

Attacks rattle Kunduz

Dozens killed as Taliban launch raids on Afghan military bases, posts

AFP, Kunduz

Taliban attacks on Afghan security forces in the country's north have caused "heavy casualties", officials said yesterday, putting the number of soldiers killed as high as 40 in ongoing fighting.

Militants using night-vision goggles launched simultaneous raids on several Afghan military bases and posts in Dashte Archi district in Kunduz province overnight, defence ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanish and other Afghan security sources told AFP.

"We have suffered casualties, the Taliban have also suffered casualties," Radmanish said.

Between 10 and 15 Afghan soldiers had been killed so far, and about the same number wounded, he added.

But an Afghan security source told AFP that the death toll among security forces was "more than 40", and another confirmed that 39 had been killed and 10 wounded.

A separate security source said there had been "heavy casualties" among the soldiers.

An air and ground operation against the Taliban was under way, Radmanish said.

But yesterday afternoon an army base on the border between Kunduz and Takhar provinces, where 29 security forces had been killed and 17 others wounded, was still under Taliban control, Takhar governor spokesman Sunatullah Timor said.

"No reinforcements have come to the area yet," he told AFP.

The Taliban claimed responsibility on Twitter for the attacks, confirming their fighters had captured an army base as well as 11 posts, and killed 65 soldiers and "many local police".

The night-vision goggles used in the latest attacks helped the Taliban fighters execute their pre-dawn raid, a senior Afghan commander told AFP.

He said the attacks were carried out by the group's elite Red Unit.

"Since we don't have the night-vision (goggles), the Taliban can get close to soldiers without them noticing," he said.

Taliban have stolen armoured Humvees, weapons and other equipment -- including night-vision goggles -- in previous raids on Afghan security forces, helping them to carry out devastating attacks.

FF quota to stay

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This is my question."

Pointing to the quota reform movement, Hasina said the demonstrators cannot say what they actually want.

She further said those involved in the attack on the residence of the Dhaka University vice chancellor will not be spared.

"They cannot be spared. They are being arrested, and an investigation is underway. Many of them have already made confessions," she said, adding that all the culprits will be arrested, no matter where they are.

Attacks on the VC's residence, torching of vehicles and looting of valuables cannot be acts of any students, she added.

No country other than Bangladesh offers higher education at such low costs, the PM pointed out.

Many of the demonstrators who are university students pay only Tk 15 a month as seat rent at dormitories and Tk 30 for a meal, yet they are carrying out movement, she mentioned.

"Is it a movement? It is chaos that can never be tolerated," she said, referring to vandalising of hall gates and female students coming out of dormitories at midnight.

"If they continue to do so, should not they pay seat rent and costs of meal at the current market prices?"

In her over 50-minute speech, the PM also praised the opposition leaders and all MPs for playing a very constructive role in the budget session.

A decent and fair atmosphere prevails in the current parliament, and the House operated the way it should, she mentioned.

Hasina said the current parliament formed through the 2014 election did not see any untoward incident or hear any unwarranted words. "There were very constructive discussions here which increased the dignity of parliament before the nation to a large extent, and people's confidence in it has been restored."

About the next general election, the PM hoped all including the opposition -- the Jatiya Party -- will participate in the polls.

"If people want, they will again cast votes in favour of boat [the election symbol of the Awami League] and give us the opportunity to serve them."

Referring to the government's various development activities, Hasina said Bangladesh is marching forward and will continue to do so. "Nobody can neglect it now."

Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad urged the PM to consider with sympathy the students' demand for quota reform.

In her winding-up speech in the budget session, she called upon the PM to raise the age limit for entry to government jobs to 35 and fix the retirement age at 65.

"There is confusion among our

Mohammad Hanif Rezayee, a spokesman for the 209 Shaheen Army Corps in the north, said two military posts had fallen to the Taliban, but security forces had managed to beat back an attack on a base.

In a separate incident, Afghan forces launched air strikes on a gathering of high-ranking Taliban members in the southeastern province of Ghazni, killing 24 and wounding 17, the defence ministry said in a statement yesterday.

Mullah Amir Khan Mutaqi, who was a Taliban minister during its 1996-2001 regime, and the Taliban shadow governor for Ghazni were among those injured in the attack in Nawa district, the defence ministry said.

CALLS FOR PEACE

In early April an Afghan air strike on an outdoor religious gathering in Dashte Archi killed or wounded 107 people, mostly children, a UN report released in May found.

The Taliban vowed revenge for the attack, which the government and military said had targeted a Taliban base where senior members of the group were planning attacks.

