

## **Dhaka cafe siege ends; six ISIS militants killed, 18 hostages freed**

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**Dhaka:** At least six persons were killed and 18 persons rescued as Bangladeshi forces on Saturday started an operation to free up to 40 hostages, including foreigners, taken by about eight to nine gunmen who attacked a restaurant in the diplomatic quarter of Dhaka on Friday late night.

Local media reported that 18 hostages were rescued by the police. The commanding officer of Bangladeshi commandos said at least six of the militants have been killed.

Two police officers were killed and at least 26 people wounded in the gunbattle.

Local TV stations reported that the rescue operation began at 7:40 a.m. It included army personnel with automatic weapons and at least seven armored vehicles. Several ambulances were on standby.

Live Updates:

\* Bangladesh government is determined to root out terrorism from the country: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The US has said it cannot yet confirm the Islamic State terror group's claim owning responsibility for the hostage crisis in a restaurant in Dhaka's high security diplomatic area.

"We have seen ISIL (ISIS) claims of responsibility, but cannot yet confirm and are assessing the information available to us," State Department spokesman John Kirby said.\* India has called for quick action to adopt the long-stalled Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) and expressed disappointment that the General Assembly failed to push for its early adoption.

\* Bangladesh siege cafe cleared, six gunmen killed, say Police: AFP

\* A total of 18 rescued from the restaurant, says a high official of Police Headquarters: Local media

\* Five bodies recovered from the restaurant, says RAB: Local media

\* 2 big explosions heard inside Dhaka restaurant; police official says 5 bodies found: AP

\* Bangladesh media: 13 hostages rescued says Lt Col Tuhin Mohammad Masud. This apparently includes Japanese and Indian national

\* 13 people including 3 foreigners taken hostage by terrorists at #Dhaka restaurant rescued

\* 5 rescued from Dhaka restaurant, 36 injured being treated. Eyewitnesses to media say 5 gunmen killed, 1 captured, 2 unaccounted for.

\* Unconfirmed report says that at least 5 persons, presumably hostages, moved out via ambulances from cafe. Bangladesh army chief at the location.

\* More ambulances moving into Dhaka restaurant lane. Local reporters say at least 100 commandos have

surrounded cafe

\* Several persons including 1 foreigner rescued from Dhaka restaurant says Mizanur Rahman of RAB. They are being taken to hospital

\* Gunshots, explosions heard as security forces move to end Bangladesh hostage standoff: Associated Press

\* Dhaka media says 30 plus injured and 2 dead, both being police officers. Unconfirmed that contact established with hostage takers.

\* ISIS affiliated news agency Amaq claims they have killed 20 people of different nationalities in Dhaka cafe. Some graphic photos released online.

\* High alert in Kolkata after Dhaka hostage crisis

\* Terrorists have turned off lights at the place where they are holding the hostages

\* Bangladeshi home minister holds emergency meeting

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\* We would like to resolve the situation peacefully. And I urge everyone to remain calm and not to panic. Some of our people have been injured. Our first priority is to save the lives of the people trapped inside: Benazir Ahmed, the head of the elite Rapid Action Battalion

\* Two persons -- an Italian and an Argentinian -- killed: IANS

\* One more police officer killed

\* Rabiul Islam, Assistant Commissioner of Detective Branch of Police succumbs to his injuries-Bangladesh media

\* It was too early to say who was involved in the hostage situation at a restaurant in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka or what their motivation might be: US State Department

\* Bangladesh plans to start operation soon to rescue hostages from the restaurant: Media

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\* Bangladesh TV channels have stopped broadcasting live from hostage situation after Rapid Action Battalion requested to stop: Bangla media

\* All Indian diplomats in Dhaka were safe, External Affairs Ministry has said.

\* Police negotiators were trying to establish communication with the suspected attackers holed up in the restaurant to know of their demands, local media has reported.

\* The kitchen staff worker said that the gunmen chanted "Allahu Akbar" (God Is Great) as they launched the attack.

