

Battle for Pathankot Indian airbase enters second night

The battle between Indian troops and militants who attacked an air force base at Pathankot near the Pakistani border has entered a second night.

At least four attackers and seven Indian soldiers have died so far.

It is unclear whether all the militants have been killed, with the home secretary saying two gunmen were still at large.

The attack is being seen as a blow to an apparent Indo-Pakistani peace initiative launched just days ago.

Hopes for a thaw in relations were raised after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid an unexpected visit to his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif.

Fresh gunfire and a blast were heard at the base on Sunday, more than a day after the attack started.

Pakistan's foreign ministry and the US State Department have condemned the attack.



Helicopters have been involved in the operation to secure the base

The attack started before dawn on Saturday, when a group of gunmen – wearing Indian army uniforms – entered the residential quarters on the base.

Hours of heavy gunfire followed, and a helicopter was seen firing at the facility. On Saturday afternoon, police said the base had been secured.

However, fresh gunfire was reported on Sunday morning.

A senior government official, Home Secretary Rajiv Mehrishi, troops were battling at least two gunmen who had been cornered at the site.

At least one explosion – suspected to have been caused by a grenade – was heard on Sunday. Local news reports said a soldier from a commando unit had been killed while defusing explosives.



India's Punjab state is on alert following the attack

The identity of the attackers is not clear. Some Indian security officials suggested the Islamist militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed was to blame.

India says the group is backed by Pakistan, but Islamabad denies this.

In July seven people were killed in a similar attack when gunmen stormed a police station in nearby Gurdaspur district. The three attackers in Gurdaspur were killed after a 12-hour standoff with police.

Pathankot air force base is about 430km (270 miles) north of the Indian capital, Delhi and is on the road linking Indian-administered Kashmir with the rest of the country.

Indian-administered Kashmir has seen a long-running insurgency against rule from Delhi, and Kashmir has been a flashpoint in relations between Pakistan and India for nearly 70 years since independence.

Death for Bangladesh blogger killers

Two students have been sentenced to death in Bangladesh for the killing of an atheist blogger there in 2013.

Six others were convicted of involvement in the murder of Ahmed Rajib Haider, who was hacked to death as he was returning home from a rally in the capital, Dhaka.

A five-year sentence was given to the head of Ansarullah Bangla, the group suspected of carrying out the attack.

Five more secular bloggers and writers were killed in Bangladesh in 2015.

The court said that one of the students sentenced to death, Faisal bin Nayeem, attacked Haider with a meat cleaver in front of the victim's house.

The other was tried and sentenced in absentia.

Haider was among a group of bloggers who had called for the execution of Islamist leaders for

crimes committed in the 1971 war.

The blogger's father, Mohammad Nazim Uddin, said he was unhappy that only two men were given the death sentence.

"I'm not happy with the verdict. I reject this verdict. Five of them confessed their involvement in the killing. But only two were given death sentence. How is it possible?", he said.

There have been several clashes in recent years between Islamists and supporters of the secular Awami League.

'JMB man admits' role in Iskcon temple attack

Suspected militant of banned Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) held over the attack on an Iskcon temple in Dinajpur is said to have confessed his role in the attack.

Detained Shariful Islam, 28, gave his confession before the Dinajpur chief judicial magistrate yesterday, our local correspondent reports quoting Redwanur Rahim, officer-in-charge of Detective Branch of police in Dinajpur district.

Shariful was caught red handed during the attack on Iskcon temple on December 10. He later confessed to have shot Italian pastor and doctor Piero Parolari in the district.

PM cautions against BDR mutiny like incident

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today asked BGB personnel to remain alert so that incident like the 2009 BDR mutiny does not recur in the future.

"BGB has turned into a dynamic and modern force with the sincere efforts of all. Through your hard labour, the reputation and dignity of this force have been restored...you must stay alert so that such suicidal incident cannot take place in the future," she said.

The prime minister was addressing the formal parade of BGB Day-2015 held at the BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh) Headquarters in the city.

Terming the mutiny and killings at Peelkhana on February 25-26, 2009 as a black chapter of this force, Sheikh Hasina said she had to face the heinous and unstable situation like BDR mutiny and killings soon after assuming office and tackled it with the united efforts of the BGB members.

Mentioning that the BGB is now fully free from its stigma following the trial of its unruly and misleading personnel involved with the mutiny, she asked the BGB personnel to discharge their duties with utmost honesty and patriotism and thus gain the confidence and trust of people.

