

Al-Qaeda plotters sentenced

REUTERS, Brussels

A Belgian court yesterday jailed a Tunisian-born former professional soccer player for 10 years for plotting to attack a NATO base on behalf of al-Qaeda.

The Brussels Criminal Court also convicted two other North African-born militants of being accomplices in the assassination by al-Qaeda collaborators of an Afghan rebel commander in 2001.

Nizar ben Abdelaziz Trabelsi, 33, was convicted of planning to blow himself up at Belgium's Kleine Brogel air base, which houses US soldiers and suspected nuclear weapons.

Trabelsi had already publicly confessed to his aim. A total of 18 accused Islamic militants, mainly of North African origin, were convicted of a range of security offences in Belgium's biggest such trial, which began in May. Five suspects were acquitted. Sentences, which included suspended jail terms, ranged between two and 10 years in prison.

Prosecutors said Trabelsi, who played for a German Bundesliga team in the late 1980s, met fugitive al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden several times in Afghanistan before accepting the suicide mission. He was arrested in Brussels on

September 13, 2001, two days after the attacks on the United States blamed on al-Qaeda.

"Everything points to the fact that on the evening before his arrest, he was determined to carry out this project," judge Claire Degryse said in handing down the maximum sentence under Belgian law in the heavily guarded courthouse.

"He tried to commit one of the most heinous crimes Belgium has ever known since independence (in 1830)," she said.

Trabelsi, who looked relaxed in court and laughed with other prisoners in the dock, was also said by the prosecutor to have been in contact with British citizen Richard Reid, who tried to detonate a bomb stuffed into his shoe aboard a transatlantic American Airlines flight in December 2001.

Trabelsi's lawyer, Didier de Quevy, said he would appeal against the verdict.

"I'm especially sad for Trabelsi that the judge did not credit him for showing remorse," the lawyer told reporters.

An accomplice, Abdelcrim El-Haddouti, was sentenced to five years in prison for supplying chemicals to make the bomb.

River-link plan

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sharing arrangements on the Teesta and six other common rivers in the fashion of the Ganges water share treaty the two countries struck in 1996.

But Delhi said it was not possible to work out similar arrangements for the Teesta and other common rivers unless expert investigations were carried out into water flow and availability in different seasons on both sides.

There has been no official announcement to the press on the talks' outcome until 10:00pm. But various sources said India argued in its disagreement with Bangladesh that the \$200 billion waterworks were at a conceptual level.

Delhi told Dhaka its protests over the river interlink proposal were premature.

"The project is at a very initial stage. We have not yet discussed it with different states and the pre-feasibility study has not even been completed so there should not be any apprehension on part of Bangladesh," Sethi told reporters after his meeting with Hafizuddin on Monday.

A taskforce headed by former Indian power minister Suresh Prabhu will examine the project in detail. Sethi said, adding: "When that stage comes, we will certainly look into how much interests are affected within and outside India."

Hafizuddin led a 12-member delegation to the 35th JRC meeting, including Mohammed Sayef Uddin, water resources secretary, and Mukhlesuzzaman, director general of Bangladesh Water Development Board.

The Indian team led by Sethi includes Water Resources Secretary AK Goswami and Chairman of Central Water Commission R Jayaseelan. Officials in Dhaka say the plan to

link 37 major rivers, including the Ganges and Brahmaputra and divert their flow from north-eastern India to water-deficient areas in the southwest, would deprive Bangladesh of its fair share of water.

The water resources ministry officials said Bangladesh depends on the two major rivers for 85 per cent of its dry season surface water.

In a recent interview with the Kolkata daily, The Statesman, Prabhu, heading the project taskforce, said, "The foreign ministry is handling some of the work. I will speak with Yashwant Sinha (external affairs minister) to discuss issues with neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh."

But officials in Dhaka said since sending a 'note verbal' through diplomatic channel to Delhi on August 13, there has been no official response from India and nor did it officially inform Bangladesh about anything of the water project.

The water interlink project is the last straw to Bangladesh after the central Indian government also approved budget for the much-debated Tipaimukh Hydro Electric Multipurpose High Dam, proposed to be constructed at the confluence of Barak and Tuivai rivers in Manipur.

Experts fear water diversion from Barak for power generation will have a negative impact on water-flow pattern in the Surma and Kushiara in Sylhet, which ultimately carry water to the Meghna.