A recent ceasefire between Afghan security forces and the Taliban during the Islamic holiday Eid had raised hopes that an end to hostilities in the war-weary country was possible.

Both sides expressed a deep fatigue with the conflict as they celebrated the ceasefire with selfies and hugs in the streets.

Since then, however, the Taliban have returned to the battlefield, launching deadly attacks against the Afghan military across the country.

The latest attacks come as President Ashraf Ghani attends a Nato summit in Brussels where he will be hoping to get a greater commitment from members to the nearly 17-year conflict.

Currently, there are about 14,000 US troops in Afghanistan, providing the main component of the Nato mission there to support and train local forces.

On Wednesday, more than 100 Muslim scholars from around the world meeting in the Saudi holy city of Makkah issued an urgent appeal for peace in Afghanistan.

So far the Taliban have not responded to Ghani's offers for dialogue, instead demanding to sit down with the United States, which has dismissed this proposal.

UPDF man killed in Khagrachhari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Unidentified criminals hacked and shot dead an activist of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) in Khagrachhari town yesterday.

The deceased was Gyanendra Chakma, 40.

Niron Chakma, a member of UPDF's information and publicity unit, blamed Jana Sanghati Samity (JSS) for the murder. The JSS faction, however, refuted the allegation.

Details of the incident were not available immediately.

We'll be ready

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Nobody gave up," said Dacic, whose team have played the equivalent of one match more than the French.

"We prepared to get to the final and we want to play it. Going to extra-time might be a problem along with the fact France have had an extra day to recover but there will be no excuses," he added.

"We have to play as if this were the first game in this tournament."

No team has ever made it to the World Cup final after going to extra-time in all three prior knockout rounds -- England twice won in extra-time in 1990 before losing on penalties to West Germany in the semifinals.

Dacic was only appointed as Croatia coach towards the end of their qualifying campaign, leading them to Russia via a play-off win against Greece.

He described France as a "top-drawer team with fantastic players", but his own side have earned their place in the final, their victory over England coming after they earlier destroyed Lionel Messi and Argentina with a 3-0 win in the group stage.

Luka Modric has been inspirational throughout their run, yet there were numerous outstanding performances at the Luzhniki Stadium as Croatia recovered from a shaky opening half hour.

Among the best was Marcelo Brozovic, the Inter Milan midfielder brought into the line-up to provide extra steel in front of the defence.

"We were the better team in all aspects of the game," said Dacic.

"We played better than we did against Argentina. I told the players before the game there was no pressure -- we have reached the semifinals, enjoy your football and this was exactly what we did."

Croatia now have the chance to take revenge on France after losing 2-1 in Paris when the sides met in the semifinals back in 1998 -- Dacic travelled to that World Cup as a fan.

With such a modest population, they are the smallest country to get to a World Cup final since Uruguay back in 1950, and in the modern game it is a staggering achievement.

"For Croatian football and Croatia as a country this is history being written," said the 51-year-old Dacic.

"We are going to play England in the League of Nations (in October) and we don't have a proper stadium to play that game. But we have our hearts, our pride and our players and that is what is really important to us."

He will just be hoping that all of them are fit enough for one last effort against a fearsome French side.

Blackmailers

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Rahmat and the other suspects later dumped Mamun's body in Gazipur.

Rahmat, 35, who was arrested on Tuesday, is being interrogated by Detective Branch of police. He is on a seven-day remand.

He has given the names of 10-12 other suspects involved in the murder.

He told detectives that the gang often blackmailed its victims. Rahmat also told police that the gang rented 7-8 flats in different parts of the capital to conduct illegal activities. The flats were rented by suspects named Nazrul Islam and Sheikh Hridoy alias Papon alias Rabibul.

Inspector Mamun's elder brother Jahangir Alam Khan told The Daily Star yesterday that Mamun went to the Banani flat on Sunday evening from his Bashabo house after getting a phone call from his friend.

After killing Mamun, the gang members put his body in a sack and took it to Gazipur in Rahmat's car. They dumped the body in a bush in an isolated area.

The suspects poured petrol on the body and burnt it before dumping it, police quoted Rahmat as saying.

Detectives recovered the body on Tuesday.

Jahangir said Mamun was posted to different police stations in Dhaka and Chittagong since 2006. Mamun was buried at Shahjahanpur graveyard on Wednesday.

Deputy Commissioner (East) of Detective Branch Khandker Nurun Nabi said he hoped to arrest more suspects in a couple of days.

Police sources told The Daily Star that the flat where the murder took place was rented for Tk 45,000 a month.

