

Premier Bank

FROM PAGE 12
When this correspondent went to Banani to locate Nirvana Construction Ltd yesterday, the office of the company could not be found as local residents said the block-C of Banani does not have road-18.

Earlier, a group of reporters went to the Motijheel branch on Wednesday to talk to Anwarul Latif about the matter, but he declined to disclose anything.

But when the reporters showed him the sanction letter, he admitted the fact and said, "The account has already been closed and I can't tell anything more. You can talk to the managing director."

Asked whether the borrower, Fauzia, is a relative of HBM Iqbal, Latif said she had testified herself that none of the directors is her relative.

It was found that the bank not only sanctioned the Tk 15 crore OD to Fauzia, it also extended the limit to Tk 25 crore on July 27, 2004 and the facility period was also extended till June 30, 2005.

Moreover, the interest rate was reduced to 11 percent for the particular case, down from the normal rate of 12 percent.

When Managing Director of the bank Kazi Abdul Mazid was contacted over his cellphone on Wednesday for his comment on the matter, he said: "I am at a meeting now. I don't have any ready information about it."

Also, there are allegations that the chairman is involved in siphoning-off such huge amount of money from the bank using the names of his relatives.

BOACCOUNT SCAM
The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on Wednesday sent an investigation team to

Chittagong to verify an address that was mentioned in opening 15,000 beneficiary owners' (BO) account by the depository participant of the Premier Bank.

The SEC on February 12 suspended a Tk 55 crore public floating of Premier Bank after around 25,000 beneficiary owners' (BO) accounts had been found to be fake in the preliminary investigation of the capital market watchdog.

The Bangladesh Bank also launched an investigation into the scam after being informed officially by the SEC. The central bank detected a number of irregularities in opening of a huge number of accounts with Premier Bank.

The Bangladesh Bank is now investigating possible link of four other banks with the 25,000 'false' BO accounts.

Open rice

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Some 319 dealers are assigned to carry out the OMS in the capital. They will buy rice from the government at Tk 13.50 a kg and are authorised to sell 510 kg a day.

Food Directorate officials said 10 dealers have been appointed at each district town and three at every upazila and union parishad.

Our staff correspondent from Chittagong adds: The OMS of rice on the first day failed to attract both dealers and consumers, with only three of the 45 dealers in the city found to selling rice.

The picture was more frustrating in the district, where until Wednesday night only 15 of the 211 designated dealers showed interest in the programme.

ACC to take

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The regular staff were declared 'reserved staff' by the government last month.

So there is no question of attaching the officials-on-deputation to the commission as per yesterday's decision, sources close to the meeting said, adding that around 80 of the 1,107 Bac staff had worked there on deputation.

Earlier, a controversy gripped the anticorruption watchdog when its chairman announced that all Bac staff would automatically be absorbed into the commission. He also formed two committees to screen the Bac staff.

When it was reported that his decision went against the ACC Act, Justice Sultan wrote a letter to the attorney general on December 14 last year to know the status of the staff of Bac, which was dissolved on formation of the ACC on November 21.

Interpreting the law, Attorney General AF Hassan Arif in a letter on December 15 said the service of the Bac officers and employees has been vested with the commission from the day Bac was dissolved. "They will continue in service until withdrawn by the government on the request of the commission under section 35 (2)," he said.

After the commission informed the Cabinet Division about the attorney general's views, the cabinet secretary said on December 18 that the Bac staff have not been placed under the ACC. "Therefore, these employees should be treated as government's reserved staff," said Dr Saadat Hussain, the cabinet secretary.

As the commission continued working with the Bac staff, the government on January 3 ordered them not to work for the commission.

On January 8, the law ministry said the attorney general's legal interpretation on the status of Bac staff was not correct.

The cabinet division sent a letter to the ACC chairman and two commissioners on January 29, saying some of the Bac officials had been holding 'non-existing' positions and issuing letters on behalf of the ACC.