The Committee against Tipaimukh Dam in Manipur has already submitted a memorandum to the Indian prime minister, protesting construction of the dam, which they feared would submerge 275.5 square kilometres permanently.

CPA chief

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journalists at his Sangsad Bhaban chamber.

The AL sent the special emissary to the CPA headquarters on September 25 to explain its decision on boycott of the conference after Marshall wrote a letter and made phone calls to the leader of the opposition, urging her and her party to take part in the event.

The AL decided to boycott the CPA conference in protest at what it said was the government's arrogant attitude toward the opposition in preparing for the event.

Marshall will meet Hasina after his arrival in Dhaka on October 3 and the CPA pins hopes on the dialogue with the opposition to bring its leaders to the meet, to be joined by 538 delegates from 137 parliaments in 46 countries.

Sircar still wishes the opposition to join the conference and said: "I

Push back

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They had been detained by Bangladesh border guards until 10:00am before they were forced back in. The BSF opened the long unused checkpoint only for the push-in, sources said.

During interrogation, two of the push-in victims, Matabbar and Mahtab, told the BDR that the BSF had gathered 51 more people for the push-in and were taking truckloads of other people to the border checkpoint to force them into Bangladesh.

The push-in has sparked serious tension along the Chilahati-Vogdaburi borderline and sent villagers moving to safer places and the BDR on high alert.

The BDR sector commander in Rangpur, who is in charge of the area, was not available for comments.



A baby douc langour plays with its mother, one of the two siblings born at the Singapore Zoo, being the first zoo to breed this endangered species successfully.

JS body

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The committee will then meet with the prime minister, who is in charge of the ministry and also a member of the committee, and discuss the matter.

After the draft is finalised, it will be placed before parliament to make it a national policy, said Mia Golam Mohammad Parwar, member of the committee.

The establishment ministry has set up a career planning and training wing, but it has not started operating, Parwar told The Daily Star yesterday.

The meeting was informed that 98 officials are now acting as officers on special duty (OSDs).

Chairman of the committee Sarder Shakhawat Hossain Bakul presided over the meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Two killed

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recovered the body of an unknown young man near international trade fair ground at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar early morning.

Suspecting the man died in a road accident, police sent the body to the DMCH for autopsy. But doctors found wounds in the victim's head and asked police to make a fresh inquest report stating that the man died from bullet injury.

A case was filed with Tejgaon Police Station.

In the other incident, Mukul Hossain, personal assistant to the owner of a Sayedabad hotel, died at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) where he was admitted with multiple injuries ten days ago.

He died at 7:00am and police sent Mukul's body to the DMCH for autopsy.

Mukul's son Rajib Hossain lodged a complaint with Demra Police Station.

Bottled danger

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them with plain water. These are then supplied to markets."

After filling up, the bottles are wrapped with transparent plastic sheet and put in boxes, just as the original manufacturers would do. The finished products look exactly like the original ones.

There are several small tin-shed 'plants' in Keraniganj where such brisk businesses are going on for years. It is alleged that the traders pay huge bribes to local police to run the illegal business openly.

Keraniganj police, however, said they do not know about any such unscrupulous trade. Duty Officer Abdul Majid said, "We have no knowledge about such activities. We never received any complaint."

When contacted, some top manufacturers of bottled drinking water said the illegal trade in water is posing a major problem to business and health hazard.

A senior official of Partex Beverage said, "On the one hand, we are losing financially as the fake products are distributed at almost half our product price. On the other, consumers may lodge complaint against us since the bottles carry our labels."

He however said Partex bottles, with the brand name 'Mum', have special security seals to guarantee untampered safe water.

Mahubur Rahman, managing director of Exim Trade that bottles water under the brand name 'Fresh Water', expressed similar concerns.

"The issue was raised at a meeting with the National Board of Revenue (NBR) Monday. But there was no immediate solution," he said.

Odhikar survey

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September stood at 13 while the Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) reported the number at 11.

The IDR also reported 382 people were killed in September, up from 358 in August, and 96 women and children raped while the BSEHR put the number of such rape victims at 123.

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum in a report said 633 incidents of child abuse took place in September.

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) reported that 89 journalists fell victim to torture and repression by criminals as well as ruling party elements.

AL roundtable

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decision on export of natural gas. "It is the resource of the people and there should be no decision on it without taking their opinion", he observed.

