

Dhaka, Islamabad

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Pakistan as a springboard for the markets of Afghanistan, central Asia, Iran and the Gulf, he told the meeting.

He also proposed to identify areas for joint venture projects in Bangladesh and Pakistan and promote backward linkages in the textile sector.

Pakistan is in an advantageous position to offer cooperation in areas like railway, engineering, sugar, and cement plants, Shah added.

To finalise these proposals and implement the recommendations of the JEC, he proposed setting up a working group that will hold meetings every six months.

Bangladesh Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury said although the target to raise bilateral trade to one billion dollar by 2007 is achievable, trade and economic relations among Saarc countries in general and between two countries in particular are much below its true potential.

He urged taking early steps for launching direct shipping service from Chittagong to Karachi.

The two countries have already signed a number of agreements on

trade, avoidance of double taxation, investment promotion and protection, bilateral shipping, air service, and cultural exchange programme, he mentioned.

Despite Pakistan's according duty free access to up to 10,000 tonnes of tea and unlimited quantity of raw jute from Bangladesh annually, the latter faces huge trade deficits with Pakistan, he said.

"We hope to discuss various ways through which the current trade imbalance could be removed," he said, adding that Bangladesh is actively seeking foreign direct investment in the country.

A very liberal incentive regime has been put in place to attract investments in the country, Altaf said, adding that vast opportunities exist for further intensifying our cooperation in science and technology, agriculture, fisheries and livestock, water resources management, education and other areas.

High government officials from different ministries of Bangladesh and Pakistan are participating in the eighth JEC meeting.

The next JEC meeting between the two countries will be held in Islamabad in September 2006.

Kahn's son

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Once the impressive structure was known mainly to architects worldwide but now it is known to so many others as an architectural splendour, he said.

Nathaniel, a film director, handed over a documentary film on the Sangsad Bhaban--My Architect--to IAB President Khadem Ali. "It is the only film I have made on my father's work," he said.

It took five years to make the film that dwells on a son's search for an understanding of his long dead father and he had also come to Bangladesh four years ago, he mentioned. "I got emotion-driven and burst into tears seeing the building."

The film was nominated for the Academy Award-2004, he said and hoped it would be screened for people, particularly students and youths of Bangladesh.

Nathaniel recalled that his father had spent much of his time in Bangladesh to see the construction of the Sangsad Bhaban as a major work of his life. Nathaniel was only 11 when his father died in 1974.

He said he has met the Speaker and made an appeal to him to ensure protecting the building's original plan.

The IAB president said Louis Kahn laid more emphasis on being a 'performing architect than being a mere practising architect'. The film made by his son will help people know more about the Sangsad Bhaban.



Momtaz Alam, centre, an employee of JMB leader Abdus Samad's Satata Machineries on Nawabpur Road in the city, shows police metal dice for making bombs yesterday.

Shady agreement

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undermined Petrobangla's constitutional role as the state's supervisor of oil, gas and mineral resources. While all oil and gas contracts are signed between Petrobangla and the contractors, Petrobangla was not a signatory of the JVA. The country's law does not allow other companies to sign such a deal.

Petrobangla does not even have the authority to monitor the JVA.

The bid to make this JVA with Niko, which was disqualified in the government's evaluation during the second round block bidding in 1997, began in 1999 during the Awami League (AL) rule by okaying a framework of understanding (FoU) between Bapex and Niko in 1999.

Former energy secretary Tofik-e-Elahi Chowdhury, the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina's cousin Sheikh Helal and others pushed the bid amid strong opposition of Petrobangla. Barrister Moudud Ahmed, who is related to Tofik-e-Elahi facilitated it as Niko's adviser. The AL government could not sign the JVA.

The BNP government completed what the AL began. AKM Mosharrif Hossain and a powerful young policymaker of the alternative powerhouse of the government pushed the deal. Mosharrif approved the deal on behalf of the prime minister in October 2003.

They even dropped the option of Swiss Challenge from the JVA as drafted during the AL government. Swiss Challenge would have at least given Bapex the option to seek matching or better offers from other oil companies.

