

'MOTHER OF ALL BOMBS' KILLS 36 ISLAMIC STATE MILITANTS

ACHIN: The top US military commander in Afghanistan said yesterday that the decision to deploy one of the largest conventional bombs ever used in combat was purely tactical, and made as part of the campaign against Islamic State-linked fighters. As many as 36 suspected Islamic State militants were killed in the strike on Thursday evening in the eastern province of Nangarhar, Afghan defense officials said, adding there were no civilian casualties.

Amaq, the news agency affiliated with Islamic State in the Middle East, carried a statement denying that the group had suffered casualties in the attack, citing an unidentified source who had been in contact. The statements could not be independently

verified, and yesterday Afghan and foreign troops in the vicinity were not allowing reporters or locals to approach the scene of the blast. The strike came as US President Donald Trump prepares to dispatch his first high-level delegation to Kabul, amid uncertainty about his plans for the nearly 9,000 American troops stationed in Afghanistan.

Nicknamed "the mother of all bombs," the weapon was dropped from an MC-130 aircraft in the Achin district of Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan. Nicholson said he was in constant communication with officials in Washington, but the decision to use the 21,600-pound (9,797-kg) GBU-43 bomb was based on his assessment of military needs and not broader political considerations. "This was the first

time that we encountered an extensive obstacle to our progress," he said of a joint Afghan-US operation that has been targeting Islamic State since March. "It was the right time to use it tactically against the right target on the battlefield."

Afghan and US forces were at the scene of the strike and reported that the "weapon achieved its intended purpose," Nicholson said. Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said no civilians were harmed in the massive blast that targeted a network of caves and tunnels that had been heavily mined. "No civilian has been hurt and only the base, which Daesh used to launch attacks in other parts of the province, was destroyed," Waziri said in a statement. —Reuters

'MOTHER OF ALL BOMBS' TARGETS ISLAMIC STATE

KABUL: The United States dropped a 21,600-pound GBU-43 bomb, one of the largest non-nuclear devices used in combat, on a suspected Islamic State target in Afghanistan on Thursday. Here are some details about the bomb, based on information from the US military, independent security think-tanks and media reports.

Exploding above the ground

Described by the US Air Force as its "largest non-nuclear conventional weapon", the 9,840 kg Massive Ordnance Air Blast Bomb (MOAB) - also dubbed the Mother of All Bombs - is packed with 11 tons of high explosives. The MOAB is not a bunker buster built for deep penetration, but is designed to explode just above the ground, flattening surfaces structures, destroying mines and killing enemy troops within a radius of up to around 150 meters. MOAB is also envisaged as a psychological weapon deployed to shock enemy combatants with its power. The Russian military says it has tested a more powerful device, dubbed the "Father of all Bombs", although there are no reports of it having been used in action.

'Flattener'

Designed in 2003 for use against Iraqi forces, the MOAB succeeded the Vietnam War-era, 15,000 pound BLU-82 "Daisy Cutter". Daisy Cutters were primarily dropped to clear landing zones for helicopters operating in the Southeast Asian jungle. They could flatten a 60-metre wide patch of jungle and destroy mines and other booby traps without leaving a crater. They were also used to stun North Vietnamese or Viet Cong units lying in wait for American troops. Both the MOAB and Daisy Cutter are dropped from C-130 transport aircraft, with a parachute dragging a pallet holding the bomb out of the back. Apart from producing a bigger bang than the Daisy Cutter, MOAB is equipped with a GPS guidance system. The Daisy Cutter was used in the first Gulf War in 1991 and later in Afghanistan, including in the hunt for Osama bin Laden during the Battle of Tora Bora. It was taken out of service in 2008.

British heritage

The US Air Force's big air blast bombs and its heavy bunker busters trace their origins back to "earthquake bombs" of World War Two designed by the British. Also known as "Tallboy" and "Grand Slam", the devices penetrated deep into the ground with hardened steel casings before exploding. The British Royal Air Force used them to attack strategic German targets. The larger 22,000-pound Grand Slam became the US military's T-14, spawning a generation of bunker busters. The US Air Force also modified the 12,000-pound Tallboy to create the T-10 for use against Imperial Japanese forces in the Pacific. It was put into storage unused when the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war. —Reuters



CHECHNYA: People protest outside the Russian Embassy in London, following reports of the torture and murder of gay men in Chechnya. The United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights called upon the Russian government in a statement "to put an end to the persecution of people perceived to be gay or bisexual. —AP

NEWSPAPER FEARS FOR STAFF AFTER CHECHEN CLERICS VOW VENGEANCE

CLERICS ADOPTED RESOLUTION PROMISING REVENGE

MOSCOW: Russia's most famous campaigning newspaper said yesterday it had appealed to the Kremlin to protect its staff after Chechen clerics said the paper faced "retribution" for alleging that gay men in Chechnya were being tortured and killed. Novaya Gazeta published an article this month which said authorities in the majority Muslim southern Russian republic had rounded up over 100 gay men or men suspected of being gay and tortured them. It said at least three of them had been killed.

Kremlin critics saw the report as further evidence that Moscow allows authorities in Chechnya to run the region - which has been consumed by two wars since the Soviet collapse - as a feudal fiefdom in exchange for separatist and radical Islamist sentiment being brutally suppressed. Chechnya's Moscow-backed president Ramzan Kadyrov denies allegations human rights are routinely flouted. His spokesman Alvi Karimov called Novaya's report "an absolute lie", saying there were no gay men in Chechnya to be persecuted. "Nobody can detain or harass anyone who is simply not present in the republic," Karimov told the Interfax news agency.

Novaya's report also caused outrage among Chechnya's Muslim clerics, who adopted a resolution saying it had insulted the dignity and Islamic faith of Chechen men and society. "We promise that retribution will catch up with the hate-mongers wherever and whoever they are and with no statute of limitations," the resolution read. Dmitry Muratov, Novaya's

editor, said yesterday that the resolution was an incitement to violence and that he was worried about his staff's safety. "This resolution is encouraging religious fanatics to retaliate against our journalists," he said in a statement, calling on the authorities to protect journalists and stop anyone whipping up hatred against them.

Two of Novaya's reporters specializing in Chechnya - Anna Politkovskaya and Natalya Estermirova - have been murdered in the last decade. Neither case has been fully solved. Set up with financial help from ex-Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993, Novaya Gazeta is well-known in Russia for its investigations into official corruption, its reporting on Chechnya, criticism of the authorities and coverage of the opposition in a media landscape where most big-circulation newspapers are loyal to the Kremlin.

The Kremlin said it was following the situation closely and that anyone who thought Novaya's report was false should contest it through the courts. "We are against any actions that could pose a threat to the safety or lives of journalists," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. Peskov said that reports about gay men being tortured in Chechnya could not be regarded as reliable at this stage however, and that the Kremlin was not aware of the police receiving any complaints on the subject. Novaya said Russian investigators had so far ignored a request it sent to the authorities to investigate the contents of its report. —Reuters