The AL leader however reiterated his party's stand on the issue that Bangladesh could export gas only after meeting its domestic demand and keeping a reserve for 50 years.

Terming gas the 'most environment friendly resource', some speakers said the donors are playing a double standard on gas policy and environment policy. They are advocating export of gas to the detriment of environment and at the same time suggesting steps to protect environment, the speakers noted.

General Secretary of the Gano Forum Saifuddin Ahmed Manik said natural gas should be used in the industrial and power sectors. He urged the AL to join the movement to resist any move by the government to export gas.

Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, criticised the AL for urging the US to conduct a survey on gas reserve of Bangladesh and said this will demoralise people.

Bimal Biswas, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh, said gas will be the prime source of energy in the coming days and any decision to export it will be ruinous for the nation.

The speakers included AL leaders Sajeda Chowdhury, Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, ASHK Sadiq, Abdul Mannan and Ashiqur Rahman, Prof Badrul Imam, Dr Dil Afroz, Prof Mostafa Chowdhury, Prof Sultana Safi, Barrister Tania Amir and Shahidullah Chowdhury.

Former chairman of the Petrobangla Prof Hossain Mansur presented the keynote paper on Natural Gas Resources of Bangladesh: Reserve, Uses and Demands. A paper on Natural Gas

Resources Use in Abating Environmental Degradation in Bangladesh was presented by Chairman of the Environmental Conservation Management Centre Ansarul Karim. Hasan Mahmud of the AL moderated the discussion.

Japanese old car exporters to may put pressure on govt to lift bar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Exporters of reconditioned Japanese vehicles yesterday said if needed they would pressurise the Bangladesh government through its Japanese counterpart to lift the year-bar and other restrictions on such vehicles.

The members of the visiting 9-member high-powered delegation of Japan Used Motor Vehicle Exporters Association (JUMVEA) said this while exchanging views with the press at a local hotel yesterday afternoon.

They had already met ministers and high officials of the Bangladesh government and discussed the matter. They are hopeful that the Bangladesh government would facilitate import of Japanese reconditioned vehicles by relaxing the rules.

"If our appeal regarding removal of the restrictions fail to elicit a positive response, we will raise the point through the Japanese government," a member of the delegation said.

Hiroshi Sato, JUMBEA chairman, said at the meeting that Japanese reconditioned vehicles are being exported to 168 countries including New Zealand, the UK, Australia, and the UAE.

But the Bangladesh government's restrictions on vehicles having more than 1600CC engines and slapping of year-bar were unfortunate, he observed.

Minu Rajshahi city BNP chief

Allegations of picking up pocket committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The councils of the district and city units of the BNP were held yesterday with a good number of BNP leaders including three local lawmakers abstaining.

Councillors of four thana BNP units in the city formally declared Minu city unit president yesterday evening.

Former BNP lawmaker Azizur Rahman and Tanore upazila President Shish Mohammad were made president and general secretary of the district unit at the council. Sources said the selection was predetermined.

The Rajshahi district has five BNP lawmakers, but only Post and Telecommunication Minister Aminul Haque attended the council as the special guest and Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu MP presided.

The council was held after 10 years at Loknath School premises in the city. Health and Family Welfare Minister Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain attended the council as the chief guest.

Political aides of the three absentee BNP lawmakers -- Kabir Hossain MP, Nadim Mustafa MP and Abu Hena MP -- said the lawmakers skipped the council apprehending that their men would be neglected in the council.

Kabir Hossain told The Daily Star he had earlier termed the council 'illegal' and said the council should not have taken place during the current floods.

He also said none invited him to attend the council.

Nadim Mustafa said he absented due to illness, but he noted that the council might be 'partisan'.

Abu Hena could not be contacted.

Four cases challenging four such units of Boalia, Rajpara, Motihar and Shah Mokhdum thanas in the city were on trial at a senior assistant judge's court in Rajshahi.

Outlaws gun down BNP leader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A local leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Union Parishad (UP) member was gunned down allegedly by armed operatives of an outlawed group at Baghmara in Rajshahi Monday.

Eight masked activists of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) shot Afsar Ali from back at around 5:00pm while he was crossing Fouzdarpara bazaar. As he fell on the ground, the gang stabbed him indiscriminately to ensure death and shouted slogans in favour of the PBCP, police said.

The victim's son Abu Sayeed filed a case with Baghmara Police Station and police held Zahir Uddin in this connection.