\* A kitchen staff of the bakery, who managed to escape, said several armed men entered the restaurant around 8:45 PM and took the chief chef hostage, local media reported. "They set off several crude bombs triggering panic," he added.

\* A large number of policemen and Rapid Action Battalion cordoned off the restaurant.

\* Several people including foreigners are feared to have been taken hostages inside the restaurant, police said.

\* According to police, about five armed men entered Holey Artisan Bakery, a restaurant popular with foreigners, and opened gunfire around 9:20 PM (local time).

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The attack marks an escalation in the growing drumbeat of militant violence to hit the traditionally moderate Muslim-majority nation in the past three years, but with increasing frequency in recent months. Most attacks have been by machete-wielding men singling out individual activists, foreigners and religious minorities.

Bangladesh did not immediately respond to the claim of responsibility by IS, but in the past have denied that the extremist group has a presence in the country. The U.S. State Department said it had seen the IS claim, but could not confirm its authenticity.

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More than eight hours after the hostage crisis began, a standoff had developed with little sign of any resolution.

The attackers "have not responded to authorities' calls for negotiation," said a member of the elite anti-crime force, Rapid Action Battalion, identifying himself as Lt. Col. Masood, during an interview with the Indian TV channel Times Now.

He said authorities were planning to launch a coordinated response at dawn, and that the security cordon would prevent any of the attackers from escaping. Authorities also ordered internet services to be blocked across the country, according to internet service provider Aamra.

Police said the two officers died at a hospital after being wounded in the gunfire with as many as nine attackers, who

also hurled bombs. Ten of the 26 wounded were listed in critical condition, six of whom were on life support, according to hospital staff, who said the injuries ranged from broken bones to gunshot wounds. Only one civilian was among the wounded.

Reza said the attackers chanted "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) as they launched the attack around 9:20 p.m. Friday, initially opening fire with blanks. A huge contingent of security forces cordoned off the area around the bakery.

Resident Lutful Amin told The Associated Press he heard several explosions, the last of which went off around 10:45 p.m.

The head of the Rapid Action Battalion told reporters Friday night that they were working to save the lives of the people trapped inside the restaurant. The hostages included an unknown number of foreigners.

Their nationalities were not immediately clear. On Saturday, Japan's top government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said at a hastily called news conference in Tokyo that the government is trying to confirm that Japanese were among the hostages. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told reporters that saving lives is the top priority.

"Some derailed youths have entered the restaurant and launched the attack," Benazir Ahmed said. "We have talked to some of the people who fled the restaurant after the attack. We want to resolve this peacefully. We are trying to talk to the attackers, we want to listen to them about what they want."

"Our first priority is to save the lives of the people trapped inside," Ahmed said. He would not say how many people were being held hostage.

Among the hostages was a businessman and his wife and two children, according to his uncle Anwarul Karim.

"My nephew Hasnat Karim called me and said he was inside with his family. He told me, 'Please save us, please!' And he hung up," he said. "We do not know what is going on there."

In Washington, a White House official said President Barack Obama was briefed on the attack by his chief counterterrorism adviser Lisa Monaco. The president asked to be kept informed as the situation develops, said the official, who was not authorized to speak publicly about the president's meetings.

State Department spokesman John Kirby says the U.S. is in contact with the Bangladesh government and has offered its assistance to bring those responsible to justice.

He said all official American personnel are accounted for with no injuries reported, and the department is working with local authorities to determine if any U.S. citizens and locally-employed staff were affected.

The spree of recent attacks in Bangladesh have raised fears that religious extremists are gaining a foothold in the country, despite its traditions of secularism and tolerance.

About two dozen atheist writers, publishers, members of religious minorities, social activists and foreign aid workers have been slain since 2013. On Friday, a Hindu temple worker was hacked to death by at least three assailants in southwest Bangladesh. IS and al-Qaida affiliates have claimed responsibility for many of the attacks.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government has cracked down on domestic radical Islamists. It has accused local terrorists and opposition political parties "especially the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its Islamist ally Jamaat-e-Islami" of orchestrating the violence in order to destabilize the nation, which both parties deny.

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