Niko-Bapex found a small gas reserve in the Feni gas field in 2004 and it started selling 20 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) to 40 mmcf per day to Petrobangla from October '04.

Being a very small company that entirely depends on hired contractors for all the works, Niko's faulty drilling in the Tengratila area under

Chatak east led to the first blow-out in January this year. Niko started drilling in December with a target to reach 1700 meters.

The blow-out forced more than 10,000 people of different villages in Tengratila to flee their homes for days till nature itself tamed the fire.

The government formed three committees after this chapter and investigators told The Daily Star that Niko did not take proper safety measures and it went on drilling up to 800 meters through the well that had only 300 meters of concrete casing.

Although these reports faulted Niko's operation, the government took no action against it. In fact, while Tengratila was burning, Mosharrif forced Petrobangla to pay \$4 million to the Canadian company for Feni's gas.

Niko meanwhile proceeded slowly in the Tengratila remedial works. On June 17, the company once again proved its incompetence through the second blowout. At this phase, energy ministry adviser Mahmudur Rahman punished two Bapex officials leaving Niko untouched.

Once again three committees were formed--two on the cause of the blowout and assessment of damage and another on how the Niko agreement was signed--magnifying Awami League government's role in giving away the contract. All these committees filed their reports faulting Niko's operations.

Meanwhile country's experts and pressure groups started strong protests against Niko's deal. They also rejected the reports of the government committees on gas loss assessment (both headed by a Buet teacher) saying that these tried to save Niko.

Till now the government took no action against Niko, did not even try to modify or correct the faulty JVA.

Biman raises

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against Tk 2,950.

The fares of Dhaka-Saidpur will be Tk 2,125 against 1,775, Dhaka-Jessore Tk 1,850 against Tk 1,550 and Dhaka-Rajshahi Tk 1,725 against 1,375.

The charges for Dhaka-Barisal will be Tk 1,725 against Tk 1,375, Rajshahi-Saidpur Tk 1,225 against 1,025 and Chittagong-Cox's Bazar Tk 1,175 against Tk 975.

Besides this the fares of DC-10 and Airbus flights on Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet routes have also been increased to Tk 2,225 against Tk 2,000 for economy and Tk 2,725 against Tk 2,500 for business classes.

The press release also mentioned that the fares, as before, excludes Tk 25 embarkation fee and Tk 200 travel tax which the passengers pay with the ticket fares.

Biman sources said the fares for the international flights would also be increased soon.

Hasina

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making its illegal fortunes without caring about the commoners," she said in a press statement yesterday.

Six bills proposing the hike in pay and perks of the president, the prime minister, speakers, ministers, Supreme Court judges and MPs were placed in parliament on Sunday.

Hasina, also the Awami League chief, observed that the rulers increased their salaries for a third time without increasing the salaries of government officials-employees, teachers, police and armed forces.

She termed self-contradictory the two-day weekend as part of austerity measures on the one hand and the raise in salaries on the other.

Giving a statistics the former prime minister said people are forced to buy rice at Tk 20 from Tk 10 and soyabean at Tk 56 from Tk 30 after the alliance government assumed office.

She said the diesel price, which was Tk 15 per litre under the Awami League rule, has now increased to Tk 30 while the retail price of kerosene was raised to Tk 32 from Tk 15.

"People's earning has not increased even by one percent while the cost of living has doubled," she said.

The opposition leader alleged that the prime minister's family and ministers and MPs of the coalition government "plundered thousands of crores of taka. They are exacting huge amounts as kickbacks against each project and business."

Questioning the source of this huge money she said the government is trying to grab more shares of the taxpayers' money.

Hasina said a self-respecting government would have quit by conceding its failure in controlling the price hike instead of hiking their salaries.

HC stays trial

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case at a speedy trial tribunal in Khulna.

A division bench of the HC comprising Justice Abdur Rashid and Justice Fazlur Rahman gave the order after hearing the petition submitted by Selina Akhter Lucky, the complainant and wife of the murdered Jessore bureau chief of the daily Janakantha.

