

Kakrail Mosque

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and non-political. Local and foreign Tabligi men gather regularly in huge numbers at Kakrail Mosque all year round for religious purposes.

Law enforcers suspect the militants had taken the advantage of the huge gathering to prepare themselves for the blasts, without being noticed by the intelligence men.

Faisal also said the chief of the militant group Abdur Rahman and his younger brother Ataur Rahman alias Sunny had briefed a group of JMB members on jihad in Kalitali of Tangail after Eid-ul Azha in last January.

A class VIII student of Balla Madrasa in Tangail, he also told Magistrate Nani Gopal Biswas that Shobek of his village had persuaded him to join JMB in 2004. Tangail district unit JMB leader Enayet sent him to Dhaka on August 14.

"At first, I went to a mosque in Khulna. After a short stay there, Uzzal took me to Kakrail Mosque and showed me how to switch on a bomb," Faisal said in his statement. After the training, Uzzal gave him Tk 600, he added.

He placed a bag containing a time bomb in the northeastern corner of Rajbari Police Lines at 10:50am on August 17. He said JMB members Jahid and Habib accompanied him while Uzzal was the team leader.

"Now I can't feel what I have done is wrong," Faisal told reporters, coming out of the court. He said he still would not dare to disobey his leaders, as the consequence would be dreadful.

He also said he was told that he would never make it to heaven if he does not take part in jihad.

Police detectives produced him before the court on completion of his seven-day remand. He is detained in a case filed under the Explosive Substances Act with Paltan Police Station.

Meanwhile, two more people arrested in connection with the serial blasts gave confessional statements before magistrates yesterday. They are AHM Shahim, son former ameer of Habiganj district Jamaat-e-Islami, and Shamsi Akhter, son of Abdus Samad. Shamsi was arrested at JMB den in South Goran on September 8.

AHM Shahim in his confessional statement said JMB operative Hasan had brought him into contact with the militant outfit at a mosque in the capital's Sobhanbagh area in January this year.

Later the same month Hasan took him to a house at Bashabo and introduced him to Ataur Rahman alias Sunny, chief of JMB military wing. After the meeting, he had returned to Habiganj.

Shamsi told the magistrate that Sunny had inspired him to join JMB. He said he (Sunny) had called him on his cellphone and asked him to immediately come to Dhaka.

Soon after he reached the Bashabo house on August 16, Ataur handed him two bags, one containing bombs and the other leaflets. He said he in turn had handed those over to JMB members Yasir and Akram.

Besides, Sunny had given him three files each containing JMB leaflets similar to those found on different blast scenes on August 17. Ataur had asked him to send those leaflets written in Bangali, English and Arabic to JMB leaders and activists across the country by email.

On the morning of August 17, Shamsi dispatched those leaflets to different destinations from a cyber cafe in front of Labaid.

In another development, Shamsi

told a magistrate of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Court that her husband used to work under the command of Ataur Rahman Sunny.

In her confessional statement, she also said JMB members Belal and Akram had supplied her husband with the bomb-making materials that were recovered from their South Goran house.

KHULNA

Our staff correspondent from Khulna reports: The six JMB cadres who had allegedly been sheltered by Khulna Saint Joseph High School teacher Abdul Hakim Gazi in his house have been identified as Shahidullah, Palash, Mehedi, Hasan, Khalid Hasan Mintu, and Mahbub.

They went into hiding on August 17. Abdul Hakim Gazi told police that the six had rented the ground floor of his three-storey building, identifying them as students of Khulna Alia Madrasa.

But Principal of Khulna Alia Madrasa Moulana Mohammad Saleh issued a statement to the press, saying that the JMB men were not his students.

Officer-in-Charge of Batiaghata Police Station yesterday went to Sathkira after getting information on whereabouts of one of the six wanted JMB men. Abdul Hakim Gazi was accompanying him. The schoolteacher was let out from the office of Detective Branch (DB) of Khulna police few hours after his arrest on condition of not leaving his house without permission.

He wanted to know from the envys why they want to hold such conference only in Bangladesh when many countries in the world are seriously lacking in democracy and some of them do not even hold elections.

Sources said Reaz Rahman further told the two of the Tuesday Group that the very essence of democracy is peaceful hand-over of power through elections and it happened very successfully for three consecutive terms.

Besides, he said, Bangladesh has a unique system like the caretaker government for the conduct of free and fair elections.

Food Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, who chaired the September 21 FPMC meet, could not be contacted for comments on what prompted the government to rescind a decision in four days. He is now on a China visit.

Asked, Deputy Minister for Food and Disaster Management Asadul Habib Dulu however said the idea of holding the conference and said that there are many other things to catch up on.

Asked about the outcome of the meeting, both the envys declined to make any comment.

Meanwhile, official sources said the Tuesday Group sensing beforehand a negative response from the foreign affairs ministry had sought support from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and reportedly got assurance.

But the move bypassing the foreign ministry angered the ministry and eventually led to rejection from the PMO as well.

Riaz of Tengra in Sadar upazila was arrested on September 2.

BAGERHAT

BSS from Bagerhat adds: Police arrested two suspected members of JMB on Saturday night.

Of the two, Babul Sheikh, 43, was arrested, by Chittamari upazila for suspected links to blasts in Munshiganj on the night of Shab-e-Barat, and Khairel Islam, 23, for his alleged connection with JMB.

36 fishermen

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in vacating the HC stay order, sources said.

The mission came to know that on the day the HC order came, no representatives of the finance ministry, Privatisation Commission and Rupali Bank were present in court.

The hearing of the case scheduled for August 23 also could not be held as no representatives of the attorney general's (AG) office attended the hearing despite frequent reminders. Barrister Rabeya Bhuiyan was present on behalf of the commission.