The UP member was murdered following a rift with Jhikra union chairman over wheat distribution, police suspected.

Saifur slams TIB report

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He cited examples of recent graft charges against the New York Stock Exchange chairman and a European Commission officer.

"Bangladesh has several problems, but such comments are very insulting and humiliating for the country," Saifur said.

He also criticised local personnel working for foreign agencies for 'slurring the country's image'.

He informed the ceremony that International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director told (Saifur) during the IMF's Dubai meeting, he was amazed that 135 million people were living at such a small country like Bangladesh.

"This clearly indicates that Bangladesh's economy is doing well," Saifur quoted the IMF managing director as saying.

He also said some participants of the Dubai meeting told him that different reports show that economic condition of Bangladesh is

Durga Puja

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The prime minister said Bangladesh has attained world recognition setting a glaring example of communal harmony. The people of all religions here freely observe their religious rituals, she said.

"People irrespective of cast, creed and religion are tied in a bond of harmony and amity", she said, adding, "we have to uphold this tradition of communal harmony and further strengthen it."

She said the country belongs to people of all faiths and all have to work with full devotion and dedication respecting each other for the progress and prosperity of the nation.

The prime minister also wished peace, prosperity and happiness of all citizens along with the Hindu community on the occasion.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in her message said the Durga Puja festival is treated warmly by all as a bridge of communal harmony, amity and friendship.

She said all citizens of Bangladesh have full freedom to practice their religious rites and hoped that the happiness of the festival will enlighten the lives of all citizens.

Meanwhile, President of Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee Swapan Kumar Saha and General Secretary Mongol Chandra Ghosh yesterday greeted the countrymen on the occasion of Durga Puja.

In a statement, they sought cooperation of the government, all political parties and people from all social strata in making the five-day festival a success.

They also prayed for the peace and progress of the country.

Electrocuted

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the source of danger, and they were forced to tie the pole balancing wire to a post in the pond. Police have been deployed in the area.

Speaking on the incident, Desa Executive Engineer Aminur Rahman said, "We are deeply shocked at the deaths, and a probe is on to find out the cause behind the accident."

The investigators are looking into any illegal redirection of electric wires from the pole that might have led to the accident, Desa sources said.

good but unfortunately reports in local newspapers do not reflect that.

Saifur said "we have enough talents and we need to capitalise on those to bolster our economy."

The finance minister also urged the bankers to create a post of financial controller for improving lending management.

A 24-member committee comprising representatives from nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), private commercial banks (PCBs) and foreign banks prepared a manual -- Managing Core Risks in Banking -- for the training to be conducted by Bangladesh Bank (BB).

The committee has identified five core risk areas in the banking sector that include credit, asset and liability, foreign exchange, internal control and compliance and money laundering.

Speaking at the ceremony BB Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed said the central bank would issue a circular later to all banks to use the manual as a guideline.

Terming the public-private partnership a good initiative, Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan hoped the manual would be beneficial for banks.

Explaining the reason for preparing the manual, Muhammad A Ali said the idea of taking up such project sprang from the observation that some banks operating in the same environment perform better than others.

Hartal

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Expressing his total support to the movement that started from Sylhet against the anti-humanity law, Barrister Amir said the government should immediately scrap the anti-people law.

He also asked the authorities to cancel the lease of the historic Singha Bari, which the district administration did without any lawful authority.

Economist Dr Mohammad Abul Barkat said the vested property law is a death trap for the minority. Almost all the 10 lakh Hindu families in the country were somehow or other oppressed by the law, he added. He called upon all to join the movement for the cause of humanity.

The speakers also called upon the government to withdraw the deputy commissioner of Sylhet, who had illegally leased out the historic Singha Bari and had misbehaved with the leaders of the movement on several occasions.

The Sylhet District Bar General Secretary EU Shahidul Islam conducted the convention while Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran chaired. Member-Secretary Lokman Ahmed read out the convention declaration.

The convention was also addressed by Advocate Tobarak Hossain of the Supreme Court, Shahjalal University Teachers Association President Dr Akhtarul Islam, member secretary of Habiganj district committee of the Protirodh Andolan Mohammad Firoz, convener of Moulvibazar district committee of the Protirodh Andolan Yahia Mujahid, Arash Ali of Ganatantri Party and Syed Abdul Hannan of the National Awami Party.