Earlier the complainant submitted a petition to the judge of the Khulna Speedy Trial Tribunal, which was holding the trial, to send the case back to the Jessore Judges' Court for security reasons. The judge asked her to obtain an order from higher court in this regard.

A family source close to the slain journalist said the complainant is afraid of coming to Khulna from Jessore to attend the trial after receiving death threat from one of the accused, hailing from Fakirhat upazila of Bagerhat, who played a key role in the planning of the murder.

Stop gas payment

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Sunday, saying Bapex, a subsidiary of the energy ministry, has no locus standi in entering a vital agreement with a foreign company.

The government formed three committees for each of the blowouts on January and June 17. The court sought the investigation reports of these committees filed on February 7, April 13, June 4, August 13 and 28, and September 3, which found Niko's operation and drilling responsible for the two rounds of blowouts.

Counsel for the petitioners Dr Kamal Hossain told the court that the agreement was signed in violation of the Petroleum Act as well as the environment laws of the country and undermined the national interest.

He said the joint venture agreement has been signed violating articles 143 and 145 of the constitution, in a non-transparent manner with intention to unduly benefit Niko and its allies.

The petitioners submitted to the court that the government has failed to take appropriate measures to realise adequate compensation for the loss of the country's natural resources, damage to public and private properties and incurable damage to the environment and ecology due to gross negligence and utter incompetence of the respondent in exploring gas in Chhatka.

Barrister Tanjib ul Alam assisted Dr Kamal Hossain for the petitioners while Deputy Attorney General Zaman Akhter Bulbul argued for the government.

The Energy Division secretary, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forest secretary, Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Corporation (Petrobangla) chairman, Bapex managing director, Department of Environment director general, Doarabazar deputy commissioner, Doarabazar upazila nirbahi officer, Board of Investment (BOI) chairman, and Niko Resources (Bangladesh) Ltd president have been made respondents in the petition.

Khaleda off to NY

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occasion of the 60th anniversary of the UN.

A flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the prime minister and her 26-member entourage left Dhaka at around 10:40am.

Talking to The Daily Star, a high official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the prime minister during her visit to the US will project Bangladesh and its achievements in a strong way during the World Summit, UNGA and a number of meetings with world leaders.

Khaleda Zia is expected to seek international support for the developing nations, including Bangladesh, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

She has a busy schedule of engagements, including several bilateral meetings with the leaders of the USA, Pakistan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mozambique and heads of UN bodies as well as an address to the High Level Plenary Meeting of the World Summit and Millennium Session of the UNGA.

The PM will attend a reception this evening at the Starlight Roof of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel hosted by US President George W Bush and Mrs. Bush in honour of the world leaders attending the UN summit.

According to the programme schedules, the PM will join the opening session of the High Level Plenary Meeting of the World Summit 2005 and address the meeting on the first day.

Also on the first day, President of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom is due to call on her at the UN Building. She will also attend a luncheon by the UN secretary-general in honour of the heads of state and government at UN headquarters.

On Sept 15 (Thursday), US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will call on the PM at her hotel suite at 1:40pm and hold a bilateral meeting, where they will discuss the entire range of Bangladesh-US issues and matters related to regional and internal issues of common concern.

The Chairman of the Dow Jones Co (Wall Street Journal), Peter Kann, will also call on the PM at her hotel suite on September 15. On the same

day Khaleda Zia will attend the opening of the Clinton Global Initiative.

Executive Director of UNICEF, Ann Veneman, and Administrator of UNDP, Kemal Dervis, will call on the PM at her hotel suite.

Khaleda Zia will be the chief guest at a reception and dinner being hosted by the expatriate Bangladeshis at the Ballroom of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York on the evening of September 15.

On September 16, Khaleda Zia will hold a series of meetings with Prime Minister of Thailand Thaksin Shinawatra, President of Sri Lanka Chandrika Kumaratunga, President of Mozambique Armando Emilio and President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf at the UN headquarters.

