

Militants kill 52 cops in Egypt

AFP, Reuters

At least 52 Egyptian police officers were killed in an ambush by Islamist fighters near the Bahariya oasis in the country's Western Desert, security and medical sources said yesterday, in a rare flare-up outside the Sinai Peninsula.

The interior ministry said security forces hunting down Islamist militants in the region were attacked late Friday on a road to the Bahariya oasis, some 200 kilometres southwest of Cairo.

An official statement said a number of the attackers were killed, but did not give any figures for losses on either side.

According to a source close to the security services, the convoy was hit by rocket fire. The attackers also used explosive devices.

There has not yet been a claim of responsibility. A fake claim in the name of the small extremist group Hasm, reported by multiple local media, spread on social media soon after the attack.

Since the army in 2013 removed elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, extremist groups have increased their attacks on the military and police.

Authorities are fighting the Egyptian branch of the Islamic State

group, which has increased its attacks in the north of the Sinai peninsula more than 500 kilometres (300 miles) away from the latest violence.

In response to the latest bloodshed Egyptian security forces appeared to step up their operations in the area of the attack.

Two truck drivers heading away from the scene told AFP they had seen heavy deployments of security personnel in the area and that aircraft were carrying out surveillance.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was scheduled yesterday to attend events in the northern town of El Alamein on Egypt's Mediterranean coast to mark the 75th anniversary of the pivotal Allied World War II victory in the Battle of El Alamein.

But an AFP reporter did not see the strongman leader at an open-air ceremony involving foreign dignitaries, and his office said he had cancelled his participation in a number of other engagements.

Condemnations of the attack came in from the Middle East and Europe, with France -- where Sisi is due to visit next week -- pledging solidarity after the latest losses for Egypt's security force in "the fight against terrorism".

The Muslim Brotherhood, once Egypt's largest opposition movement,

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Tough to recover

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"The Alltex Group has to pay Sonali Bank more than Tk 75 crore before it can avail itself of the facility of interest waiver and loan rescheduling."

According to the bank documents, the defaulted loans of the Group's three companies -- Alltex Industries, Alltex Fabrics and Alltex Spinning -- stood at Tk 360.65 crore till August.

Of the three, Alltex Industries and Alltex Fabrics were earlier listed by the commerce ministry as sick industry for bad performance.

On August 2, the Sonali Bank board approved the Alltex Group's proposal for waiving interest of its three sister concerns and rescheduling the loan of Alltex Industries. The board then sent the documents to Bangladesh Bank for approval.

The central bank in September approved the proposal for waiving interest and rescheduling the loan of Alltex Industries, and on Thursday also gave the nod to another proposal for waiving interest on the loan of Alltex Fabrics.

Besides, the BB asked Sonali Bank to take steps in line with the existing rules and regulations in case of Alltex Spinning, as the firm is not listed as a sick organisation.

Talking to this correspondent, a number of BB officials said the decision to waive such a big amount of money would encourage other big defaulters to find ways to have their unpaid interest waived.

Contacted on Monday, Sonali Bank Managing Director Obayed Ullah Al Masud declined to comment on the matter.

According to Sonali Bank documents, the state-run bank will waive interest of Tk 72.09 crore on the defaulted Tk 236.74 crore loan of Alltex Industries, and reschedule Tk 164.64 crore on condition that the company repays the money in three years.

The company will also enjoy a six-month grace period and pay 10 percent interest, which is lower than the existing rate between 10.50 percent and 13 percent set by the bank for long-term loans.

Havoc on highways

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vehicles had been moving quite slowly since Friday morning on the road, which had numerous potholes hidden under stagnant water. At some places, vehicles broke down right in the middle of the road, leading to tailbacks. The slow movement of the vehicles made the situation even more complicated.

DISRUPTION IN FERRY SERVICES

Mohammad Masum boarded a Satkhira-bound bus from Dhaka's Shyamoli around 6:45pm on Friday. He, however, was trapped near the Paturia Ferry Ghat for around 14 hours.

"I don't know when I will reach home," he said.

Masum said there was a long tailback on the highway towards the ghat.

Our Munshiganj correspondent reported that the authorities suspended operations of ferries and all other types of vessels at the Mawa Ghat due to the bad weather.

The decision was made on safety grounds.

However, the stranded passengers were taken to the other side of the Padma river on a special ferry after they

The Sonali Bank board also decided to give Alltex Fabrics interest waiver of Tk 20.81 crore after the firm pays dues of Tk 27.80 crore.

Besides, Alltex Spinning will get an interest waiver of Tk 36.49 crore after paying dues of Tk 38.79 crore, show the documents.

Alltex Spinning and Alltex Fabrics will have to clear their dues within the next three months. And the two companies will close their loan accounts with the bank once they do so.

In a letter to the BB in late August, the Sonali Bank mentioned that its board rescheduled the defaulted loan of Alltex Industries in November 2015, offering the company interest waiver of Tk 72.09 crore.

