

Shiite fighters from the Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation) advance towards the village of Salmani, south of Mosul yesterday during the ongoing battle against Islamic State group jihadists to liberate the city of Mosul.

Mosul battle 'no picnic'

Says Iraqi Shia commander

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraqi troops and security forces edged closer to Mosul on two southern fronts yesterday but a leader of the Shia militias newly participating in the offensive warned that the battle for Islamic State's Iraq stronghold would be long and gruelling.

A military statement said the army's Ninth Armoured Division raised the Iraqi flag in the village of Ali Rash, about 7 km (4 miles) southeast of Mosul, after recapturing it from the ultra-hardline Sunni Muslim militants.

Further south, an Interior Ministry officer said security forces were advancing from the town of al-Shura, recaptured from Islamic State on Saturday, along the Tigris river valley towards Mosul 30 km (20 miles) to the The army and security forces, along

with Kurdish peshmerga fighters, have been backed by US-led air and ground support in their two-week-old campaign to crush Islamic State in the largest city of its self-declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Their battle for Mosul, still home to

1.5 million residents, could be one of the toughest battles in a decade of turmoil since the 2003 overthrow of then-President Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Muslim, brought Iraq's majority Shias to power.

On Saturday thousands of Iranianbacked Iraqi Shia militia fighters, known as the Hashid Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation) forces, joined the Mosul offensive, launching a cam-

paign to take territory to the west of the city.

Their target is to seize the town of Tal Afar, 55 km (35 miles) west of Mosul, from Islamic State. That would cut off any chance of the jihadists retreating into - or being reinforced from - their positions in neighbouring

Iraqi troops and Kurdish peshmerga fighters are already driving Islamic State fighters back on the southern, eastern and northeastern approaches to Mosul.

"There is cooperation between ... the army, federal police, Hashid and counter-terrorism (forces) and also the (local Sunni) tribes," said Hadi al-Amiri, head of the Badr Organisation, the most powerful group within the Popular Mobilisation forces.

Hilsa catching on amid ban

FROM PAGE 2

Pangas fish on the Padma, witnessed

this illegal fishing of hilsa.

SM Shaheen, assistant commissioner (land) of Louhajang as well as executive magistrate of a mobile court, was seen near Shimulia Ferry Terminal on the Padma. He was conducting a drive along with Mohammad Idris, district senior fisheries officer, and members of law enforcement agencies.

Seeing the magistrate from a distance, the fishermen warned each other and started moving away discarding their nets tied to small buoys. As soon as the magistrate's speed boat was gone, they became busy retrieving

their nets. Asked why they were risking arrest and losing the valuable nets, some

worth around Tk 1 lakh each, a few of

the fishermen said they had been unable to make ends meet as hilsa had not been available in the Padma for the last three months.

Moreover, the government did not give any compensation to over 10,000 hilsa fishermen in Munshiganj.

Under the circumstances, they had no choice but to risk everything for their survival. As selling of hilsa is prohibited during this period, they sell it at a low price by going door to door in villages.

Wishing to remain anonymous, a fisherman said he had eight mouths to

Magistrate Shaheen said 13 fishermen were apprehended during his drive that day and six of them were sent to jail for a week each. The rest were

fined Tk 5,000 each.

Mohammad Khalequzzaman Louhajang upazila nirbahi officer, said until yesterday, 17 mobile courts conducted drives to enforce the ban on

catching hilsa.

During this time, 87 fishermen were detained and 27 of them were given jail sentences on different terms for violating the ban. Sixty-five others were fined, he said, adding that they also confiscated and destroyed around two lakh metres of current net.

He admitted that there has been no allocation of government food relief for the fishermen and their families in

the upazila. Shaila Farzana, deputy commissioner of Munshiganj, said she already wrote to the higher authorities, requesting allocation of food relief for the fishermen in the region.

One year on, charge sheets not submitted

killers are still on the run, said detectives. The Detective Branch officials investigating the cases said they have

already detected all the suspected killers and masterminds and unearthed the motive.

Of the arrestees, Abdus Sabur, a leader of banned militant outfit Ansar al-Islam, confessed his involvement in the attacks on Dipan and Tutul and two friends of Tutul.