The Chairman of the Bangladesh Caucus, Congressman Joseph Crowley, will call on the PM at her hotel suite on the evening of September 16.

On September 17, the PM will attend the inauguration of the general debate of the 60th session of the UNGA and make a country statement.

The same day she will depart from New York for Dhaka at 10:00pm (US time) and arrive at Zia International Airport via transit at Brussels in the early hours of September 19.

Earlier, the prime minister was seen off among others by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, Minister Abdul Tamim Chowdhury, Foreign Minister M Moshed Khan, Mayor of Dhaka City Sadeque Hossain Khoka, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Bابر, State Minister for Civil Aviation Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and the Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury. High civil and military officials were also present on the occasion.

The prime minister's entourage includes, among others, Advisor for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman, Rosy Kabir MP, Secretary to the PM Khandker Shahidul Islam, Chief of Protocol Brigadier General Sheikh Monirul Islam and Director General (UN) M Fazlul Karim.

Militants' bomb factory

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Samad's engineering works.

Meanwhile, immigration police yesterday held a man at Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday. The man bearing close resemblance to Bangla Bhai, the chief of banned militant organisation Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), was offloaded from a plane before he was taken for interrogation. But the policemen released him after being sure that he in fact is not Bangla Bhai.

In another development, police released a leader of Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society on Sunday night, 11 hours after his arrest at the NGO office in Uttara for suspected links to the countrywide explosions.

Acting on leads obtained from Samad's wife Shammii Akhter, who was arrested on Thursday with a huge number of bomb-heads, other bomb-making materials, and books on jihad, detective police went to Nababpur Road at 4:30pm Sunday and their drive culminated in recovery of the bomb-heads yesterday.

Besides Shammii's, the information found in a computer seized from a den of Ataur Rahman, brother of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) chief Abdur Rahman, were of help during the raid.

"Shammii told us that the huge bomb-heads found in Samad's South Goran house were made in Satata Hardware, which is owned by her husband," Shafiqul Islam, additional deputy commissioner (ADC) of Detective Branch (DB) of police, told reporters.

The DB men at first did not find Satata Hardware, but found a boy named Saiful who identified Samad from his photograph as his employer. The boy led the policemen to Satata on 115/1, Nababpur Road.

Saiful later took them to the house of Samad's partner Tofael Ahmed on 110, Nababpur Road. While Tofael was attending a nama-janaza in Mirpur, his mother called him on his mobile phone on the instructions of the detectives.

The DB men picked him up as he returned to his house at 9:15pm.

On instant interrogation by the law enforcers, Tofael admitted to having made bomb-heads and handed over samples of those to the detectives.

But he claimed himself to be a mere employee of Samad's works. "I work on a monthly salary of Tk 3,200."

DB officials said Tofael has confessed to making two dices and keeping one at his house.

Asked why he had kept the dice, he told reporters: "Three days ago, Samad Bhai asked me to hide it as police were raiding the area to arrest bomb suspects and recover bomb-making materials."

He said they had got the bomb-heads made by one Mamtaz Alam, 30, of Lalbagh in Old Dhaka.

When police went to Mamtaz's workshop on 98, Jagannath Saha Road the same night, they found the workshop shut.

Later at about 11:45am yesterday, a team of around 100 detectives led by DB's Deputy Commissioner (DC) Shahidul Islam launched a raid on Mamtaz's workshop. They had to break into the building where they found two dices and a sack of 'green' raw materials, which are widely used in making bomb-heads. No one however was arrested during the raid.

After the DB team had left the area, Mamtaz went to the scene and was arrested by another team, which was waiting in lie for her.

"We're now sure that these bomb-heads are of the same stock that we had recovered earlier from Goran. Like those, these can all together contain detonator, capacitor and battery," said the DB deputy commissioner.

Talking to reporters at DB office later, Mamtaz said Tofael had ordered for 100 bomb-heads about a month ago and received 10 pieces immediately after the August 17 attacks.

"Being satisfied with the quality, they later took 85 others," he added.

