

Iraqi troops expand foothold in Mosul

REUTERS, Mosul

US-backed Iraqi troops expanded their foothold on the eastern side of Islamic State's stronghold of Mosul yesterday, as the group pledged to mount more suicide attacks on their offensive to take the city.

The elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) stormed the Tahrir district on the northeastern edge of Mosul, the last major city under control of the Sunni hard-line group in Iraq.

A Reuters correspondent reporting from the CTS-held line in Tahrir saw civilians streaming out of the nearby Aden district where fighting blazed, pushing trolleys containing their belongings and carrying home-made white flags.

The women were still shrouded in black robes imposed by the militants but most had uncovered their faces as they fled intense fighting.

Militants have been steadily retreating from areas around Mosul into the city since the battle started on October 17, with air and ground support from a US-led coalition.

"The advance is slow due to the civilians," said CTS Lt Gen Abdul Wahab al-Saidi, adding that the US-trained unit aims to clear the rest of the neighborhood during the day.

A Friday prayer sermon referring to "mujahideen", or holy warriors, could be heard coming from a mosque under control of the jihadis in the vicinity. An armed man, possibly a sniper, was in the minaret of the mosque.

As the offensive entered its second month, Iraqi government forces are still fighting in a dozen of about 50 neighbourhoods on the eastern part of Mosul, which is divided by the Tigris River that runs through its centre.

AL picks Ivy

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met Hasina at the Gono Bhavan where the party chief asked the nominee to work with local AL lawmaker Shamim Osman.

Earlier, the party's Narayanganj city unit at an extended meeting picked three party leaders, excluding Ivy, as candidates for the mayoral election for the consideration of the central body.

The unit recommended the names of city unit President Anwar Hossain, Siddhirganj upazila unit President Mojibur Rahman and Bandar upazila unit President MA Rashid.

Ivy, who has recently been made vice president of the district AL, had said she would seek Hasina's intervention in getting party ticket.

She was elected as the country's first female city mayor, defeating Awami League-backed candidate Shamim Osman.

The maiden election to the NCC was held on 30 October, 2011. The then opposition BNP-backed contestant boycotted the polls at the last moment.

The BNP, which remains outside parliament for boycotting the last national polls, on Thursday at a meeting decided to participate in the upcoming NCC election.

The AL local government nomination board also decided that the party would give preference to opinion polls while nominating its chairman candidates for the zila parishad elections.

The board also asked presidents and general secretaries of the AL committees in 61 districts, which are going to the polls on December 28, to recommend names for the posts of 15 general councillors and five female councillors and send the list to the AL president's political office within a week.

Bangabandhu

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Hasina received the "ICT Sustainable Development Award" from the ITU. The premier had dedicated the award to the young people of Bangladesh.

The ITU this year also announced six major awards, recognising excellence and innovation in ICT solutions. The winning entries are Global SME Award - BRCK, Kenya; Host Country SME Award - ServisHero, Thailand; Thematic Award (eGovernment) - Nile Centre for Technology Research (NCTR), Sudan; Thematic Award (eHealth) - Neofect, Republic of Korea; Thematic Award (eEducation) - Academic Bridge, Rwanda and Thematic Award (Disaster Prevention/Recovery Communications) - Mastercard, United States.

The ITU is the UN's specialised agency for information and communication technologies.

Some 250 exhibitors, including 107 exhibiting tech-SMEs and 60 partners and sponsors took part in the ITU Telecom World 2016. Over 330 leaders from 90 countries joined the event in the capital of Thailand.

HC order brings relief to Santals

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Thursday's High Court order has given way to a relaxed atmosphere at Santal villages in Madarpur and Joypurpara areas of Gobindaganj upazila.

In its November 17 order the HC asked the authorities concerned to allow the Santal families to harvest paddy from the farmland belonging to Rangpur Sugar Mills.

Furthermore, the court directed the government to ensure security and free movement of the Santals in the upazila.

However, despite the court order many members of the indigenous community are still unsure of what the future holds for them.

"We don't know how we would be able to harvest the paddy from the Sahebganj sugarcane farm as the mill authorities by this time have installed barbed wire fence around the farm," said Rafayel Hasda, a local Santal leader.

When contacted, Abdul Awal, managing director of the sugar mill, said they would ask genuine owners to harvest their crops after it is fully ripe.

Four months ago, on July 1, indigenous people occupied around 100 acres of land inside Sahebganj sugarcane farm owned by Rangpur Sugar Mills and built makeshift sheds and homes on the plea that the land belonged to their forefathers.

On November 6, police reportedly opened fire and lobbed teargas shells during an eviction drive at Sahebganj sugarcane farm, leaving two Santals dead and several others injured.

