

JMB chief was in Dhaka

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Superintendent of Police (ASP) Delwar Hossain Saidi nabbed Uzzal and Anisur Rahman Khokon at around 7:30pm Sunday at Itagachha in the outskirts of the town for their suspected involvement in the August 17 countrywide serial bomb blasts.

According to Uzzal's confession, the bombs used on the fatal day had been smuggled into the country from India through Sathkira and Chapainawabganj borders a few months ago.

He said a 13-member committee of hardcore JMB operatives sat in a mosque at Itagachha on August 15, where Munjan, now in police custody, briefed them on when and how to carry out the terror strikes. But the police official could not identify rest of the meeting participants.

Uzzal admitted to being in charge of planting bombs at Khulna Road intersection in the town, while Fakhrudin Razi of Kalora supervised the overall bombing operations in Khulna division.

The police raided the house of Razi, who reportedly heads Khulna division of the banned Islamist militant group, but did not find him. Locals said Razi went on hiding soon after the blasts.

Around 15 militants of the district received training on grenade and sophisticated firearms like AK-47 and AK-56, Uzzal, a physical trainer of the Islamist outfit, told the police.

"The training was held at dead of night in remote mosques, particularly in the border areas," the police official quoted Uzzal as saying. Pictures of grenades and firearms were used in the training, he said, with the instructors briefing the trainees how to operate those.

Khokon, the other arrestee, claimed he knew about the attack but was not directly involved in it. He also admitted to having a good relation with Munjan, a JMB operative arrested soon after the attacks and now being quizzed at the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) in Dhaka.

"We have received some significant clues from Uzzal and Khokon but we are not in a position to disclose those for the sake of investigation," ASP Delwar told The Daily Star last night over telephone. He

US reassures

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blasts in Bangladesh, the spokesman said, "The US works closely with Bangladesh in a number of different areas in combating terrorism, on the law enforcement front, on the financial front as well as on the political front".

A magistrate court yesterday granted eight-day police remand for Uzzal and Khokon. Police sources said the two might be sent to the JIC in Dhaka for further interrogation.

A JIC source said the police conducted a massive overnight manhunt in Khulna region on Monday to nab a man, named by four arrestees to JIC interrogators as the co-ordinator of bomb attacks in two Khulna districts. But the drive failed to nab the man.

JIC sources said investigators could not glean any fresh information yesterday from 22 detainees being quizzed at the JIC.

JESSORE
Our Jessore correspondent reports: A 9-member body formed to probe the August 17 bomb attacks has yet to make any headway.

Meanwhile, 10-year-old Sagar arrested soon after the blasts made a confessional statement to Jessore Sadar upazila magistrate's court under the Section 164 of Criminal Procedure Code on Sunday. As he fell sick in the second day of a three-day remand, he was sent to a juvenile correction centre at Pulerhat.

Another mobile court led by magistrate Mizanur Rahman raided eight restaurants and fined them Tk 90,000.

The court fined the popular Capsicum Chinese Restaurant at College Gate as they found rotten food there.

The Dhaka City Corporation's mobile court by Md Motek Ahmed yesterday raided a biryani house and a restaurant and fined them Tk 10,800.

They also seized 160 sacks packed with rotten dates from traders in Mohakhali and fined them Tk 40,000.

Later the court fined the manager of the City Garden Chinese Restaurant Tk 30,000 and arrested the manager for failure to pay the fine. The court also issued warrant against Mizanur Rahman Swapani, the owner of the restaurant.

"Almost all restaurants in the city have been offering inedible food. They are not willing to maintain the hygiene standard even when the mobile courts are in operation in the city," said a member of the court.

He confessed to having direct contact with JMB chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman. The police are now certain of his involvement in the attacks but are keeping mum for the sake of investigation.

Nilphamari SP Shoyeb Ahmed said they have prepared a list of probable Islamist militants of the district and are keeping close watch on some madrasas that reportedly provided shelter to the militants.

Locals said most of the militants have shaved off their beards and gone into hiding.

HC orders

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The rule is returnable in three weeks.

A High Court division bench comprising Justice MA Matin and Justice Mamnun Rahman ordered Alam to appear in person before the court on October 25.

The bench specifically instructed the Supreme Court registrar to lodge a case under sections 124(ka), 504, and 505 of Bangladesh Penal Code for sedition and provocation with Ramna Police Station.

The same bench earlier on May 23 passed a suo moto rule banning agitation on the Supreme Court premises.

Advocate Noor Hossain in his petition said Faridul set fire to copies of the High Court order during a grand rally of Sammiliti Ajnabi Samannoy Parishad on the Supreme Court premises on July 29.

Faridul, by burning the copies, showed sheer disrespect to the court, and it is an attack on the dignity of the judiciary, reads the complaint.

Advocate Abdul Mannan moved for the petitioner.

The May 23 High Court order reads: "This injunction shall particularly be binding upon all advocates practising in any courts of law in Bangladesh and further that in the event of any breach by anyone of this order, proper steps to enforce this order shall be taken including proceedings for contempt of court and in the case of advocates."

"Such steps shall include making orders prohibiting them from appearing in court as advocates so long as they shall remain in contempt," said the order.