He however claimed he did not know anything about Samad's motive or where he was going to use

those bomb-heads. "We make plastic toys, we never want to know what the [clients] will do with those. I just worked as per his order."

Tofael said he became acquainted with Samad only one and a half years ago at a library in Bangshal.

"He asked me to make two dices for a customer and being an employee, I was not supposed to ask him any further detail," he added.

Family of Tofael, who is fluent in Urdu, migrated to Bangladesh from Pakistan fifty years ago, he said.

The DB men produced him before the Court of Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka with a petition for him to be placed on a 10-day remand. The court granted seven-day remand.

Mamtaz was being interrogated at DB office last night.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on Sunday night held a youth, suspecting him to be a JMB operative in Badda.

The arrestee, Sheikh Abu Saleh alias Liton, was handed over to Badda police yesterday.

OFFLOADING INCIDENT
Immigration police at the ZIA offloaded Al Amin from a Saudi Arabia bound flight at around 7:00am yesterday. Son of Bahaudin Mia of Ruppangj of Narayangani, he was going to the Gulf country for job.

He was offloaded, as he resembles Bangla Bhai, the infamous militant leader.

The offloading incident took place just a day after the government announced bounty for information leading to the arrest of Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman, chief of JMB, both widely blamed for August 17 attacks. Soon after Al Amin was held, high officials of intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies rushed to the ZIA. But they released him after quizzing for about three hours they became sure that he is not Bangla Bhai.

He was served with a notice to meet immigration police a few days later.

ISLAMIC HERITAGE LEADER RELEASED
Police released Revival of Islamic Heritage Society Ekrmuzammam, who was picked up Sunday morning on suspicion, the same night as he secured anticipatory bail from the High Court on March 20.

"We released him following the instructions of my superior officials when he showed the High Court bail papers at 10:00pm," Sub-Inspector Gias of Uttara Police Station told The Daily Star last evening.

Ekram, chief of Talim wing of the organisation, however, denied his links to the August 17 blasts.

Bangladesh costliest

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and the Maldives 12 days. Globally it takes only two days in Australia to start a business.

But the cost to start a business, as a percentage of the per capita income, in Bangladesh is 81.4 percent. In Nepal it is 69.9 percent, India 61.7, Pakistan 18.6 and Sri Lanka 10.4 percent only. Globally Denmark is the cheapest country with zero cost to start a business.

"Across countries, cumbersome entry procedures are associated with more corruption, particularly in developing countries. Each procedure is a point of contact opportunity to extract a bribe," says the survey report, which will be published globally today.

"Empirical analysis shows that burdensome entry regulations do not increase the quality of products, make work safer, or reduce pollution. They hold back private investment, push more people into the informal economy, increase consumer prices and fuel corruption," it added.

The WB-IFC conducted the survey by gathering data on starting a business (entry regulation), dealing with licenses (building a warehouse), hiring and firing workers (employment regulation), registering property (regulation of property transfers), getting credit (legal rights), and protecting investors (corporate governance) etc.

In Bangladesh it takes 13 procedures to obtain a license, while it takes 26 in Bhutan, 20 in India, 12 in Pakistan and, the regional lowest, 9 in the Maldives. Globally New Zealand needs the least, with 7 procedures for a license.

Businesses in Bangladesh need 185 days to obtain a license, while it takes 270 days in India, 218 in Pakistan and, the region's lowest, 131 days in the Maldives. Globally Finland requires the lowest - 56 days for obtaining a license.

The licensing cost in Bangladesh, as a percentage of per capita income, is 290 percent while 1170 percent in Pakistan, 678 percent in India and, the region's lowest, 40 percent in the Maldives. The United Arab Emirates takes the global lowest - 2.1 percent.

Talks with Tata

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Rosling, executive director of Tata Sons, and Sukran Singh will lead the Tata delegation.

The third round of talks was originally scheduled to begin in July, but was deferred because of the delay in selection of a team leader to replace former finance secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan, who joined the World Bank recently as its alternative director.

The Tata has offered to invest \$ 2.5 billion in Bangladesh to set up a steel and a power plant at Barapukaria of Dinajpur and a fertiliser plant in Chittagong.

