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HuJi link suspected in attack on UK envoy

2 more arrests made yesterday; investigators hope major progress in case after over two years of grenade throwing

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Investigators suspect that the four persons arrested in the last two days in connection with the grenade attack on British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury at Hazrat Shahjalal's shrine in Sylhet have links with banned militant Islamist organisation Harkatul Jihad al Islami (HuJi) or other Islamist groups.

Arrested after over two years and three months into the incident, the four are the first to be shown as apprehended for their involvements with the attack that killed three and injured 70. Although around 20 people were detained earlier following the attack, all were released because the investigators could not find any link between the incident and those individuals.

According to intelligence sources, two of the latest arrestees already admitted to their involvements with the attack carried out immediately after the Friday prayers on May 21, 2004.

Investigators however refused to make any official disclosure about the information quoted out of the arrestees, but claimed that the arrests will lead to 'a good progress' in the investigation.

They said the four will be interrogated extensively by an intelligence task force comprising members from different intelligence agencies, police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to dig out the mystery behind the incident.

A Sylhet court yesterday placed

the four — Sharif Sahedul alias Bipul of Chandpur, Badrul Alam Mizan of Habiganj, Hafej Nayeem Rahman Arif of Sunamganj, and Delwar Hossain Ripon of Moulvibazar on 10-day remand.

After the remand order, the

investigators started for Dhaka and were on the way till filing of this report yesterday evening.

During interrogation before the remand order, the investigators learnt that the four had involvements with the attack, said sources.

"The four have been captured after a long investigation since the attack. The investigators had been trying to tally the information and

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PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

The two (blindfolded) arrested in Sylhet and Habiganj on suspicion of their involvement in bomb attack on the British high commissioner in 2004. They were handed over to Rapid Action Battalion yesterday.

Bodies of six peacekeepers arrive

UNB, Dhaka

The bodies of six Bangladeshi peacekeepers, killed in a road accident in Ivory Coast on August 25, arrived in Dhaka yesterday.

A special UN aircraft, carrying the bodies, landed at Zia International Airport at about 2:45 pm. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan received the bodies at the airport.

A pall of gloom descended at the tarmac of the VIP terminal with wailing by wives, parents and other relatives of the killed peacekeepers when their bodies were brought down from the aircraft.

The foreign minister placed wreaths at the coffins. The chiefs of the three services were beside him.

Senior officers of the army, navy and air force, relatives of the deceased, UNDP Country Representative Renata Lok Dessallien and officials of the foreign ministry were present.

A guard of honour was given by a contingent drawn from the three services and the last post was played on bugle.

Later, the foreign minister met the relatives of the deceased and consoled them.

Those killed in the tragic accident are Lance Corporal SM Miraz

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PHOTO: STAR

Army presents a guard of honour to the six deceased Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers as their bodies arrive at Zia International Airport yesterday from Ivory Coast.

CEC sees no crisis despite reforms row

New EC assumes office, goes for 'photo shoot'

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz does not see any crisis impeding the upcoming parliamentary election despite an open conflict between the opposition coalition and the government over electoral reforms which is making the fate of the polls exceedingly uncertain in the public mind.

"There is no crisis now and there will be no crisis in future. Good sense will prevail and all the political parties will participate in the next parliamentary election," Aziz, who has already been mired in controversies, told reporters yesterday in his office brushing aside apprehensions of further crises regarding holding of the election.

"There will be an election on time and it will be successful as we have been able to create a level playing field," the CEC said, who wants reinstatement of controversial authorities of the Election Commission (EC) like the power to cancel candidatures in cases of gross irregularities in the election,

and the power to bring contempt proceedings against violators of the commission's orders.

The prevailing political situation in the country however does not support Aziz's claim as Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also BNP chairperson has started a campaign against Awami League-led 14-party opposition coalition's proposal for reforms in the system of caretaker government and the EC.

The prime minister has been repeatedly rejecting any idea of electoral reforms and claiming that the election will be held on time while the opposition coalition remains rigid on its position of not participating in the polls without the reforms. Rigidity of both the sides have already triggered apprehension of a political crisis which might make timely holding of the next parliamentary election uncertain.

Moreover, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia last week declared that the head of the interim government will be that person who is mandated by the constitution. According to the constitution the latest retired chief

justice is to be the head of a caretaker government. But, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina categorically said the opposition coalition will not accept latest retired chief justice KM Hasan as the caretaker government. The opposition also declared that it will not participate in the polls under CEC MA Aziz.

In wake of the prevailing political situation nobody is sure about what will happen when the tenure of the four-party alliance government will expire on October 28 and the issue of forming a caretaker government will come to the fore.

Many political analysts fear that the existing political deadlock will only be strengthened if the issue of electoral reforms is not resolved during the tenure of the present government. But for the moment, there is no sign of a possible dialogue between the ruling and opposition alliances to resolve the crisis.

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Hasina pledges to root out graft, terrorism

UNB, Dinajpur

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday apparently kicked off her election campaign, pledging a package of commitments that she said will be fulfilled if the 14-party opposition combine is voted to power.

Hasina, who has long been leading a movement for electoral reforms, held out the promises while addressing several wayside rallies at Sherpur of Bogra, Ghoraghat, Matibali Crossing and Gobindaganj in Dinajpur on her way to Phulbari.

She said if the 14-party alliance is voted to power in the next general elections, terrorism and corruption will be eliminated, prices of essentials brought down to people's reach and rate of literacy increased.