In protest, the Santals fired arrows at police personnel and mill workers, who joined the eviction drive. At least 25 people, including nine policemen, were wounded.

Around 1,200 families of the indig-

enous community were evicted during the drive from the farmland where they had cultivated aman rice.

The HC order came in response to a writ petition filed on November 17 by three rights organizations -- Ain O Salish Kendra, Brotee, and Association for Land Reform and Development.

In the writ, the petitioners sought HC directives upon the government to ensure security of lives and properties of the Santals.

In its order the HC bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath issued a rule upon the authorities to explain in two weeks why their inaction regarding protection of lives and properties of the Santals should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench also fixed November 30 for further hearing on the matter.

BNP DELEGATION VISITS GOBINDAGANJ

A nine-member delegation of BNP, led by BNP chairperson's adviser Joydul Abedin Faruk, yesterday visited Madarpur and Joypurpara areas of Gobindaganj.

The delegation distributed sarees, lungis and other relief materials among the evicted Santal families.

Joydul told reporters that local leaders of the ruling party, assisted by police, were involved in the killings and eviction of the Santal community.

Demanding judicial inquiry into the incident, Joydul said the government should take stern action so no criminal involved in the atrocities is spared.

Nobody, including members of the ethnic communities, is safe under the Awami League government, he added.

Former minister Asadul Habib, Gaibandha BNP president Anisuzzaman Khan, Shushil Barua, Amalendu Das and Abdul Mannan Mandal were present among the central and local BNP leaders during the visit.

2 cops held

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Bashir caught Latifuzzaman red-handed. Police, however, said the two arrestees during primary interrogation denied their involvement in the mugging.

Police later formed a three-member committee, headed by the DMP additional deputy commissioner (Traffic North), to probe the incident.

"As a criminal case has been filed, we will investigate the case and put the two constables on trail if they are found guilty," Maruf Hossain Sorder, deputy commissioner (Ramna Division) of DMP, told The Daily Star.

Egg wholesaler Bashir said the two uniformed cops intercepted his rickshaw-van near Pantha Kunja around 5:30am when he was returning to his shop on Tejgaon Station Road with the money after selling eggs to a client in Lalbagh.

The policemen asked Bashir why his trouser pocket looked full. They also questioned him whether he was carrying cannabis in his shirt pocket.

Bashir instantly pulled his mobile phone and money from the pocket and showed those to Latifuzzaman. The cop then took away the money, pretending he would check those.

"Latifuzzaman soon mounted his motorcycle and handed over the money to Razikuzzaman who rode pillion on the motorbike," Bashir told The Daily Star.

As the two cops were not wearing name badges, Bashir suspected they were fake policemen.

The trader grabbed Razikuzzaman. As Latifuzzaman tried to flee with the motorcycle, the trader released Razikuzzaman and grabbed the other cop by his throat.

Hearing Bashir shouting for help, locals rushed to the spot and beat up Latifuzzaman.

Bashir soon called in his fellow traders who later handed over Latifuzzaman and his motorcycle to Shahbagh Police Station.

However, Razikuzzaman managed to flee with the money. Police later arrested him in the afternoon, but could not recover the money.

Amanat Ullah, president of Tejgaon Egg Traders Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd, alleged that some egg traders are mugged by people in police uniform every month. He, however, said traders do not lodge any complaint with police as they have no confidence in law enforcers to recover the money.

For example, he referred to two recent mugging incidents. Some uniformed policemen around a week ago intercepted trader Safar Ali's pick-up van near the Jahangir Gate at dead of night and snatched Tk 1.40 lakh from him, said Amanat.

Around 12 days back, muggers in police uniform intercepted the pick-up van of another egg trader Ashish Harun in Mohakhali area and mugged him for Tk 5,000, he added.

He was not sure

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The panel conversation titled "The Writer and the World: VS Naipaul" focused on his literary career.

The conversation was moderated by festival co-director Ahsan Akbar while the writer's wife Nadira Naipaul accompanied them on the stage and also responded to some questions to describe his works.

About taking up writing as a profession, Naipaul said it would have been awful for him had he not been an author.

"I'd have nothing to do. It could have been too awful."

In 2001, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature "for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel to see the presence of suppressed histories".

The Nobel Foundation said nothing sustained him afterwards except the determination, often close to despair, to become a writer.

On their visit to Dhaka, Nadira said it would not be possible if she had not loved Bangladesh.

"We are happy to be here," she added.

Naipaul was born in August 17, 1932 in Trinidad. A scholarship to Oxford at the age of 18 took him to England. He has published more than 30 books, both fiction and nonfiction.

He was married to Patricia Ann Hale until her death in 1996. He had dedicated his "A House for Mr Biswas" to her.

In 1996, the writer married Nadira, a former Pakistani journalist.