Palestinians

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last to go at 6:50 am (0350 GMT), exiting through the metal gates at the Kissanif crossing where military bulldozers dug up mounds of earth to block the entrance.

"The mission is completed," Kochavi said. "From now on, the responsibility for what happens in the Gaza Strip lies in the hands of the Palestinian Authority."

In the southern Gaza town of Khan Yunis, a swelter of armed factions paraded through the streets proclaiming "victory" over the departed occupier.

Israel's troop withdrawal follows the tumultuous clearance of all settlers from Gaza three weeks ago, an operation that pitted Jew against Jew and added to the domestic political pressure on Sharon.

The operation took place under cover of darkness, much like Israel's pullout from south Lebanon more than five years ago but in sharp contrast to the settlers being dragged kicking and screaming from homes and synagogues last month.

"I'm so happy that I can't find the words to describe how I feel. I just hope the West Bank will follow," said Captain Abu Mohammed.

Bashar shared in a run-a-minute

59 stand with Javed Omar (30) for the second wicket and a further 92 with Mohammad Ashraf for the third.

Having reached his first half-century against Sri Lanka -- Bashars overall 21st fifty in 37 Test appearances -- in the last over before lunch with an exquisite square cut off Muttiah Muralitharan to the point fence, the captain continued the assault in the second session with firm drives, trademark hooks and wonderfully timed cuts.

Bashar, whose fifty came off 73 balls with seven fours, forced Malinga off the attack with two fours each in the pacer's two overs.

But then Bangladesh lost their way with five wickets falling for three runs inside 20 deliveries.

Mohammad Ashraf (17 off 62 balls) attempted to loft Herath over mid-off but skied a catch to extra cover after mistiming the drive.

Herath clean bowled Tuskar Imran in his next over.

And it was all over for Bangladesh after Bashar was controversially run out by the third umpire while trying work Muralitharan on the on-side.

Tigers crash

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minutes before tea.

Left-arm spinner Rangana Herath finished with a career best 4-38 while master spinner Muttiah Muralitharan snared 3-42.

In reply, Sri Lanka reached 160 for three at stumps after Bangladesh new ball pair Syed Rasel and Shahadat Hossain scalped Sri Lankan skipper Marvan Aapattu (18), lbw, and Sanath Jayasuriya (46), spectacularly caught by Atfah Ahmed at cover while chasing a wishid delivery, respectively for their maiden Test wickets.

Mohammad Rafique also took his first Test wicket against Sri Lanka when Kumar Sangakkara (30), outfoxed by the bounce, pulled a catch to mid-on off a leading edge.

Thilan Samaraweera (33) and Mahela Jayawardene (17) were at the crease.

Earlier, debutant opener Shahriar Nafees was clean bowled by Lasith Malinga for three, bringing Bashar to the wicket. He repaired the early damage with two significant partnerships.

Bashar shared in a run-a-minute

Abdur Rahman's brother

FROM PAGE 1
no link to the militant activities of Abdur Rahman, Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai and the JMB. He even opposed their activities.

He also told the interrogators that his brother Abdur Rahman visited Misabpara around a year ago and stayed there for 10-15 days. At that time Rahman told him that if he does not follow Rahman's path, he will face trouble, Obaidur said.

The source said Obaidur had absconded for around a month in 2003 when his youngest brother and JMB military chief Ataur Rahman and Abdur Rahman's son-in-law Abdur Awal were arrested in a case filed with Khetlal Police Station in Natore under Arms Act.

After he returned, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) operation commander Bangla Bhai warned him of dire consequences over mobile phone as he protested to two Bangla Bhai cadres, saying the Qur'an and Hadith do not allow killing, the source said quoting Obaidur.

Jamalpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Biswas Afzal Hossain said the interrogators have gathered some information from Obaidur, which they are now cross checking.

Profile

Obaidur Rahman became a hafiz in 1985 from a madrasa at Jatrabari in Dhaka.