Moinul Hasan Shamim alias Sifat, allegedly a member of the same outfit, admitted being involved in the Dipan

murder. Another arrestee, Sumon Hossain Patwari, confessed his involvement in perpetrated both the attacks.

friends injured. Another accused in the case,

Shariful Islam alias Saleh alias Arif, was killed in an "encounter" with detectives on June 19. "We have made remarkable prog-

ress in the cases. We've made some arrests and some of them have already confessed their involvement," Mashruqure Rahman Khaled, deputy commissioner of the Detective Branch The Daily Star yesterday.

of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told Asked when they would submit the charge sheets, he said they are hunting for the other accused who include

killers, masterminds and trainers. "Once we arrest most of the accused,

we'll submit the charge sheets."

On October 31 last year, in what appeared to be synchronised attacks on publishers of secularist authors, Dipan of Jagriti Prakashani was murdered at his office in the capital's

Shahbagh. Just hours before the attack on Dipan, Tutul and his blogger friends Ranadipam Basu and Tareque Rahim were injured in a machete attack at Tutul's publishing house

Mashruqure, who is supervising the investigation, also said Ansar al-Islam

Shuddhoswar in Lalmatia.

Bangladesh branch of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), has reportedly been carrying out targeted attacks on secular writers, bloggers, publishers, free-thinkers and gay rights activists for the last couple of years. Sacked and absconding army officer, Major Ziaul Haque is allegedly the military commander of the outfit.

hatch the plan to kill publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan.

Police had earlier told reporters that execution of the plot to kill writerblogger Avijit Roy encouraged pro-al-Qaeda militant outfit Ansar al-Islam to

Both Tutul and Dipan were publish-

an attack on free-thinking and people's right to express opinion."

ers of free-thinking online activist Avijit, hacked to death by machetewielding assailants in TSC area on February 26 last year. According to confessional state-

ments of the three arrestees, 19 Ansar al-Islam operatives recruited from different parts of the country took training on firearms and machetes at a hideout in Tongi area, detectives said quoting the confessional statements.

Later, 10 of them divided in two groups -- five in each -- carried out the attacks on Dipan, Tutul and the two others the same day. Alongside machetes, they carried

firearms with them. The sacked major, known in the

the attack that left Tutul and his two Ansar al-Islam, said to be the organisation as Ishtiaq, used to visit the den of those militants and train them, according to detectives.

Commenting on the investigation, Dipan's father Prof Abul Quasem Fazlul Huq, an intellectual and a writer, said law enforcers are willing to unearth the mystery of the case and the progress made in the investigation is

credible. He said, "The killing of Dipan was

He added that a cultural renaissance, for which Dipan worked through his publishing house, would

stop recurrence of such attacks.

Afghan military death rate rises in 2016: report AFP, Washington

The death rate among Afghan security forces is surging far above last year's levels, a US government watchdog said yesterday, and slew of social gains in the war-torn nation is also eroding.

Afghan forces are nearing the end of their second year providing security across their war-torn country, after Nato moved into an advisory and training role -- and the toll on the local forces has been devastating.

2015 was a terrible year, with an estimated 5,000 killed and another 15,000 wounded, primarily by the Taliban.

But the death toll this year is already much worse: From January 1 through August 19, a total of 5,523 Afghan service members were killed, according to a quarterly report from the office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

An additional 9,665 members were wounded during the same period, the report found.

Violence from the Taliban and other insurgent groups typically spikes over the summer during the fighting season."

But increasingly, militants continue launching attacks throughout the year, meaning the death rate will likely rise further still.

"The most immediate challenge to the US reconstruction effort, and to the viability of the Afghan nation state, remains the armed insurgency pursued by the Taliban and other factions," the inspector general, John Sopko, said in the report.

US Army General John Nicholson, the top US and Nato commander in Afghanistan, warned a week ago that basic leadership failures in many Afghan police and military units were helping drive casualty rates higher.