"This is illegal and contrary to service discipline," the letter said, adding that if necessary the government will take legal steps against them.

Asked to comment on the views of the cabinet division and law ministry on the status of Bac staff, Justice Sultan told reporters: "Ask them, they'll best explain it."

Talking to reporters after yesterday's meeting, Commissioner Prof Maniuzzaman Miah said: "The ACC is failing to work for manpower shortage. But all whom we'll attach must have to undergo screening as per rule."

About the Bac officials who worked on deputation, Prof Miah said, "They were working at the bureau as it needed them. We'll ask the government to withdraw them and, if we need, ask the government to send fresh people to the commission."

The commission yesterday decided to appoint former additional secretary of law ministry Abul Bashar Bhuiyan as legal consultant for the commission.

The commission will appoint a secretary in 15 days.

The commission also formed a five-member advisory committee headed by former Comptroller and Auditor General M Hafizuddin Khan for screening of Bac staff.

ASP's bail prayer

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(Rab) men at his office. Rab men went there to arrest outlawed party cadre Hasan on Monday night.

Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mohammad Mobjibul Haq passed the order and sent Mofazzel Hossain to Dhaka Central Jail. He also directed the authorities concerned to send the necessary documents to Khulna Sadar Police Station.

The former additional SP of Khulna tried to cover his face when Mohammadpur police produced him in handcuffs before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court, Dhaka, at 1:00pm.

Saifur Rahman, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Mohammadpur Police Station, in the forwarding report said they arrested Hossain at a house on Azam Road of Mohammadpur after Khulna Sadar police had sent a requisition slip regarding two cases, one filed under Explosive Substances Act and the other one for attempted murder.

Besides, Iqbal Hossain Swadhin, an operative of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddho), had given a statement linking the former additional police super Mofazzel with bomb attack on Jugantar Journalist Dip Azad, the OC said.

Advocate AKM Alamgir, lawyer for Hossain, submitted the bail petition. He argued that his client had been fitted up for criminal acts

for harassment.

After hearing both the sides, the court rejected the bail petition and ordered to send him to jail.

Sources said he might have links to the bomb attack that killed journalist Shaikh Belaluddin and injured three others on Khulna Press Club premises last week.

A three-member committee, headed by Deputy Inspector General of Police Aziz Sarkar, had been formed to investigate the incident.

Our staff correspondent adds: Mofazzel was shown arrested for bomb attack on Dip Azad, the Khulna Bureau Chief of Dinik Jugantar, on January 4. Dip Azad survived the attempt on his life, as the bomb did not explode. A case was filed with Khulna Police Station on January 5.

Iqbal Hossain Swadhin made the confessional statement to CMM Atiqul Huq when he was produced before the CMM Court, Khulna on Wednesday afternoon. He said Mofazzel Hossain connived with Hasan and some other PBCP cadres to kill Dip Azad.

Swadhin was taken on a five-day remand yesterday in the Belaluddin murder case and bomb blast on press club premises. He is a charge-sheeted accused also in Dinik Janmabumi editor Humayun Kabir Balu murder case.

10 Workers Party men hurt in cop clubbing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 10 activists of Workers Party of Bangladesh (WPB) were hurt in police baton-charges after their conference at Muktangan was thwarted by an unscheduled rally of ruling BNP's cultural wing.

The WPB leaders said they started their scheduled Seventh Dhaka City Conference but could not proceed as Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha (Jasas) held an unscheduled rally beside the venue.

The WPB brought out a procession after party chief Rashed Khan Menon inaugurated the conference at 3:30pm.

The leaders said Jasas told them that they would close their rally before the second session of the conference began. But the Jasas leaders continued the rally, causing hindrance to their programme, they alleged.

After an hour, the WPB cancelled the programme at 5:00pm and decided to hold a protest rally at its central office on Tophkana Road.

As the WPB was marching in procession towards its office, police clubbed them near the Paltan police box without any provocation, the leaders said.