But the company failed to pay the instalments. Three of its cheques were dishonoured in a row, prompting Sonali Bank to file a case against the company under the Negotiable Instruments Act 1981, it said.

The bank will withdraw the case after the Group repays the loans, read the letter.

Sonali Bank documents show that Alltex Industries mortgaged 11.69 acres of land with the bank. Of the property, 1.05 acre would be disposed by the bank so that the Group can sell it along with Alltex Spinning to pay the dues.

Imtiaz Uddin Ahmad Asif, managing director of Alltex Group, told this correspondent on Tuesday that Alltex Industries was listed on the stock exchange while Alltex Spinning is "a family asset".

"We have failed to run Alltex Spinning properly. We are going to sell the company to clear the liabilities to the bank. We will also sell some land of Alltex Fabrics," said Asif, son of Afsar Uddin.

The group would do whatever necessary in line with the BB decision, he added.

This correspondent phoned Alltex Group Chairman Afsar Uddin, also member of Chittagong District (South) AL Executive Committee, several times on Thursday, and also sent a message on his mobile phone, but didn't get any response.

reached the terminal through the Shimulia-Kathalbari route.

Our Manikganj correspondent reported that the ferry service in Aricha Ghat remained suspended for 11 hours until yesterday noon.

DHAKA-TANGAIL HIGHWAY
Hundreds of vehicles remained stuck on the highway in many places of Mirzapur, Basail, Sadar and Kalihati upazilas in Tangail.

An around 15-kilometre tailback of several hundred vehicles was created from Chandra of Gazipur to Mirzapur in Tangail yesterday.

The road was dug up at different places, including in Square, Nasir Glass Factory, Cadet College, Mill Gate, Sohagpur and Corai areas for widening. It, however, made things difficult for the passengers.

Bus passenger Shamin Kabir said he started from Joypurhat around 11:30pm on Friday and reached Tangail's Elenga at 3:20am on Saturday. His bus, however, had been stuck at Elenga until 10:00am yesterday.

"I could not get down from the bus for a single moment during these hours due to the incessant rain. I can't explain my sufferings in words," he added.



The road in front of Notre Dame College in the capital looks like a river after three days of downpour. *Inset*, a flooded and almost deserted street in Motijheel. The photos were taken yesterday afternoon.

Down with downpour

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great demand among office-goers and children going to schools.

The rain swamped large swaths of private residential area Bashundhara as well. Thoroughfares there were water-logged disrupting movement of locals.

Abdul Karim, a resident of Bashundhara, said, "Small vehicles like cars and auto-rickshaws could not ply inside Bashundhara and thousands got totally stuck in their homes."

Rubel Hossain, an Uber driver, said he somehow waded through Dhanmondi Road-27 which was under knee-deep water. Electric cables of his car got severed in the process.

"I am avoiding any trip to Motijheel, Paltan or Moghbazar areas as vehicles would surely break down in rainwater," he said.

Parts of Karwan Bazar, Motijheel, Farmgate, Dhanmondi, Nikunja, Mirpur, Green Road, Mohammadpur, Jatrabari, Shahjahanpur, Shantinagar, Khilgaon, Demra, Mohammadpur, Badda and several other areas in the capital were inundated.

In many places, people had to stay indoors for hours.

The traffic situation in Banasree got worse during the rain, said Shabnam Sultana, a local. The poor state of the streets compounded the sufferings of the locals, she said, adding that people had to wait for around half an hour

Rohingya crisis a great test for UN

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in this very narrow piece of land, which is hilly," he told The Daily Star in an interview last week.

He lamented the lack of consensus at the UN Security Council to find a solution, and emphasised that those responsible for the crimes against the Rohingya population must be held accountable.

"The Security Council has met more last month to talk about Myanmar than in the last 10 years. It is quite remarkable. In spite of that, we are still having problem to get consensus from the Security Council on steps that need to be taken to try to solve this problem," said the UN head in Bangladesh.

A Security Council meeting in late September failed to make any decision on Myanmar because of opposition from China and Russia.

However, despite the lack of consensus at political level, there is absolute consensus that the UN has to intervene at humanitarian level. "We are doing everything within our power to ensure that needs of these people are met," he said.

But the lingering of the refugee crisis will adversely affect Bangladesh's economy, which is a big concern, he added.

"It will definitely have an impact. There is no question about that. And that's why we not only have to find a solution to the problem quickly, but also to minimise the impact on the economy."

The solution lies in the repatriation of the refugees to Myanmar given that peace and security is ensured there, said Watkins, adding that he did not think any solution would come in the next few months.

His comments come when some 589,000 Rohingya people -- about 60 percent of them children -- have crossed into Bangladesh since August 25 to join nearly 400,000 of their fellow countrymen who fled violence in Myanmar in phases over the years.

The UN and other aid groups are struggling to mobilise fund for the emer-

gency reliefs.

Early this month, UN agencies appealed for \$434 million for emergency assistance for six months, but received commitment of only \$105 million or 24 percent so far.