"If you don't want to buy rice at Tk 20 per kg, don't vote for the BNP-Jamaat alliance. Vote for nouka (boat). We will restore peace in the country and its image abroad," she told the gatherings.

The Awami League (AL) chief

EU mission on polls due Sept 11

UNB, Dhaka

A six-member exploratory mission of the European Union (EU) will arrive in Dhaka on September 11 to gather basic information on the next general elections in Bangladesh.

During their 10-day stay, the members of the EU mission will exchange views with the leaders of political parties, the chief election commissioner, civil society members and senior journalists.

A EU official told the news agency that the European Union would take the decision about sending election observers to Bangladesh on the basis of the report of the exploratory mission.

Sirajganj Jubo League leader shot dead

UNB, Sirajganj

A Jubo League leader was shot dead on the premises of Kandapara Government Primary School at Belkuchi upazila headquarters last night.

The dead is Jewel Hassan, 32, information and research secretary of Belkuchi upazila unit of the Awami League's youth front.

Witnesses said a gang of 15 swooped on Jewel while he was chatting with his friends at about 8:30pm.

The gang shot him point blank and left the scene, chanting slogans in the name of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML), the witnesses said.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the body to the police station.

Indefinite strike at all airports suspended

Govt assures staff of making Biman solvent; Saifur tells of bank loans for airline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Biman staff yesterday suspended the indefinite strike called at airports across the country after the state minister for civil aviation and tourism assured them of solving the financial problems of the national flag carrier.

The announcement came after a meeting between State Minister for Civil Aviation Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir and Biman Sammilito Sangram Parishad (BSSP), a

combined body of various trade unions.

Sangram Parishad leaders said the meeting with the minister at his office was fruitful and so they have suspended the strike scheduled to take effect from September 7.

Announced on Sunday, the strike and other demonstration programmes were aimed at pressing for urgent measures to make the state airline solvent.

Parishad Convener Captain SM Helal told The Daily Star last

night, "We are happy with the outcome of the meeting. He [Fakhru Islam] has assured us that he'll do everything necessary to bail Biman out of the remorseless crunch."

Meeting sources said the state minister has pledged some funds and a committee has been formed to ensure best utilisation of that money. The committee is comprised of Biman managing director, director (finance), director (planning) and the BSSP convener.

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Foreign airlines take away Biman's 90pc business

Non-professional plans, politics blamed

SHARIEF KHAN

Utter negligence of the government in equipping the national flag carrier Biman with adequate aircraft, absence of professional marketing plan and poor manpower planning are helping foreign airlines to drain out 90 percent of air-passenger revenue from Bangladesh.

In terms of money, the foreign airlines are making a hefty \$1.2 billion air ticket revenue per year while Biman hardly gets around \$200 million, and its share is gradually shrinking every year, aviation sources pointed out.

Interestingly, Bangladesh's airlines market is rapidly growing at a rate of 12 per cent a year, which should have encouraged the cash-strapped government to invest more in this sector to make Biman a cash cow.

In addition, the over-staffed national airlines is helplessly watching the foreign airlines bag another \$500 million a year from carrying freights.

Biman is currently operating four DC-10s and four A-310 aircraft in international routes and five small aircraft on domestic and semi-international routes.

Moreover, two wide-bodied DC-10s are grounded for months due to non-availability of serviced engines. The engine suppliers of DC-10s — KLM and MTU — have refrained from delivering the engines as Biman has not paid them \$7.5 million of arrears.

With such small number of aircraft, Biman is operating flights to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Sarjah, UK, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Japan, India, Nepal, Thailand,

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Rejoinder, our reply

Former secretary of the telecommunications ministry AKM Shamsuddin has sent a rejoinder to the news headlined "Telecom secy hid deal irregularities" published in The Daily Star on September 1, 2006. His rejoinder says the following:

"Regarding the installation of optical fibre cable and SDH transmission link between Dhaka and Rajshahi, my contention is that after receiving the DG, CPTU's opinion on overseas tour of one or two officials of BTB and the recommendation for award of contract to the host of the tour, we, on behalf of the Ministry, brought it to the notice of the Cabinet Purchase Committee on Government procurement meeting held on August 21, 2006, where it was discussed threadbare, and finally the said committee took a decision on the matter.

It is hoped that this may be reflected in the proceedings of the meeting. Subsequently, I brought the matter to the notice of the Secretary, Cabinet Division and the

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OPPOSITION PROGRAMME Ban on gathering in, around EC secretariat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday imposed a ban on any kind of gathering, procession, demonstration or laying siege to anything in and around the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat for 19 hours from 1:00am tomorrow.

The move was apparently to thwart 14-party opposition combine's programme to lay siege to the EC Secretariat tomorrow.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) in line with the government directives yesterday in a press release disclosed its decision about imposing the ban. The press release said the DMP feared deterioration of law and order in the area as 'some political parties' made programmes to lay siege to the EC Secretariat.

Sources said police was directed to take strict measures to prevent opposition men rally around the EC Secretariat in the capital. The gov-

ernment, however, did not mention any measures to stop the opposition's siege programme of election offices across the country.

The Awami League (AL)-led 14-party combine's leaders last night decided the ban and expressed their determination to go ahead with their programme.

"It is not our concern. We declared the programme and we will go ahead," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star last night.

He termed the DMP's ban 'usual'. "The government had imposed ban on opposition programmes. So it's nothing new," Jalil, also the coordinator of 14-party opposition combine, said.

DMP Commissioner SM Mizanur Rahman said the EC Secretariat is a very important establishment and a restricted area. "The DMP imposed the

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