Menon told The Daily Star they got approval from Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and police for the conference, adding that the Jasas held the rally without approval.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda and Deputy Minister for Land Rural Quddus Talukdar Dulu attended the Jasas rally as the chief and the special guest.

The WPB at a protest rally on its office premises blasted the BNP-Jamaat-led government for the incident.

Quorum crisis

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At Maghreb prayer break at 6:00 pm, the speaker asked all members to return to the House by 6:20 pm but again due to lack of quorum (presence of at least 60 MPs out of the 300) the House sat at 7:10 pm. And when the speaker adjourned the day's sitting at 8:15 pm, only 35 lawmakers were present.

The JS session resumes at 4:30 pm on Tuesday.

The quorum crises sparked angry reaction among the treasury bench members present in the House, and a minister asked how long they would have to wait for quorum.

Four out of five private members' resolution proposals could not be raised for discussion yesterday due to absence of the lawmakers concerned.

No 'Crossfire' Figure
State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar could not provide the House any specific figure of deaths in 'crossfire' so far.

Replying to a query from Jatiya Party (JP) lawmaker Moshir Rahman Ranga, Babar said his ministry did not have exact figure of 'crossfire' deaths but assured the House that the anticrime elite force Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) would not be used for political purposes.

He said Rab recovered 662 illegal arms till January 31 this year while Cheetah recovered 39 and Cobra 61.

When another JP lawmaker, Hafizuddin, drew his attention to bomb blasts at different NGO offices, Babar said the government is looking into the matters seriously, and people would see the results soon.

Lawmakers of the ruling alliance however made no query on incidents of bomb explosion and grenade seizure that have created tension among people. They rather asked for more police pick-ups and fire service in their respective constituencies.

Confusion over Citizens ID Card
Two ministers gave separate timeframe for introduction of identity cards for all citizens of the country.

Lutfozzaman Babar told the House the process of introducing identity cards would begin next year. But State Minister for Planning Anwarul Kabir Talukdar said such cards would be introduced during the next population census.

The census is billed for 2011.

11 to die

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accused kidnapped Abdul Kadir, 75, and his wife, Rawshan Ara Begum, 57, from a ferry ghat on their way home at Sonarchar village on March 11, 2002 and took them to an unknown place by a launch.

Later, their bodies were found buried in two separate graves at Sonarchar village on March 19 following a confessional statement by an arrested person.

The accused gouged out both eyes of Kadir, cut off his genital and stabbed him to death. They also stabbed his wife to death.

Kadir's younger brother, Nasir Uddin, filed a case with Meghna police on March 16.

Earlier, a gang of criminals had kidnapped and killed Humayun Kabir, the eldest son of the couple. Police arrested Mobarak Hossain in connection with the abduction and murder.

Angered by the arrest of Mobarak, his son and other accused brutally murdered Abdul Kadir and his wife as they had previous enmity over land dispute.

Kibria family

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said at a press conference held at their Dhanmondi residence.

Mentioning Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain's statement regarding Habiganj grenade attack, he said, "The investigation team should interrogate Saifur Rahman, Mannan Bhuiyan, Motiur Rahman Nizami and Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, because I think they might have some information about Habiganj grenade attack."

"As the government probe body would not be able to interrogate these influential ministers, the FBI should be given the charge of investigation," he added.

Reza alleged that the government is trying to distract people's attention from Habiganj carnage by blaming AL for the incident.

He expressed fear that the main accused and the witnesses to the grenade blasts might fall victim to 'crossfire'.

Replying to a query, Asma Kibria, wife of SAMS Kibria, said that they had requested the government to inform them of the latest developments in the investigation.

On whether they had asked the investigation team to interrogate the four ministers, Asma said, "I've told them (investigation team) to take note of it."

She said the government's 'pointing the finger at AL for Habiganj grenade attack' shows that they do not want the real culprits to be brought to justice.

Asma said that she plans to exhibit the signatures collected through the 'mass signature campaign'.

"I hope the government would have no objection to arranging the

exhibition at Manik Mia Avenue," she added.