The \$434, for which the UN is going to have a pledging conference in Geneva tomorrow, is for food, shelter, water, sanitation and medicine, and will not cover the cost of Bangladesh government that is "pretty large," said Watkins.

Therefore, it is important to seek funds from financial institutions like the World Bank, IMF, ADB, and possibly OIC, he added. "We know that we won't have the resources and Bangladesh won't have resources so we are going to find extra resources from both sides."

Bangladesh is playing host to such a huge number of refugees when it is facing its own development challenges. Despite various measures, the yearly poverty reduction rate has dropped from 1.7 percent between 2005 and 2010 to 1.2 percent between 2010 and 2016.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics latest report, 24 percent people in Bangladesh are still poor (those unable to ensure daily food intake of 1,800-2,100 kilocalorie), and 13 percent of them are ultra poor (those unable to ensure daily food intake of 1,800 kilocalorie).

Slower growth in agriculture, drop in remittance inflow, lack of job opportunities, wealth inequality and challenges of reaching the hard-to-reach poor people were blamed for the slowing trend that goes against the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for 2015-2030 that speak of inclusive development.

Watkins said implementing the SDGs, which already faces financial challenges, would suffer further blows despite the fact that Bangladesh integrated the SDGs in its policies quite well.

"We hope the pledging conference in Geneva on October 23 will be an opportunity for other member countries of the

Road, Chaktai and Khatunganj.

Most of these areas went under knee-deep water.

Even though it had not rained that much yesterday morning, the heavens opened after 3:00pm flooding Lal Chand Road, KB Aman Ali Road, DC Road, Telipatti Road and some parts of Bahaddarhat to Shah Amanat Bridge Connecting Road.

Many areas of Shulak Bahar, Bahaddarhat, Kapashgola, Dewanbazar, Sholoshahar, Prabantan intersection, Muradpur, and Oxygen intersection were also inundated.

Most of the streets mentioned were in poor state which added to the sufferings of the port city dwellers.

Haider Ali, president of Chaktai Trade and Industries Association, said many businesses just had to close the shutters as the roads went under water.

Our Pirojpur correspondent reported that nonstop rain caused the water levels of the Kacha, Baleshwar, Sandha, Pona, and Kaliganga rivers to go above the normal level.

Our Jhalakathi correspondent reports: Many farmlands went under water and people of the low income group, particularly labourers and rickshaw pullers, were bearing the brunt of the inclement weather.

Our Pabna correspondent said many roads in Shalgaria, Mujahid club, Mokhtab Bazar, Sahdupara, New

Market, Chhatiani, Chakchhatiani, Court Para, Radhanagar, Jugipara, Noorpour, Talbagan, Library Bazar and Anontabazar areas of the town went under knee-deep water.

The inclement weather caused ferry service disruption at Paturia and Mawa and slowed down or halted traffic on highways. The BIWTA at 4:00pm yesterday suspended all launch services from Sadarghat until further notice.

REASONS FOR WATERLOGGING
Urban planners have time and again pointed out that unplanned urbanisation would result in such an unbearable situation even during usual rain.

They said powerful real estate developers had been allowed to indiscriminately fill the conservable water-retention ponds, canals, and flood plains in and around the capital.

Rain water was supposed to be carried away instantly to those low-lying retention areas with a well-networked storm drainage system but unfortunately even the slope of the existing drainage system was improper, they added.

Extensive river foreshores around the capital have been filled up and encroached upon by land claimants with the government playing a silent role.

As a result, it takes hours for rainwater to drain, making the lives of city dwellers miserable and causing damage to properties, including vehicles and roads, they said.

high.

Comparing corruption in Bangladesh with traffic chaos in the capital, he said, "People just don't care about other people. They are just concentrating on themselves."

As there is a sense of impunity that there will be no consequences for corruption, corruption is going to continue. "It is really a lot more about changing attitude, the mindset.

"People have to take example that nobody is above law. Ministers, for instance, are to be held accountable for their actions. If there are cases of corruption, there has to be consequences.

"If people see that is happening, rules are happening for everyone, not just for the rickshaw pullers, but for the ministers or any others, then they will start abiding the rules. That's how you start changing the mindset of people... People at the top have to set the example.

"People now say why should I do it? This rich man gets away with it, the minister gets away with it, why should I follow the rules? And, that's where it starts -- people at the top have to set the example."

PARTICIPATION OF ALL PARTIES IN POLLS IS KEY

But the real challenge that Bangladesh faces today in democracy is the issue of full participation of all the political parties in elections.

He said the problem in last election was that the main opposition party chose not to participate, and thus the democracy in Bangladesh is not fully reflective of all of the political parties in the country.

"That's why we have been working tirelessly with political parties and urging them to participate in next national elections. We will be working with the Election Commission to ensure that the elections take place in the most professional environment."

This way parliament will reflect the whole spectrum of political opinions. "That's what we want more than anything else," said the top UN official.