Visitors thronged the festival yesterday, the second day of the three-day event, as it was a weekend. Several literary sessions and cultural events were held on the Bangla Academy premises.

Apart from literary sessions, the festival also features cultural programmes, folk performances, poetry recitations, an editing workshop, children's programme and screening of films.

Trump picks hardliners

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The appointments represent the president-elect's first steps to appoint a cabinet after a transition effort that so far has been marred by infighting and reshuffles on the team getting ready for the January 20 inauguration.

For director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Trump tapped Pompeo: a congressman who became well known in the controversy over a deadly militant attack against the US consulate in Benghazi, Libya in 2012.

"He will be a brilliant and unrelenting leader for our intelligence community to ensure the safety of Americans and our allies," Trump was quoted as saying in the statement.

The 52-year-old co-authored a report slamming then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton's handling of the attack, in which the US ambassador and three other Americans died.

And as national security adviser, Trump turned to the 57-year-old Flynn, who is set to play a key role in shaping policy for a president with no experience in government or foreign policy.

"I am pleased that Lieutenant General Michael Flynn will be by my side as we work to defeat radical Islamic terrorism, navigate geopolitical challenges and keep Americans safe at home and abroad," Trump said.

A registered Democrat, Flynn served as Trump's leading national security adviser during the campaign and was a highly visible surrogate, with a hardline stance on Islamic extremism. He described it in an interview with the New York Times as an existential threat on a global scale.

Flynn is highly respected as a decorated military intelligence officer who helped combat insurgent networks in Afghanistan and Iraq. But he left the military after President Barack Obama fired him as head of the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2014 following complaints about his leadership style.

Flynn's appointment does not need approval from the senate.

But that of Sessions as attorney general does, and he's got baggage: racially charged comments he made in the 1980s and which once cost him a chance for a job for life as a federal judge.

Back in 1986 Sessions said that a prominent white lawyer was a "disgrace to his race" for defending African-Americans.

Sessions acknowledged saying this in testimony to the US Senate at the time, but he insisted he did not mean it.

In the 1980s he also allegedly addressed a black prosecutor working for him as "boy," and joked about the Ku Klux Klan, saying he had thought its members were "OK, until I found out they smoked pot," according to The New York Times.

The reported appointments came a day after Trump met with a foreign leader for the first time -- Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

He was the first representative to meet with Trump from a US ally rattled by Trump comments during the campaign that questioned US loyalty to joint security arrangements and free trade accords, among other commitments.

Abe said after the 90 minute meeting in New York that Trump was a leader "in whom I can have great confidence."

Trump was headed yesterday to his exclusive golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, transition officials said, a location that offers

more seclusion and comes amid complaints about the congestion in front of Trump Tower on New York's bustling Fifth Avenue.

Trump is reportedly set to meet over the weekend with Mitt Romney, the moderate, failed presidential candidate -- and formerly vehement critic of Trump -- who is thought to be in the running for secretary of state, alongside former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani.

Romney, who lost to Obama in 2012, had described Trump as vulgar, dishonest and out of line with US values, rebuking the tycoon for proposals such as banning the entry of all foreign Muslims.

If chosen Romney would bring more orthodox Republican worldview to foreign policy. In 2012 Romney described Russia as the top geopolitical threat -- a sharp contrast to Trump, who has exchanged compliments with President Vladimir Putin.

Trump has drawn outrage by tapping anti-establishment firebrand Stephen Bannon, who pushes white identity politics, as chief strategist. House Democrats urged him to cancel the appointment.

Protect lives

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with the rule of law and its international obligations," said Edwards.

"We appeal for calm and for humanitarian access to assess and meet the needs of thousands of people who have reportedly been displaced from their homes by the ongoing security operation. The affected population is believed to be in urgent need of food, shelter and medical care," he added.

The UNHCR also urged the government of Myanmar to immediately allow humanitarian actors to resume the life-saving activities they had been carrying out for some 160,000 civilians in northern Rakhine state until such activities were suspended on 9 October.

Meanwhile, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said 15,000 people were believed to have fled their homes over the space of 48 hours, according to an AFP report.

"Up to 30,000 people are now estimated to be displaced and thousands more affected by the 9 October armed attacks and subsequent security operations across the north of Rakhine state," said a spokesman for the OCHA. Troops have poured into a strip of land along the Bangladesh border, an area which is largely home to the stateless Muslim Rohingya minority, since coordinated attacks on police posts last month.

The army this week said troops have killed nearly 70 people as they hunt the attackers, although activists say the number could be much higher.

Violence escalated over the weekend, with state media reporting troops had killed more than 30 people in two days of fighting after coordinated ambushes forced the army to bring in helicopter gunships.