In the afternoon yesterday, Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee formed a human chain in front of Kibria's Dhanmondi residence. They demanded trial of the perpetrators of the January 27 attack that left former finance minister SAMS Kibria and four others dead.

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) activists brought out a silent procession from Dhanmondi Abahani Ground and marched to Kibria's residence yesterday.

JMJB men
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verify the information provided by the court source.

Earlier, documents of another case filed against three JMJB activists disappeared from the court after a first class magistrate of Bogra had officially recorded statement by the JMJB operative Shafiqullah on February 6. The case was filed with Gabtoli Police Station under the Explosives Substances Act.

Another source of the district police said investigations in both the cases have stalled unofficially for some unknown reason.

"Although some of the accused are included in both the cases, the investigation officers have stopped exchanging information," added the source.

The source also said that the Bogra police are considering handing over the cases to the Criminal Investigation Department due to slow pace of the investigations.

The investigation officers of the cases might be changed within a few days, the source added.

National ID card

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date of birth, address, blood group, signature and photograph will be included in the ID card.

Optical fingerprint or iris scan will be hidden in the card in the form of two-dimensional magnetic memory or in a microchip. This will check counterfeiting of the cards and prevent people from falsifying their identity.

Sources said the most sophisticated technology will be applied in issuing the cards so that no person can duplicate the card or hold more than one card.

Each card will bear a unique number to be generated from a central database through fingerprint verification or iris scanning. The number will contain some digit from name, date of birth, place of birth etc.

The government will provide all border outposts, airports and police stations with special scanners to retrieve the information embedded in the card.

"Even an individual's financial information such as bank account statements and tax updates can be stored in the card depending on the memory capacity of the magnetic tape or chips," said Dr M Abdul Awal, a professor at North South University (NSU) and one of the developers of the programme.

The Computer Science Department of NSU and the Institute

of Information & Communication Technology (IICT) of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) have jointly developed the model.

He said many countries including USA, Britain, Spain, France, Malaysia, Germany and Singapore have introduced the national ID card which is called either social security or residence card.

The ID card would reduce the workload of the special branch of police, which takes a long time to verify documents when a person applies for passport.

NSU and BUET have recently presented a demonstration of the model at the home ministry. According to the model, a database will be established at each district linking to the central database in the capital.

The government is yet to decide about the implementation agency of the project but sources said the Directorate of Immigration and Passport may be the possible executing body.

Sources said the government will not have to spend much on the project as the applicants will pay for the card.

The Election Commission had taken a project to issue voter ID card in 1995 but the project was abandoned due to various anomalies.

Chopper controversy

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13 km from Habiganj sadar police station, in the evening of January 27. When he was coming out of the school gate, a grenade exploded in front of him at 7:10 pm and left him critically injured.

Amid a panic-stricken crowd, Habiganj AL leaders picked Kibria in a car and drove him 13 km to Habiganj Sadar Hospital in 15 to 20 minutes. The hospital recorded his admission at 7:50 pm.

At around 7:30 - 7:35 pm, the Habiganj AL leaders requested Dhaka police and the higher authorities through the local police for a helicopter.

"We were told by the Habiganj SP (superintendent of police) that the message was sent to Dhaka," said Shahiduddin Chowdhury, Habiganj District AL vice president. "But he conveyed us no decision on it."

The AL leaders waited there till 8:30 pm.

As Kibria continued to bleed, the AL leaders started for Dhaka in a microbus at 8:30 pm. The local police also did not stop them.

"The local police escorted us up to Dhaka. They could not say anything about helicopter," Shahiduddin added.

The microbus reached Dhaka at around 11:20pm. By that time, Kibria had succumbed to his injuries. An AL leader who was inside the microbus said Kibria was alive for more than two hours after the blast. Probably, he breathed his last at around 9:30pm.

A Habiganj police source notes, "It happened in such a way that it is not possible to say who is responsible for it."