Rashed 'admits' taking money from Rony

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Daily Star could not independently verify the authenticity of the videos.

Contacted, Rashed claimed he made the admission under duress.

In two of the three clips, Rashed is seen confessing that he took Tk 9.5 lakh from Rony as an investment in the coaching centre business.

He is also heard saying that Rony was his business partner and that the partnership was based on trust and there was no document.

In another clip, ward-3 Councillor Kafil Uddin Khan is heard asking Rashed to amicably settle the matter with Rony.

At one stage of the conversation, Rashed said that Rony demanded some money back from him but he could not do so as the coaching business was incurring losses.

"As I failed to pay any money to Rony, he wanted the whole amount back which I took from him in 2017," Rashed said.

In one of the clips, Rashed and several other people are seen sitting at Kafil's house in the port city. Kafil is also seen with them.

At one point, Kafil told Rashed: "If you admit your mistake ... you will see, Rony will stand by you."



Nurul Azim Rony Rashed Mia

Asked about the clips, Rashed claimed that seven to eight people picked him up along with one of his students Sohanul Islam from Cantonment School and College area on Tuesday.

"They beat me up and forced me to admit that Rony was my business partner. Later they took me to the house of Councillor Kafil Uddin. They also forced me to sign on three stamps, saying that I will withdraw the case," he claimed.

Immediately after coming out of the councillor's house, he went to nearby Baizid Police Station and filed a written complaint, he added.

Ataur Rahman Khandakar, the officer-in-charge there, confirmed this said they were investigating the matter.

However, Rony told The Daily Star

that Rashed went to the councillor's house on his own and that he was not even there at the time.

He added that Rashed himself requested the councillor to settle the matter.

The Daily Star could not reach the councillor by phone for his comment despite repeated attempts.

However, in a Facebook post, the councillor quoted Rashed as telling at his house: "I was trying to withdraw the case earlier. But I could not find anyone trustworthy to help settle the matter."

The post also says that Rashed expressed regret for doing injustice to Rony and agreed to pay the money back in instalments.

Rony made headlines in March after a video clip went viral where he was seen slapping the principal of the Chittagong Bigyan College, accusing him of realising extra money from HSC examinees.

The principal, Jahed Khan, filed a case against eight BCL men, including Rony, on April 4 accusing them of demanding Tk 20 lakh in extortion money.

Rony was sent to jail on June 4 in this case and came out of prison on bail three days later.

challenge to cooperate with each other because we have a long history of cooperation. We have a little bit of language barrier on the ground level but we will overcome very soon because we are going to establish a border liaison office soon."

When a journalist pointed out the Rohingya's allegation against BGP of killing and torture, Police Brigadier General Myo Than, chief of police general staff of Myanmar, who was leading the Myanmar delegation, angrily shouted "objection".

Officials from the Bangladesh side then said the issue was out of agenda, while the Myanmar side said they talked about the security along the borders.

Lt Col Mahfuzur Rahman, director (operation) of the BGP, said both sides also agreed to sit in immediate talks in case of any shooting in the border, ensure smooth coordination in border patrol, share intelligence and information, especially in case of any helicopter operations near the border to avoid any confusion.

Besides, both sides decided that their forces would not cross the border without prior permission, he said.

BGP Additional Director General Brig Gen Anisur Rahman, who led the Bangladesh team, was also present at the briefing.

The next meeting between the two forces is expected in January next year in Myanmar.

List of drug dealers

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The BGB official, however, did not disclose the number and names in the list when he was speaking at a post-summit joint briefing at BGB headquarters in Pilkhana in the capital.

The four-day summit between BGB and Myanmar's Border Guard Police (BGP) ended yesterday, with both sides pledging to improve the frontier security.

The conference was held at a time when tension rose in the bordering areas as about 10 lakh Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution by Myanmar security forces since August 25 last year.

The Rohingya issue, however, was not discussed in the summit represented by an 11-member Myanmar delegation and 13 top officials of BGP, Prime Minister's Office, and foreign and home ministries from the host side.

Though Rohingyas took shelter in Bangladesh fearing adverse situation in Myanmar, some Teknaf-based top drug dealers, having good connections with their counterparts in Myanmar, fled to the country since the anti-narcotics drive began on May 4 in the country, said law enforcers.

At least 178 suspected drug dealers have been killed and thousands arrested in the crackdown. But the top drug barons in Cox's Bazar area, including lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodu's cousin Mong Mong Sen and

other relatives, are still out of the dragon. Many of them too reportedly have fled to Myanmar.</p