Delhi gang rape juvenile released

Youngest convict in 2012 Delhi gang rape is released from correction centre, his lawyer tells the BBC.

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Legal challenges and protests from the victim's parents had failed to prevent the release.

The rapist, who cannot be named as he was a minor at the time of the crime, was sentenced to three years in a reform facility in August 2013.

The rape and the subsequent death of the woman caused global outrage.

Bangladesh static in Human Development Index

Bangladesh's position remains unchanged in the Human Development Index, [according to the 2015 Human Development Report](#) launched by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Bangladesh ranked 142 out of 188 countries in the index, while neighbouring India ranked at 130, Nepal at 145 and Pakistan at 147, the report, published today, said.

"Bangladesh has shown a positive trend in Human Development for the last couple of decades with an average annual increase of about 1.55 percent," a press release in this regard reads.

UNDP launched the report titled "Work for Human Development" at NEC Conference Room at the Planning Commission today.

According to the report, despite extremely rapid technological adoption in recent years, as of 2014, 2.5 billion people in Asia and the Pacific did not have access to the internet (1.4 billion people in South Asia), the press release reads.

Mentioning that youth unemployment in Asia ranges between 8.7 percent in Bangladesh and 28.7 percent in Iran, the Human Development Report 2015 observed that fostering education, skills and entrepreneurship can facilitate a necessary labour market transformation.

"In order to ensure that the work-force is capable of adapting to rapidly changing demands, the governments need to make strategic investments into education and health care," Haoliang Xu, assistant administrator and director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, told today's programme.

The index was created to emphasise that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone.

It is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living.

Tough World Twenty20 draw excites Shahid Afridi

Shahid Afridi, Pakistan's T20 captain, on Thursday (December 17) said he hoped a tough World Twenty20 draw would motivate his team to win the title for the first time in seven years and beat arch-rival India along the way.

The 2009 champions are placed in Group 2 of the Super Ten round of the World T20 along with hosts India, Australia, New Zealand, and a yet to be decided qualifier.

The qualifier in this 'group of death' is most likely going to be Bangladesh, given that the Tigers emerge champions of Group A after three matches against Netherlands on March 9, Ireland on March 11 and Oman on March 13.

If Bangladesh qualify, they will face Pakistan in the Super 10 Group 1 match on March 15, 2016.

Tigers will next play on March 21 against Australia at Bangalore.

On March 23, Bangladesh's opponent will be hosts India at the same stadium.

On March 26, Bangladesh cricket team will face New Zealand at the Eden Gardens, Kolkata.

"We have a tough draw but I am hopeful that this challenge will pump-up my team to win the title and on the way beat India," Afridi told AFP.

Pakistan lost to India in both the group round and final of the inaugural World Twenty20 in 2007



Nasir Hossain (R) celebrates with his teammates after the dismissal of the Zimbabwe cricketer Malcolm Waller during the second T20 cricket match between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. Photo: AFP

and then in

two subsequent tournaments. They have also lost to India every time they have faced them in six World Cups. But Afridi said it was time for a change. "I don't want to live in history. Whatever mistakes we usually make in the matches against India we have to overcome them."

Pakistan's recent form, however, does not augur well. Last month, they lost to England 3-0 in a Twenty20 series in the United Arab Emirates, slipping to sixth in the rankings.

"We made school boy errors and despite putting up good fights in all three matches we lost by narrow margins so we have to be on our toes and should not repeat those mistakes," said Afridi, who is set to draw the curtain on his two-decade long career after the event.

Pakistan who have three Twenty20 matches on their tour of New Zealand next month before featuring in the six-nation **Asia Cup Twenty20 in Bangladesh** in February.

"We have enough matches before the World Twenty20 so we have to find a settled combination and I hope we do well in these matches and carry that form into the World Twenty20."

The sixth edition of the World T20 is scheduled to be held between March 8 and April 3, 2016 across eight venues in India.

Pope Francis recognises second Mother Teresa 'miracle'

Pope Francis has recognised a second miracle attributed to Mother Teresa, clearing the way for the Roman Catholic nun to be made a saint next year.

The miracle involved the healing of a Brazilian man with several brain tumours in 2008, the Vatican said.

Mother Teresa died in 1997 and was beatified – the first step towards sainthood – in 2003.

She won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work with the poor in the slums of the Indian city of Kolkata (Calcutta).

"The Holy Father has authorised the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to proclaim the decree concerning the miracle attributed to the intercession of blessed Mother Teresa," the Vatican said on Friday.