Still, SIGAR found, morale within the ranks appears good, with threequarters of recruits saying they have received good care and 90 percent satisfied with their pay. The report also found that gains in

key social areas such as poverty, unemployment, women's rights and the education gender gap have all eroded this year. "Deep-rooted cultural traditions

and a persistent insurgency continue to threaten the physical safety and health of Afghan women and hold them back from entering public life, the report states. The Afghan government still

only has full control of two-thirds of the country's population of 30 million.

Ten percent is in Taliban hands, and the rest is still being fought over.

This summer's fighting saw the Taliban try at least seven times to seize a provincial capital, as they did in Kunduz last year.

The Afghans managed to repel these thanks to Nato support, easier rules for the United States to strike targets and the growing confidence of the Afghan air force.

JSC, JDC exams

FROM PAGE 16

City

the number of girls exceeding the boys, said Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid at a pre-examination press briefing at the Secretariat yesterday.

"Necessary measures have been taken to hold the exams in a peaceful environment," he said, urging the examinees to be present at the exam centres 30 minutes before the test.

He said girls are ahead of boys in terms of numbers as 1,64,029 more girls than boys are sitting for the exams this year. The JSC candidates will take Bangla

first paper tests on the first day, while the JDC students will sit for Quran Mazid and Tazbid. The exams will end on November 17. The examination was introduced in

2010 when around 18.92 lakh students participated in the test across the country.

This year, over 20.38 lakh students would sit for the JSC exams under eight general education boards. Around

3.74 lakh students would take the JDC exams under madrasa education board, the minister told journalists.

Of the total examinees, about 1.21 lakh are irregular, while some 1.06 lakh will take the improvement examinations, according to the statistics

provided by the ministry. sit for the tests at eight overseas centres. All papers except for Bangla 2nd, English 1st and 2nd exams would be held under the creative question method, said Nahid.

Speaking on the university admission issue, the minister at the briefing said there was no question of passing or flunking in the university admission

"Admission test is for filtering out; here pass or fail is not an issue," Nahid said, adding that excessive publicity of such pass-fail issue would tarnish the image of the country abroad.

FBI director ignored FROM PAGE 16 will have an impact on any remaining

The officials acknowledged there was little Lynch and Yates could do given the fallout over Lynch's controversial meeting over the summer with former President Bill Clinton. Lynch and Yates objected after

Comey gave advance notice to top officials at the Justice Department before sending the letter to lawmakers, law enforcement officials briefed on the matter said. Justice officials didn't sign off on Comey's decision and he didn't seek their approval, one official said. Instead, he made an independent

decision to go against longstanding Justice Department and FBI practice to not comment publicly about politically sensitive investigations within 60 days of an election, the official said.

Comey later explained his decision to provide Congress with the information in a letter to FBI employees. "We don't ordinarily tell Congress

about ongoing investigations, but here I feel an obligation to do so given that I testified repeatedly in recent months that our investigation was completed," Comey said. "I also think it would be misleading to the American people were we not to supplement the record." Clinton's campaign and allies quickly

decried the decision's timing, and the

candidate herself on Friday forcefully called on the FBI to release the "full and complete facts" about its review. "Voting is underway, so the American people deserve to get the full and complete facts immediately," Clinton said at a brief news conference in Des Moines, Iowa, adding it was

this issue in question, whatever it is, without any delay." Clinton said she was "confident whatever [the emails] are will not change the conclusion reached in July," when Comey said he wouldn't recom-

"imperative that the bureau explain

mend criminal charges in the matter. Republican nominee Donald Trump, who has spent the past several weeks on defence, seized on the issue.

"Hillary Clinton's corruption is on a scale we've never seen before," Trump said at a rally in Manchester, New Hampshire. "We must not let her take her criminal scheme into the Oval Office."

He later responded to Clinton's

statement, saying she "tried to politicize the investigation by attacking and falsely accusing the FBI director of only sending the letter to Republicans." In a letter to eight congressional

committee chairmen Friday, Comey said investigators are examining newly discovered emails that "appear to be pertinent" to the email probe.

"In connection with an unrelated case, the FBI has learned of the existence of emails that appear pertinent to the investigation," Comey wrote the chairmen.

"I am writing to inform you that the investigative team briefed me on this yesterday, and I agreed that the FBI should take appropriate investigative steps designed to allow investigators to review these emails to determine whether they contain classified information, as well as to assess their importance to our investigation."