"We don't have any front by the name of Ulama League. We've heard about a number of organisations having the name, but Awami League does not own or approve [of] any of those," he said, adding that Masud has no relation or connection with the AL.

Meanwhile, newspaper reports that Masud was an advisor of Ulama League, a platform of the main opposition Awami League (AL), were found to be wrong.

"It is totally baseless. In fact, there is no legal formation of Ulama League," AL's Secretary of Religious Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah said yesterday.

"We don't have any front by the name of Ulama League. We've heard about a number of organisations having the name, but Awami League does not own or approve [of] any of those," he said, adding that Masud has no relation or connection with the AL.

Meanwhile, the home ministry yesterday said so far 150 people have been arrested in connection with the August 17 blasts.

Of them, Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested eight, Chittagong Metropolitan Police 12, Khulna Metropolitan Police three, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police nine, Dhaka Range Police 13, Chittagong Range Police 16, Rajshahi Range Police 62, Khulna Range Police eight, Barisal Range Police eight and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 11.

"A team of experts (meant for those in Joint Interrogation Cell) have so far quizzed 29 people in Dhaka. Seven of them have been released after it was learnt that they did not have any links to the blasts," Joint Secretary Mohammad Mohsin said.

Another arrestee was brought to Dhaka yesterday while two others from Sathkira will be brought today, he said.

He described the progress in the blasts investigation as 'good'.

PM stresses

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The prime minister said when Bangladesh is continuously advancing in all sectors, such an incident is being carried out to stall the march on the path of development and progress.

She called for a national unity to "foil any evil attempt against the country".

Expressing concern over the serial bombings across the country, the BJP leaders extended support to and expressed solidarity with the government steps to find out the perpetrators.

They BJP leaders appreciated the prime minister's call for a broad-based national unity. They also emphasised strengthening the unity of the four-party alliance.

They go free too easily

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arrested in a murder case, but I did not get the permission," he said. All seven were later freed.

According to press reports, 74 suspected militants were arrested in 1998, three in 1999, eight in 2001, five in 2002, 72 in 2003, 126 in 2004 and over 160 this year before the serial bombings.

Police headquarters on August 30, 2003 asked all top district bosses of Rajshahi police to take action against the militants and maintain a logbook of militant activities. The instructions, however, were never followed for mysterious reasons.

Jagrata Muslim Janata of Bangladesh (JMB) chief Siddiqui Islam, nicknamed Bangla Bhai, is a glaring example of how militants have repeatedly escaped police dragnets and subsequently waged a reign of terror with backing from ruling party lawmakers. He was first arrested along with five others for attacking an Awami League leader in Mollarhat in Bagerhat on August 17, 2002. As villagers chased him, he took shelter in a house from where he was later caught with arms and militant documents. But police dropped Bangla

Bhai's name from a charge sheet and no specific charges were brought against the rest. Rather, police termed him 'an Islamic scholar'. All the criminals were later freed.

Others have similarly flourished while evading arrest. The home ministry took six months to give a nod to Rajshahi police to bring sedition charges against Al Higma chief Syed Kawsar Hossain after his arrest on November 6, 2004. Earlier, police did not bring any sedition charges against him when he was

arrested twice with evidence of anti-state activities.

Forty-one Harkat-ul Jihad (Huji) operatives, who were arrested during arms training in a Ukhia jungle in Cox's Bazar on February 19, 1996, were convicted on May 3, 1998 for keeping arms and for explosive cases. But they received bail from the High Court without strong objection from the prosecution after the BNP-led coalition came to power.

Seven foreign citizens of Al Haramaine were arrested in September 2002 on suspicion of involvement in international militant organisations and placed on remand. But they were released on bail, and later dropped by police at a city hotel in a police vehicle for mysterious reasons. Law enforcers have since lost their trace.

On February 23, 2003 banned Al Higma leader Azimuddin and Azhar Ali Bhuiyan were arrested but against no charges were brought against them.

Seven JMB militants were arrested at Kalai of Bogra on April 25, 2003, but police let them go without filing any case against them. One of the seven, Salahuddin, was arrested on February 23 this year for bombing a Brac office at Kalai.

Police arrested three leaders of Al Higma in Rajshahi for involvement in anti-state activities on February 15, 2003. A case was filed under the arms act but the name of their organisation was not mentioned in the case. They were later freed on bail.

JMB activists fought with police at Moheshpur village in Khetai Upazila of Joypurhat on August 14, 2003 and snatched three shotguns and a wireless set from the police. Some of the injured attackers who could not escape were not arrested. Later, after directives from the high command, police arrested 39 people in connection with the shootout,

but all of them were freed on bail.

In August 2003, five militants of Hizbut Towhid were arrested in Gazipur, but they were sent to jail without any case. Police arrested four other Hizbut Towhid men in Kushtia for killing a woman in September 2003 but no case was filed against them either.

Nine suspected militants of JMB were arrested at Bogra in August 2003 but they were sent to court for 'suspicious activities' under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

On September 20, 2003, police arrested 18 militants led by Abdur Rouf, who claims to have taken part in the Afghan war, in Boalmari while taking training. But that day, police released 16 of them without investigating their cases.