She is expected to be canonised in Rome in September.

Sister Christie, a spokesperson for the Missionaries of Charity Mother Teresa founded in 1950, told the BBC that they were delighted by the news.

"Obviously all of us at the Missionaries of Charity are extremely happy. But we do not have any plans to celebrate this announcement as yet," she said.

'Saint of the gutter'

Beatification by the Catholic Church requires one miracle, while the process of becoming recognised as a saint requires proof of at least two miracles.

Mother Teresa was beatified in 2003 after Pope John Paul II accepted as authentic a miracle

attributed to her.

He judged that the curing of an Indian woman suffering from an abdominal tumour was the result of the supernatural intervention of the late Mother Teresa – a claim challenged by Indian rationalists.

There are few details about the recovery of the Brazilian man, whose life the Vatican says was saved in the second miracle.

His identity has not been disclosed to maintain the discretion needed for the investigation, the Catholic New Agency has said.

It says he was unexpectedly cured from brain tumours in 2008 after his priest prayed for Mother Teresa's intervention with God.

Born Agnes Gonxhe Bojaxhiu in Skopje, Macedonia, in 1910, she dedicated her life to caring for impoverished and sick people in Kolkata.

Known as the "saint of the gutter", she earned worldwide acclaim for her efforts.

Her critics, however, accused her of peddling a hardline Catholicism, mixing with dictators and accepting funds from them for her charity.

Her supporters justified the funding, saying it did not matter where the money came from as long as it was used to help the poor.

'JMB man admits' shooting Italian pastor in Dinajpur

Suspected JMB man, arrested in Dinajpur temple attack case, admitted that he shot Italian pastor and doctor Piero Parolari, detectives claim.

Shariful Islam, 28, confessed his involvement in the gun attack before Dinajpur Chief Judicial Magistrate Court yesterday, Redwanur Rahim, officer-in-charge of Detective Branch of Police, told our Dinajpur correspondent.

Shariful was caught by locals soon after the gun attack on the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon) temple in Kaharol's Bahuchi village of the district on December 10. Two people were injured in the attack.

A few days later, Humayun Kabir, deputy inspector general of police (Rangpur Range, said that they found connection of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) with the killing of Japanese national Kunio Hoshi and five recent attacks in Rangpur and Dinajpur.

Italian pastor Piero Parolari, 57, was attacked by unidentified assailants in Dinajpur on November 18 when he was riding a bicycle towards Dinajpur Medical College Hospital.

David Cameron accused of 'governing from the gloom' over bid to scrap Freedom of Information Act

David Cameron has been urged to scrap his review of the Freedom of Information Act and instead strengthen the legislation to give voters a greater insight into the Government's work.

Accusing the Prime Minister of wanting to "govern from the gloom," deputy Labour leader Tom Watson has described the review of the transparency legislation out of touch with the public's desire for more openness, a "waste of taxpayers' money" and "predestined" to recommend raising barriers to obtaining information.

He claimed Mr Cameron was trying to "reverse the transparency Labour introduced" and seeking to "turn off the lights, systematically making it harder for people to engage with policy making, retreating into a darker and more secretive place".

Labour would strengthen and extend the FOI Act, he said, which was brought in by Tony Blair but who later admitted the legislation was his biggest regret.

Mr Cameron was criticised for appointing a commission full of opponents of the Act to look into reforming the legislation, including former Home Secretary Jack Straw, a vocal critic of the law despite playing a role in introducing it.

Mr Watson's attack on the Government's review comes after the former head of the civil service Lord Kerslake dismissed claims that the FOI Act had a "chilling effect" on civil servants.

In a speech in central London, Mr Watson will accuse Mr Cameron of contradicting his pledge as opposition leader when he said "sunlight is the best disinfectant" and promised the Tories would "bring the operation of Government out into the open".

"As Prime Minister he is methodically closing all the doors and the shutters, drawing the blinds and the curtains, retreating to the shadows at the back of the national farmhouse," Mr Watson said.

"He wants to govern from the gloom in the old fashioned way, without the inconvenience of scrutiny, abandoning any hope of decency or trust."

Mr Watson cited NHS England's announcement that weekly bulletins on the health service's performance over the winter will no longer include figures on four-hour waits in A&E departments, the number of ambulances queuing outside hospitals or operations cancelled at the last minute.

"His response to the crisis in our health service has been to introduce an NHS news blackout," Mr Watson said.

"He thinks we won't like what they're doing, so they're going to stop telling us about it."
