khulna Range and Jessore Superintendent of Police Anisur Rahman were present at the briefing.

Anisur said Tanjib, who held the Moshref position in the organisation, was arrested on September 21, 2015. At that time, various books, leaflets, anti-state and -government documents, a laptop, and mobile phones were seized from his possession.

A case under Anti-Terrorism Act was filed against him with Jessore Kotwali Police Station. He had another case against him under the same act with Khilgaon Police Station in Dhaka.

He obtained bail in both the cases. Tanjib's younger brother Tanjir Ahmed passed SSC from Jessore Cantonment College and HSC from Abdur Razzak College.

A case against him was filed with Abhoynagar Police Station. He was released on bail by a juvenile court.

Anisur said Tanjib's elder sister Masuma passed SSC from Jessore Police Lines School, HSC from Abdur Razzak College and graduated from Dhaka University.

Her husband Nazmul Hasan is accused in two cases filed in connection with militancy.

They have another sister named Maksuda Khatun. She and her husband Shakin Ahmed are also wanted, Anisur said.

Ohsumi wins Nobel Prize

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cancer and neurological disease," the jury added.

Researchers first observed during the 1960s that the cell could destroy its own contents by wrapping them up in membranes and transporting them to a recycling compartment called the lysosome -- a discovery that earned Belgian scientist Christian de Duve a Nobel Medicine Prize in 1974.

It was de Duve who coined the term "autophagy", which comes from the Greek meaning self-eating.

In what the jury described as a "series of brilliant experiments in the early 1990s", Ohsumi used baker's yeast to identify genes essential for autophagy.

He then went on to explain the underlying mechanisms for autophagy in yeast and showed that similar sophisticated machinery is used in human cells.

'HIGHEST HONOUR' Ohsumi's findings opened the path to understanding the importance of autophagy in many physiological processes, such as how the body adapts to starvation or responds to infection.

When autophagy breaks down, links have been established to Parkinson's disease, type 2 diabetes and other disorders that appear in the elderly.

Intense research is now underway to develop drugs that target autophagy in various diseases.

Ohsumi, 71, received a PhD from the University of Tokyo in 1974. He is currently a professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology.

He is the 23rd Japanese national to win a Nobel prize, and the 6th Japanese medicine laureate.

The prize comes with eight million Swedish kronor (around \$936,000 or 834,000 euros).

"This is the highest honour for a researcher," Ohsumi told Japan's public broadcaster NHK.

"My motto is to do what others don't want to do. I thought (cellular breakdown) was very interesting. This is where it all begins.

It didn't draw much attention in the past, but we're now in a time when there a bigger focus on it," added Ohsumi.

SCANDAL-TAINTED JURY

The medicine prize is awarded by the Nobel Assembly at the Karolinska Institute, which has seen its reputation tarnished over a recent scandal involv-

Indonesian jailed over IS-linked terror plots

AFP, Jakarta

An Indonesian militant was yesterday jailed for six years over a series of failed plots hatched under the guidance of an Indonesian jihadist fighting with the Islamic State group in Syria.

Arif Hidayatullah plotted to assassinate Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an ethnic Chinese Christian, and bomb a Jewish community centre and a mosque used by members of the Muslim Shia minority, a court heard.

The 31-year-old, who was detained last December on the outskirts of Jakarta, did not carry out any of his plans because he was not confident his homemade bombs were ready.

The Jakarta court heard he concocted the plots under the wing of Bahrin Naim, a leading Indonesian militant fighting with IS, who has been linked to several botched assaults in his homeland, from a plot to fire a rocket at Singapore to a suicide attack on a police station.

There has been an upsurge of violence and attempted attacks in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country over the past year due to the growing influence of IS.

Hidayatullah was found guilty of possessing explosive materials intended for use in terror attacks.

"The defendant is declared to be convincingly guilty of terrorism offences and is sentenced to six years in prison," Judge Siti Jamzanah told the court.

He also helped five Indonesians travel to Syria and helped a Uighur radical enter Indonesia, the court heard. The Uighur was later arrested outside Jakarta as he prepared to carry out a suicide bombing.

Delhi, Islamabad

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Indian firing in Nezapir and Kailer sectors, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday said it "welcomes" the surgical strike by India as every country has a right to defend itself.

Russia's ambassador to New Delhi Alexander M Kadakin also said his country had always been with India in fighting cross-border terrorism.

Russia had earlier asked Islamabad to take "effective" steps to stop the activities of terrorist groups on its territory.