Activists have accused troops of killing civilians, raping women and torching homes -- allegations the army denies. Authorities have heavily restricted access to the area, making it difficult to independently verify government reports or accusations of army abuse.

The resurgence of violence in western Rakhine state has deepened a crisis that already posed a critical challenge to the new administration led by democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi.

Over 100 people died in 2012 in clashes between the majority Buddhist population and the Muslim Rohingya, and tens of thousands of them were driven into displacement camps.

Comilla keep crashing

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93-run second-wicket stand with Mohammad Mithun (45 off 39), raced to 126 for one in just 17 overs.

In the day's afternoon match, Tamim Iqbal's Chittagong Vikings did what the Victorians were unable to do and arrested a slide of four straight defeats by beating Rajshahi Kings by 19 runs. The stars for Vikings were Mohammad Nabi, who hit a blistering 37-ball 87, and the returning Taskin Ahmed who picked up five for 31.

In the evening match, Rangpur got off to a flying start with Soumya Sarkar hitting a four and a six off the first over bowled by Nabil Samad. Soumya was the dominant partner with a 15-ball 22 in the opening stand worth 29 in just 3.4 overs during which he hit two fours and a six, but like recent efforts from the batsman trying to work himself into form, he fell just when he was looking good. A length ball from Mashrafe was pulled straight to midwicket.

Thereafter however, Shahzad and Mithun were rarely troubled as they played risk-free cricket, occasionally coming out of their shells to hit boundaries in order to stay well ahead of the modest required run-rate. An example of that was Shahzad hitting a four before Mithun hit a six in the sixth over bowled by Mashrafe.

Comilla's play was summed up perfectly in the eighth over, when Shahzad ramped a ball to third man and Marlon Samuels dropped a simple catch with the batsman just on 14. Rangpur were only too happy to capitalise.

Earlier, defending champions Comilla Victorians were restricted to a paltry 122 for five after being asked to bat first.

Rangpur Riders immediately put pressure on the struggling Victorians through tidy bowling from openers Shohag Gazi and Anwar Ali, who kept Liton Das and Imrul Kayes to just eight after two overs. The pressure told immediately as Imrul advanced down the track to Gazi but was trapped leg-before when the bowler dropped it short and spun it past the flashing blade.

Anwar bowled another quiet over, and Arafat Sunny replaced Gazi to give away just three runs in the fifth, which meant that Comilla were 17 for one after five overs. The lack of runs created a run-out in the last ball of the sixth over, when Ahmed Shehzad called through a hesitant Liton after playing Rubel Hossain to mid off, but the throw beat the non-striker to the striker's end.

Shehzad and Marlon Samuels then seemed to concentrate on avoiding a capitulation and played sensibly to put on a 64-run stand in

10.2 overs. Shehzad was the aggressor in the partnership, hitting two consecutive boundaries in the 12th over bowled by Ziaur Rahman and a six off Rubel that took him to a 50 off the 41st ball he faced in the 15th over.

He was soon dismissed for a 45-ball 52 when, in the 17th over, he skied a lofted drive off Anwar to Shahid Afridi at cover. From 85 for three, Samuels -- then on 20 off 30 -- lifted his scoring rate, hitting a six off Rubel in the 18th over and punishing Anwar for a six and a four in the 19th.

He reached his 50 off 43 balls with a single off Rubel in the last over, but there was not much more joy for him as he was caught behind off the penultimate ball for 52. Rubel then finished things off in style by getting Sohai Tanvir out in the same fashion to finish with figures of two for 27 in four overs.

Case backlog

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steps to appoint news judges for the Appellate and the High Court divisions of the Supreme Court.

Three HC judges were promoted to the Appellate Division in February this year, increasing the number of its judges to nine, he said, adding that the government was yet to take an initiative to fill the vacant posts.

The chief justice stressed the need for doubling the number of judges in courts across the country.

According to a latest SC study, 414,035 cases were pending with the HC as of September 30 after it settled only 8,449 cases from July 1 to September 30.

Earlier, the HC disposed of 37,753 cases from January 1 to December 31 last year and the number of pending cases stood at 394,225 then, said another SC study.

SC Registrar General Syed Aminul Islam recently told this correspondent that the rate of case disposal at the HC did not increase satisfactorily due to shortage of judges.

Besides, the number of new cases filed with the HC is more than the number of disposed of cases, he said.

Courts across the country disposed of 3.25 lakh cases from July 1 to September 30 this year, while 3.47 lakh cases were filed in the same period.

After the disposals, 31,39,275 cases were pending with courts across the country, including the Appellate and High Court divisions as of September 30, according to the SC study published last month.

The number of cases pending with the Appellate Division was 13,119 as of September 30.

The Appellate Division disposed of 2,368 cases and around 1,300 judges of the lower courts settled 314,334 cases between July 1 and September 30.