He said when Kibria was taken to Habiganj Sadar Hospital, the hospital was crowded with many other injured people and visitors. Amid the chaos at around 7:30 pm, the AL leaders requested local police to arrange a helicopter.

The local police then contacted the authorities in Dhaka and the authorities said the matter will be conveyed to the higher level of the government. After a while, the top level of the home ministry contacted Habiganj police. The local police once again requested for a helicopter, and the home ministry official said, "Let us see if any helicop-

ter can be arranged', the source mentioned.

But till about 8:15 pm to 8:30 pm, there was no confirmation of it from Dhaka.

"Police could not stop the AL leaders from starting for Dhaka at that time on the basis of a comment from Dhaka," said the police source. "There was a positive tone from Dhaka but it was not enough. The local police was not sure if a helicopter would be available."

Habiganj Deputy Commissioner Emdadul Haq said when the incident occurred, he was attending a programme at Nabiganj. It was about 63 kilometres off the district headquarters and there was no mobile network available. Besides, he had not been informed of the Kibria's meeting earlier, he added.

"When I came under mobile network on my way to the district headquarters, superintendent of police rang me and said that he was contacting the government for a helicopter, but by this time the AL men had started for Dhaka with Kibria by road," the DC added.

Meanwhile, another debate has surfaced if helicopters operate at night. Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) sources said if adequate lights can be arranged at an open space for landing, the BAF can operate choppers at any time of the night. In the recent past, the BAF did this several times and its helicopters stand ready 24 hours for search and rescue missions.

The state minister for home had contacted the BAF chief for a helicopter on that night, they mentioned.

A highly placed source said if the government's initiative was more prompt and timely, it would have been possible to send a helicopter instantly and try to save Kibria's life.

"By the time a helicopter was made ready, it was too late and the Awami League leaders had left for Dhaka in a microbus," he said. "The government could have at least told Habiganj authorities that a helicopter would be sent."

PBCP threatens to blast grenade at Ekushey fair

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Panic seized the town of Kushtia yesterday evening after the Purba Bangla Communist Party (PBCP), in a fax sent to authorities, threatened to launch a grenade attack on Ekushey fair in Kushtia University College.

PBCP faxed identical copies of a warning message to the deputy commissioner, assistant superintendent of police and local dailies at 4:00pm yesterday, saying it would blast grenades at the Ekushey fair within two hours if the authorities failed to stop a gambling programme organised by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

People quickly fled the fair soon after the faxes arrived, leaving the grounds virtually empty, sources said.

In the faxed message, PBCP threatened to put an end to what it called JCD's many anti-social activities, including gambling.

"A huge number of police had been deployed at the fair place and stopped the gambling after receiving the fax," Sahabuddin Khan told this Daily Star Correspondent.

He admitted that JCD secretly organised gambling functions at the fair.

CRR reduced

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the opening of Letters of Credit (LCs) increased by about 25 per cent in the last six months. The LC opening increased by 15 per cent during the same period of the last fiscal year.

Foreign currency reserves came under pressure due to increased import bill payments resulting in a volatile situation on the inter-bank foreign currency market, sources said. Foreign currency reserves were stable \$3 billion despite the rise in imports.

The reserves are likely to fall below \$3 billion following the payment to the Asian Currency Union (ACU) due in March, banking sources fear.

Taka depreciated against the US currency by about 8 per cent in February from November last year.

"The step was take also to curb inflation," said a central bank official. But another source differed with the comment and said, "The measure has little connection with inflation."

The rate of inflation (point to point) dropped to 5.5 per cent in December from 7.92 per cent in October.

A political party

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The prime minister vowed to face the conspiracy with the support of the people and go ahead with development programmes of her government.

Without naming anyone, she said 'they' want to make Bangladesh a vassal state and install a puppet government here.

"But the people will never allow it to happen. They liberated the country so as not to be subservient to anybody," she added.

Khaleda said the conspiracy of that particular political party involving their 'foreign agents' will never be successful.