"Greatest human rights violations take place when terrorists attack military installations and attack peaceful civilians in India. We welcome the surgical strike. Every country has right to defend itself," Russian embassy quoted Kadakin as having told a news channel.

He also assured India that it does not need to worry about Russia-Pakistan joint military exercise, saying it did not take place in "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir".

Tensions have been high in the region since the killing of a young Kashmiri separatist in July, which was followed by weeks of imposed curfew and deadly protests in the Indian-controlled portion.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since they gained independence from Britain seven decades ago, two of them over Kashmir. Both claim the region in full.

A number of armed separatist groups in the Indian-controlled part of the picturesque territory have for decades been fighting to break free from New Delhi.

Pigeon

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"We took it into custody last evening," Pathankot police inspector Rakesh Kumar told AFP by telephone.

"The BSF found it with a note in Urdu saying something like 'Modi, we're not the same people from 1971. Now each and every child is ready to fight against India'," Kumar said.

"The neighbours fought their third and last full-blown war in 1971. The note was apparently signed by the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) so we are investigating the matter very seriously", Kumar said.

It is not the first time birds have become embroiled in the often deadly decades-old rivalry between the two nuclear-armed nations. But it comes as tensions escalate over a raid on an Indian army base in Kashmir two weeks ago that New Delhi blamed on the same militant group held responsible for the attacks in January.

Last week, India's military hit militants across the de-facto border dividing disputed Kashmir, in a rare move that sparked fury from Islamabad.

Two balloons were also recently found in Punjab with similar messages addressed to Modi in Urdu.

Last year, Indian police seized a pigeon on suspicion it was being used for espionage by Pakistan and also X-rayed it to check for any spy camera, transmitter or hidden chip.

In 2013, Indian security forces found a dead falcon fitted with a small camera, and in 2010 another pigeon was detained over spying fears.

How to get smart NID

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of a smart card by using the cardholder's fingerprint through a desktop or laptop computer after installing software which would soon be available via www.nidw.gov.bd.

The smart NID cards were produced in France and later data were stored in the cards in Bangladesh, said Brig Gen Sultanuzzaman Md Saleh Uddin, director general at the EC's NID Registration Wing.

According to EC officials, the smart cards would first be distributed to citizens in the capital, followed by in city corporations, district headquarters and upazilas.

For getting a smart NID card, a citizen will have to appear in person at an EC-designated distribution centre.

The EC officials would collect the citizen's biometric details, impressions from 10 fingers and a photo of iris which would be embedded in the card's microchip.

After completion of the procedure, the officials would hand over the smart card to the citizen, but only after taking back his/her existing NID card.

The schedules and names of card distribution centres will be announced through newspaper advertisements and community-based campaigns, like announcements in mosques.

Besides, anyone can get information about the schedule and distribution centres by logging on to www.nidw.gov.bd or calling at 105 or sending an SMS to 105 from any mobile phone.

For sending an SMS to 105, one has

2 crore people

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of millions, empowering women, and enhancing the quality of education," Kim said in a statement of the WB.

"Many developing countries in the world can learn important lessons from Bangladesh to reduce extreme poverty and to promote sustainable development."

Two new reports -- Bangladesh Development Update and Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2016: Taking on Inequality -- find that Bangladesh is making sustained progress in poverty reduction and increasing opportunities.

Qimiaq said Bangladesh is a glaring example to the rest of the world on how to overcome poverty. "Now it is time for Bangladesh to build on the success" to pull the extreme poor out of poverty, he said.

The international extreme poverty line was updated in October 2015 from \$1.25 a day at 2005 PPP to \$1.90 a day at 2011 PPP for most countries, to reflect new price data.

While most countries reported updated statistics at that time, the WB did not apply the 2011 PPP for Bangladesh.

"Rather we took extra steps to assess that the 2011 PPP accurately reflected the price of goods for people in Bangladesh," said Zahid Hussain, lead economist of the bank for Bangladesh and the author of the report.

He said in the last one year, the WB worked with the Bangladesh Bureau Statistics (BBS) and the Asian Development Bank to scrutinise the

to go to the message option of his phone, type "SC", leave a space, type "NID", again leave a space and type the 17-digit NID card number.

Those who have 13-digit number will have to add their year of birth before the number to make it a 17-digit one.

Voters, who are yet to have an NID card, will have to go to the distribution centres with their voter registration slip.

Those who have lost their existing cards will have to contact their respective upazila or thana election offices with the main copy of a general diary which was filed with the police station concerned.