Rouf had informed the press that he was previously apprehended by Cox's Bazar police along with 40 Arakan rebels in 1995.

Nine JMB activists were arrested in April 2004 in Parbatipur with 25 petrol bombs. But all the evidence against them was burned in police custody. The local police super told the press a fire originating from a short circuit burned the evidence. All nine were later acquitted from charges.

Police arrested seven suspected Islamist militants from a mosque in Dinajpur on July 29 this year but later freed them following instructions from Jamaat-e-Islami leaders.

The police freed them at around 12:00 noon as Jamaat Ameer Attafuddin Molla of Dinajpur told the police they were activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, and were walking in the area after offering Esha prayer in the mosque.

On May 31, 24 followers of Bangla Bhai were released from the Rajshahi Central Jail.

PEPZ to meet Sunday

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reaching 6-7 billion dollars a year. Presently, the six running EPZs, dominated mainly by Dhaka and Chittagong EPZs, fetch \$1.5 billion.

The KEPZ led by Korean company Youngone could already have contributed an extra chunk to this earning.

It has remained stuck in limbo for four years as the BNP government has not issued it a licence. But by 2001, the KEPZ was handed 2500 acres of land where Youngone spent about Tk 100 crore for the purchase and infrastructure development.

The Sunday meeting will also approve a regulation framed as per the Private EPZ Act, 1996 and decide on applying the EPZ Labour Union and Industrial Relation Law, 2004 in the private EPZ and other labour related issues, the sources pointed out.

The last meeting—the 11th on April 10, 2003 had formed a committee headed by the principal secretary to the PM to amend the Private EPZ Act, 1996 in line with the laws of the land.

It decided that after this amendment, the government will consider awarding licence to the KEPZ.

The committee on July 17, 2003 filed its report saying that there was no need to amend the Act as it is framed in line with the Bangladesh EPZ Act, 1980 and does not contradict the existing laws.

The committee also noted that since the government already awarded licence to a private EPZ at Rangunia in December 2000 under the existing law, amending the law will create new legal complications.

It pointed out that the KEPZ has already been given land, which has been declared a special zone. Except for giving it the licence to run it, the government has allowed the KEPZ to proceed towards the final stage as per the Private EPZ Act. If the law is amended at such a level, it will also create complication in the investment scenario.

"Above all, this will create an adverse impact on future foreign investment," the committee noted and recommended, "In the interest of foreign investment and to protect the image of the country internationally, the government may award the licence to KEPZ."

It added, "The Private EPZ Act, 1996 may be amended after awarding the licence to KEPZ considering the current situation."

But after this report, the government sat on the issue without any reason.

Sources said the KEPZ has become a victim of politicisation. After coming to power in October 2001, the BNP-led four-party alliance government started viewing the KEPZ as a "political beneficiary" of the previous Awami League government because it was given a big land area.

Youngone has been present in Bangladesh as a small partner company since 1978, but over the years it has grown into a massive multinational corporation. In the government-run EPZs, Youngone dominates 25 percent investment with 16 industrial units employing more than 30,000 people and exporting goods worth over \$220 million.

Since the stagnation has affected Youngone's expansion, it diverted around \$40 million investment to Vietnam, China and India in the last three years.

The KEPZ, by its size and investment profile, stands out from all other EPZs in the country. It plans to install 500 industrial units with an investment of \$1 billion. KEPZ sources said they plan to set up a whole range of garments and textiles units as well as electronics, software, scientific and optical tools, machine tools, automotive parts and other units. To set up its infrastructure, Youngone will separately invest \$200 million.

156 AL men

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Rahman granted Asaduzzaman Noor and five others anticipatory bail.

Following another petition filed by 150 accused, another HC bench comprising Justice Khademul Islam Chowdhury and Emdadul Haque Azad also granted them anticipatory bail.

The court benches also issued rules upon the government to show cause why the petitioners should not be granted regular bail in the cases.

Earlier on Sunday, some 47 leaders and workers of the Awami League and its front organisations out of about 1,500 accused in the same cases obtained anticipatory bail from the High Court.

Hundred of leaders and workers of Awami League and its front organisations led by Asaduzzaman Noor and AL Office Secretary Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan were observing mourning day on the 30th death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman at Dohar on August 15.

Local BNP men reportedly attacked them, leaving more than 100 people, including Noor, injured.

On August 15 and 16, Dohar police filed the two cases against about 1,500 leaders and workers of the Awami League and its front organisations, including Awami Juba League, Krishak League and Chhatra League.

Police mentioned names of 102 leaders and workers, including AL's Publicity Secretary Asaduzzaman Noor and Office Secretary Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan, in the first information reports (FIR) of the cases and 1,400 unnamed.

Dr Kamal Hossain and Barrister Rohkanuddin Mahmud moved for the petitioners. They were assisted by Advocate Mahbubey Alam, Advocate Abdul Momin Khasru, and Advocate MAMannan.

The BBC programme recalled the presence of MCB secretary general Iqbal Sacranie at a memorial service last year in London for Sheikh Yassin, the spiritual leader of the radical Palestinian group Hamas.