She blasted the opposition party for resorting to hartal and arson on the streets without attending the parliament sessions and said they are doing so as they do not want development of the country.

When the country's law and order situation improved remarkably following activities of the Rab (Rapid Action Battalion), that party has begun a new conspiracy involving 'bomb', she said.

Chaired by Barguna BNP President Nurul Islam Moni, the rally was addressed, among others, by Health and Family Welfare Minister Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Social Welfare Minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, Water Resources Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman and Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury.

The prime minister said the four-party alliance has come to power not at the mercy of anybody. "We are in power with the blessings of Allah and the support of the people," she added.

In a veiled reference to the main opposition Awami League, she said, when in power, that party did nothing for the people, except spreading terrorism and corruption in the country.

Now they are trying to stop the massive development activities being carried out by the coalition government, she added.

The prime minister sought people's support for her party candidates in the next general elections.

She alleged the opposition party is trying to collapse the country's education system by calling strikes in educational institutions in a planned way.

Donors rethink aid

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militants, all issues of serious international concerns.

Their logic is based on their view that Bangladesh government has been too lenient to militants, which led to the recent spate of armed attacks and killings. The failure to solve any of the recent political carnage has fuelled their concern.

The meeting in Washington on February 23-24 is being jointly organised by the World Bank, the EU and the US State Department. US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca will be present at the meeting.

According to information available, these countries and blocs, which gave Bangladesh \$60 million in FY03, want the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the US to rethink their financial assistance to Bangladesh. They feel that the two multilateral donors which have the biggest stake in Bangladesh has not been sufficiently vocal about these threats that are undermining stability and are rather focussed only on the positive macroeconomic indicators.

Both the WB and the ADB think the position of these particular countries is not helpful to mitigate the situation that Bangladesh is facing today. Rather, they feel any such steps would be counterproductive and throw the country in a deeper turmoil.

However, the sentiment of the European donors has put the government on a high-lobbying mode. Adviser to the foreign ministry Reaz Rahman now in Washington discussed the matter with Rocca and Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman. Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman went to Brussels in a bid to persuade the EU to rethink its steps.

How far they have been successful is yet to be known.

On the other hand, the State Department is keen to hear the views of the EU and some other bilateral donors about Bangladesh. The US feels although the presence of fundamentalists is felt in Bangladesh, their threat is not that imminent.

However, it has been learnt that the donors are frustrated with the inaction of the government on the human rights and terrorism fronts. They feel that their repeated requests to improve governance have not been working and there has been a disconnect between them and the government.

The government has created an anticorruption commission, a long-standing demand of the donors, but in a stillborn form because of selection of wrong people and contradictions of laws. The separation of the judiciary and an independent human right commission are still not in sight.

The EU has gone public on the extra-judicial killings by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab). Although the Rab have been able to catch some criminals, the use of this force and the way of operation of the so-called elite force has been critically taken by the western countries and put Bangladesh in a bad light.

The donors now feel that instead of addressing the urgent issues the government is now too focussed on the electoral balance. The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) alliance with two fundamentalist parties -- Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikyo Jote -- which have perceptible link with militants -- have been jeopardising stability.

WB concerned

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Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday told a parliament session the government has taken the attacks seriously and will take all necessary step to bring the culprits to book.

NGO LEADERS' REACTION
Grameen Bank Managing Director Prof Mohammad Yunus termed the Wednesday's attack on a branch of his bank as a bad omen for the country and said, "It's not an isolated local and religious incident but a political and planned attack."

"By carrying out such attacks one after another, the attackers demonstrate the weakness of the government and politics. The government is also acting as if it has failed to identify the attackers and to contain such crimes," he noted.

Yunus said the attacks are aimed at proving to the outside world that the politics in the country has totally failed to contain an anarchic and intolerant situation. So, the nation needs to unite to resist and contain such crimes and to nab the criminals.

Asked what security beef-up are they planning against the backdrop of the attacks, Yunus questioned whether it is possible to ensure security for all of the bank's 41 lakh members across the country.