The newly discovered emails are part of an investigation into Anthony Weiner, according to law enforcement sources. Weiner, the disgraced former congressman, recently separated from top Clinton aide Huma Abedin after a sexting incident. The FBI and the New York Police

Department have opened preliminary investigations of allegations that Weiner, a former New York Democratic congressman, exchanged sexually explicit text messages with a purportedly underage girl. The emails in question were sent or

received by Abedin, according to a law enforcement official. There were a "considerable number" of emails being reviewed from at least one device shared by Abedin and Weiner, the official said. A separate official described it as thousands of messages. The FBI is looking at whether any of

significant."

the newly discovered emails will have an impact on the now-closed investigation into Clinton's server. In his letter, Comey said he was not sure how long the additional review would take and said the FBI "cannot yet assess whether or not this material may be

Some 681 overseas students would

undecided voters. Before the latest

dency. She is leading Trump by six

controversy erupted, Clinton had the advantage in the race for the 270 electoral votes needed to capture the presi-

points in CNN's Poll of Polls.

COMEY UNDER CRITICISM

Comey is under withering criticism from the Clinton campaign and congressional Democrats for releasing the letter so close to the election. Earlier Friday, Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta said "it's extraordinary that we would see something like this just 11 days out from a presidential election."

a heated conference call with reporters Saturday, saying Comey's letter was "light on facts, heavy on innuendo, knowing full what Republicans would do with it. It is not up to him who owes the public answers to questions that are now on the table." Dianne Feinstein, the California

He followed up on that criticism in

the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said she was "shocked" to read Comey's letter. "Director Comey's announcement played right into the political campaign of Donald Trump," she said in a

Democrat who is the vice chairman of

statement. Even Republican Sen Ron Johnson of Wisconsin urged Comey to provide more information: "In line with your commitment to be transparent with Congress and the public, I respectfully request that the FBI provide as much information as possible about these new developments without harming the integrity of its ongoing investigation," Johnson wrote in a

letter to Comey. The FBI chief felt he had no choice but to tell Congress now or risk being accused of hiding relevant information before the election, law enforcement officials said in explaining the timing. The letter was "carefully

worded," one of the officials said. The news united Republicans who have spent the past several weeks grappling with Trump's controversies. Speaker Paul Ryan jumped on Comey's announcement to blast Clinton.

Ryan said Clinton betrayed Americans' trust for handling "the nation's most important secrets."

Trump's campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, tweeted after the news broke, "A great day in our campaign just got even better."

Double blow

FROM PAGE 16 Having been through all this, she joined her class in Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Girls School. But Headmaster Anisur Rahman often called her mother and asked her to transfer her daughter

to another school, Afroza said. Finally, he handed a transfer certificate (TC) to the girl, a student of Class-IX, on October 23, which drew huge criticism.

Two days later, Rashedul, who had apparently been fleeing, was arrested at Chharanbazar and sent to Rangpur jail on a court order.

However, no action has been taken against the other accused in the case --Rashedul's accomplices, father and the uncle, the girl's mother lamented.

Receiving instructions from Rangpur Deputy Commissioner Rahat Anwar, UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) of Mithapukur Mamunur Rashid took the matter seriously and sought a clarification from the headmaster as to on which grounds the TC was issued.

Failing to do so, Headmaster Anisur admitted the girl to the school again.

Anisur said his school's management committee had forced him to issue the TC. "I admit it was a mistake but I did it as Lutfar Rahman, president of the

school's managing committee, forced me [to do so]," he said. Lutfar said guardians' representatives in the committee had been press-

ing him to get her out. The UNO said the headmaster had issued the TC unlawfully. A probe committee has been formed to look

into the matter. Meanwhile, the victim's mother demanded punishment of the accused.

Talking to The Daily Star, Saheb Ali Sarker, chairman of Borobala UP, said the allegations of rape and torture were false and that those were part of a The big question is whether the conspiracy against him.

return of the email storm, which has Asked about the TC, he said, "I did overshadowed her entire campaign, not influence anyone to issue the TC."