He passed Dakhil examination from Kamalath Madrasa at Titpalla union in sadar upazila in 1990 and completed Alim and Fazil from Abdur Alim Mirza Kashem Senior Madrasa in Jamalpur in 1992 and 1998. He passed Kamil from Sharifbagh Madrasa at Dhamrai in Dhaka in 2000.

He got married to Umme Saida Sabina on March 8, 2001. Obaidur has a son and a daughter aged three and one and a half years.

Obaidur's father late Moulana Abdullah Ibne Fazal was a member of the Jama'atul Ahle Hadith, which is now led by arrested Rajshahi University teacher Asadullah al Galib. Moulana Fazal was also accused of collaborating with the Pakistani forces during the Liberation War of 1971.

Obaidur is the second among four brothers. His younger brother

Oliar Rahman is a teacher of Madina University. The law enforcers believe that Oliar used to provide JMB with huge foreign funds. The youngest among the four is Ataur Rahman, military wing chief of JMB.

Meanwhile, five more people gave statements to district magistrates concerned confessing to their involvement in the serial blasts of August 17 while at least three militants were arrested in Rajshahi yesterday.

Jessore police authorities yesterday issued show cause notices on eight sub-inspectors for their negligence to duties to find out criminals linked to the serial blasts.

Iraqi troops kill

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Jaasim, the defence ministry official in charge of operations in Tal Afar, told a news briefing in Baghdad, referring to a central district at the heart of the insurgency.

"We are nearly in control of western areas of the city. Overall 157 terrorists have been killed and 291 arrested since the beginning of the operations," he added.

"We have cleared Sarai totally and now we will clear other neighbourhoods," a senior officer in Tal Afar, who gave his name only as Colonel Khalaf, told Reuters. "Under our plan, by Thursday the city should be clear and safe."

On Sunday, Iraq closed part of its border with Syria. The United States and Iraq say Tal Afar is a staging post for foreign fighters and military equipment from Syria on their way to cities across central Iraq.

The Kurdish- and Shia Muslim-led Iraqi government is facing an insurgency by Sunni Arabs, with daily bombings and attacks across the country.

On Monday alone police found seven bodies in the town of Rustumiya, southeast of Baghdad, all shot in the head; six civilians died and two were wounded when gunmen attacked an office in Baghdad; and at least six Iraqi soldiers were killed or wounded by a bomb in Falluja, west of Baghdad.

The Iraqi army lost its first soldier in the fighting in Tal Afar on Monday, Jaasim said, adding that six civilians had also died. He said the rebels were well prepared for the assault -- the army found 41 weapons caches and even an "advanced medical treatment centre for their own casualties."

Iraqi Captain Mohammed Abdullah, in Tal Afar, said the town effectively fell on Saturday.

"We usually surround a neighbourhood and then start a house-to-house search operation, because militarily the city fell two days ago but now we are running a cleansing operation from street to street and house to house," he said.

"We are facing some resistance from terrorists who are hiding in houses and streets and other terrorists trying to escape."

Iraqi troops in Tal Afar said rebels were booby-trapping civilian homes with explosives to wound soldiers raiding them.

Interior Minister Bayan Jabour told a news briefing in Baghdad that at least 10 houses had been blown up by such devices and Sarai was full of them.

But Jaafari had given orders to take special care to protect civilian lives, Jabour added.

"This is the first clean military operation that has ever happened in Iraq," he said, adding that the government had put aside \$50 million for rebuilding Tal Afar after the fighting.

Health ministry

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completely incorrect.

The document of the circular issued on September 3 was never sent to the health minister as was claimed by the former health secretary, and nowhere in the document it is stated that the secretary discussed raising hospital users' fees with the minister, the clarification said.

The minister's approval was not obtained prior to sending the proposal for raising user fees in hospitals to the finance ministry, it said, adding that the minister was not even verbally informed about the matter.

Referring to last month's coordination meeting presided over by the health minister that the former health secretary mentioned, the clarification said the topic on raising users' fees was never discussed at any such meetings and no decision was taken to raise the users' fees in government hospitals.