Talking on the issue yesterday, Brac Executive Director Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury said religious fanaticism was a factor behind the attacks on Brac offices.

He said the identities of the attackers are clear from the confessional statements given by their arrested co-partisans, adding, "To stop recurrence of such attacks, the government have to bring those culprits to book."

Chowdhury said such attacks are damaging the country's image and will greatly hinder its development, so they will formally request the government to take stern action against the attackers.

He said there are 1,100 to 1,200 Brac offices across the country. So it is not possible for Brac alone to provide the necessary security for each of them, which he said have to be ensured by the police and the government.

SECURITY HIKE AT NGOS
The country's leading non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are stepping up their security measures, even at their head offices, following the repeated bomb attacks and planting of grenades at their offices in the Northwest.

The incidents have instilled acute panic into the staffs of most of the NGOs including Brac and Grameen Bank in the eight northwestern districts, our Rangpur correspondent reported yesterday.

Sources said the Brac authorities have directed all its branches in the northern region to tighten security round the clock, including by deploying security guards. The order reached the Brac regional offices on Wednesday.

The Brac security men were found yesterday frisking visitors and their bags with metal detectors before allowing them into the Brac Centre at Mohakhali.

The Grameen Bank authorities also have asked their security personnel to mount keener watch at the entrances to the bank's Mirpur headquarters and allow visitors only after thorough checking.

"We have asked our security guards to be alert and allow any

unknown visitor to enter our head office only after checking them thoroughly," said a Grameen Bank official, adding similar directions have also been given to all its branches.

Grameen Bank has about 41 lakh members across the country, with a total of 13,000 staffs working at its 1,350 branches.

PROBE INTO ATTACKS
Our Rangpur correspondent reports: Police could not arrest any one in connection with the planting of the grenades on the Brac office premises at Darsona in Rangpur town.

A number of Brac officials alleged police seemed reluctant to investigate the incident. They said no policeman visited the spot until yesterday evening since disposal of the grenades on Wednesday.

Police Superintendent Mahbub Morshed told The Daily Star they have held no-one in this connection, saying, "We're yet to get any clue about the grenade plantation."

However he denied the allegation of police reluctance and said, "Kotwali police and Detective Branch (DB) have been tasked to probe the incident and working on it."

Meanwhile, locals have been questioning why the three powerful hand grenades planted to blow off the Brac branch office were not kept as evidence by diffusing those and why police lodged a general diary instead of a regular case.

A source at DB police on condition of anonymity disclosed that they are almost sure that an Islamist extremist group planted the grenades. He said the group targets to bomb all the Brac, Grameen Bank and Proshika branches.

Brac Rangpur Area Manager Nishanur Rahman said, "We have deployed night and day guards at all Brac branches in Rangpur area."

RECAP
Eight people -- six employees of Brac and two of Grameen Bank -- were wounded in identical bomb attacks on two Brac offices in Naogaon and Joypurhat and a branch of Grameen Bank in Sirajganj in the recent attacks. Besides, three hand grenades were recovered from another Brac office in Rangpur on Wednesday morning.

The attacks are believed to be carried out by ultra-militant Islamist outfit Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB).

An arrested JMJB operative, Shafiqullah, in a confessional statement to a Bogra magistrate last Monday admitted that the JMJB bomb squad is responsible for a number of bomb attacks on NGOs.

He also confessed that JMJB plans to continue attacks on NGOs like Brac and Karitas and on cultural activities, which it considers as anti-Islamic, until an Islamic revolution takes place in the country.

Another 12 operatives of Jama'atul Muzahidin, the former name of JMJB, arrested in Natore, also gave similar statements confessing to carrying out bomb attacks on 'anti-Islamic' cultural shows and NGOs.

Grenade found

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recovered an Arges model grenade and a piece of ivory from a man in the city suburb of Amin Bazar. The grenade was identical to those used in last year's August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally on Bangabandhu Avenue.