Although it costs the EC around \$1.6 to produce a smart NID card, it would be delivered to citizens free of cost. Initially, the cards will be valid for 10 years, said Saleh Uddin.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the distribution of smart NID cards in the capital on Sunday. Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad started distribution of the cards in Kurigram yesterday.

Cards were distributed in a village in Phulbari upazila of Kurigram and two wards in the capital -- one under Ramna Police Station and another under Uttara Police Station.

Currently, there are over 10 crore voters in Bangladesh. Of them, nine crore will get smart cards by the next year under an ongoing project. The rest of the voters would get cards under a new project which would be launched soon.

EC officials said citizens' data are safe from unauthorised access as the database servers are "fully protected".

data so they can reach a credible poverty rate. In doing so, the WB has revised the entire series of estimated poverty rates from 1991 to 2010 for Bangladesh.

Zahid also acknowledged that the new rate came at a time when the BBS is carrying out field level survey for the next Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES).

"Once we get data from the BBS, we will get the right picture. Still, whatever number you believe, Bangladesh's achievement is commendable."

The 2010 HIES came up with the poverty rate based on the 2005 PPP but it underestimated the purchasing power of the taka.

The PPP exchange rate of taka relative to the US dollar in 2011 was Tk 24.8 per dollar as per the 2011 PPP, but it was Tk 52.4 per USD according to the 2005 PPP.

Still, Bangladesh is currently the 64th poorest nation out of 154 countries and much remains to be done, said Qimiaq.

The development update stresses increasing resilience to security, financial and trade shocks along with weaker than expected global trade and growth.

Achieving the goal of reducing extreme poverty to less than 3 percent of Bangladeshis by 2030 will require economic growth becoming more inclusive with the poorest 40 percent of society receiving greater benefits from development.

The BBS calculates poverty line based on calorie intake. Those consuming below 1,805 calories a day are bracketed as extreme poor.

China keen to be a partner

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In March, the Chinese envoy categorically told a programme that China was willing to cooperate with other countries in helping Bangladesh build its first deep seaport at any location.

"We are certainly here to cooperate. Of course, this cooperation is open, and it's not exclusive. We're willing to cooperate with any country."

Presided over by BEI President Farooq Sobhan, the programme was addressed by Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam and Chairman of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) Munshi Faiz Ahmad.

Farooq Sobhan spoke on "Bangladesh-China Relations: Strengthening Ties" and Munshi Faiz presented on "Some aspects of China's Foreign Policy and Bangladesh".

Addressing the seminar, Ambassador Ma Mingqiang said Chinese President Xi Jinping's forthcoming Dhaka visit will take Bangladesh-China relations to a new height.

"I can assure you that there'll be a number of documents to be signed. You'll see the relations will really be upgraded to new height," he said.

The Chinese envoy said China wants to be a partner of Bangladesh in blue economy development through cooperation in the areas of capacity building, exploring sea resources and other mutually agreed ways.

Responding to a question about the recent tension between India and Pakistan, the Chinese ambassador said China maintains "strategic relations" with India, and China of course maintains very good relations with Pakistan, as well.

"Both the countries are China's partners and China wants to see these countries solve their issues themselves," he said, adding, "China always favours settlement of issues through consultations and diplomacy" instead of through arms and China will not

take any side."

Gowher in his speech said Bangladesh's relationship with China was time tested and reliable and it had reached a new level in recent times.

He said the depth and breadth of the traditional friendship and the long-standing relations and engagements between China and Bangladesh were enormous, and China responded whenever Bangladesh sought any support.

State Minister Shahriar Alam recalled Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's visits to China in 1952 and 1957 and his fond reminiscences of his experiences in China and its wonderful people.

He said China has become Bangladesh's biggest source of imports since 2007. In 2015-16, two-way trade between the two countries crossed \$9 billion with \$8.22 billion imports from China.

The state minister said a number of measures are being considered by the two countries to narrow the trade gap. "China has proposed a Free Trade Area (FTA) with Bangladesh and we are preparing for doing a feasibility study on this."

Farooq Sobhan talked about various aspects of the relationship of the two countries and hoped that there would be a "dramatic transformation" in investment and bilateral cooperation in the coming days.

He said a substantial investment would flow into Bangladesh from China following the establishment of two dedicated exclusive economic zones for Chinese investors. "We see enormous potential."

Meanwhile, an inter-ministerial meeting at the foreign ministry discussed ways to make the upcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping a success.

"We cannot tell you right now when he [Xi] will arrive here and when he will leave Dhaka for Goa [India]," an official said.

However, meeting sources indicated that the visit might be on October 13.