A Privatisation Commission source said they did not know about the writ petition, so they could not attend the hearing.

A powerful shareholder of Rupali Bank is allegedly behind the filing of the writ petition and he is now using his influence in the government to delay the government initiatives to vacate the stay order, the source added.

The third tranche of the DSC loan was scheduled to be released by August but, since the government could not fulfil some of the 14 conditions tagged with the release of the loan, it got stuck.

The matter may be tabled at the WB board meeting scheduled for November and a WB appraisal team is expected to visit Bangladesh next month to assess how far the government has fulfilled their conditions.

AWB source said the government has already fulfilled many of the conditions while some are yet to be achieved.

The formation of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is one such contentious issue. ACC's decision to absorb about half of the staff of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti Corruption (Bac) annoyed the WB, which wanted to see appointments to the ACC through competi-

Tuesday Group

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The envys told the adviser that the intentions behind the Group's move are good and Bangladesh would benefit from the conference if the government allows it to be held.

Reaz Rahman however told the envys that the conference would definitely be counterproductive and tantamount to interfering in the domestic politics. It may also give a false impression that Bangladesh does not want free polls to be held, the meeting source quoted him as saying.

Rahman said the last three general elections were held in free and fair manner and were lauded both at home and abroad and the present government is determined to ensure the continuation of holding free and credible general elections.

"Bangladesh's track record in holding elections is indeed very good," the source quoted him as saying.

Roman told the envys that as in the past, the government will invite local and foreign observers to monitor the polls and there is no need for holding any conference on the electoral process.

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Saifur

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The minister mentioned Bangladesh's dependence on foreign aid has been reducing every year and current net aid constitutes only 2 percent of the country's GDP.

"The prudent economic management, including fiscal and monetary policies, contributed to macroeconomic stability and steady growth," he said.

Saifur also expressed his optimism about Bangladesh's attaining the status of "Middle-income" country in next 20 years.

The professionals, while appreciating the minister's speech, suggested government-organised campaigns abroad to project Bangladesh's achievements.

Later in the evening, the minister attended a reception hosted jointly by the chairman of the Board of Governors, World Bank president and IMF managing director.

The six trawlers went missing on September 17 after they had gone out in the sea for fishing.

Meanwhile, 11 crew members of the Bangladeshi FB-86 trawler, which was forced to enter the Indian waters by storm, have yet to return to Pirojpur from Indian police custody.

After arrests, the members of the Indian coast guard and the navy had handed them over to Himulganj and Digha police.

Outlaw dies

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came under fire at about 3:30am, they added.

The police returned fire and drove away the attackers after a half-an-hour-long gunfight.

They claimed Asadul fell in the line of fire when he made an attempt to flee, and died on the spot.

The police seized six bombs and seven bullets after the shooting.

Indian engr

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crime, one of the most gruesome in this conservative Gulf Arab state, the newspaper said.

However, if any former Bac officials selected through the competitive exams, the WB said it will have no objection to such appointment.

Again, the procurement law was also supposed to be raised in parliament as another condition, which the government did not.

The source said while the WB appraisal mission may overlook these conditions, it may take a tough stance if it is not convinced about the government's sincerity to move forward.

The next review mission of the IMF is scheduled to visit Bangladesh at the end of December to finalise the release of the fifth instalment of the DSC loan.

Bangladesh will have to fulfil three conditions to get the instalment released: setting up of an independent audit unit in National Board of Revenue, appointing financial advisor for the privatisation of Agra Bank, and reconstituting Sonali Bank's board.

The source added that the IMF mission hinted that it might reconsider the issue of releasing the fifth instalment if it does not find the government's initiative in expediting the privatisation of Rupali Bank.

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OMS of rice stopped

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600 dealers in Dhaka and another 18,000 across the country would be engaged in the sale of about three lakh tonnes of rice through OMS. Each family would be eligible to purchase five kilograms of rice at Tk 14.50 per kg.

As coarse rice price soared up to Tk 18 to Tk 20 a kg in the retailer market, the government in August decided to launch OMS from September 1 to sell rice to lower-income group at the subsidised price.

However, the government rescheduled the OMS launching for September 20 and again for September 25.

Market sources apprehend tagging the OMS with village rationing would further delay the OMS operation giving the hoarders' syndicate undue leverage.

But it however denied the allegations raised by certain quarters that hoarders' syndicates had created pressure for delaying the OMS drive.

He said village rationing cards, whether ready or not by October 1, "we'll start the OMS drive without making further delay."

The deputy food minister visited poverty-stricken two northern districts, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari, on the first day of the VGF drive yesterday. He expressed the hope this drive would help the rural poor bear the current higher prices of rice.

Under the VGF programme, 10 kg of rice is being given against each of 1,000 cards distributed among the poor in each of over 4,500 unions across the country.

About 1.2 lakh tonnes of rice is required to carry on the operation until the end of October.

Authorities in central Mississippi reported the first known casualty, as one unidentified person was killed by a tornado spun off the remnants of Rita.

No deaths were reported in Louisiana and Texas, though 24 elderly evacuees were killed in an explosion in a bus on Friday as they joined a mass exodus out of the danger zone. An elderly woman also succumbed to heat exhaustion in a traffic jam.

The town of Port Arthur, Texas, close to where Rita's swirling eye came ashore, was awash in waist high floods, downed power lines and uprooted trees. Cars lay smashed on the streets and the main refinery was out of reach after the storm struck.

"It was pretty scary," said John Harrison, whose wooden home was ringed by a foot (33 centimetres) of water as dawn revealed damage wrought during a wild night.

Real estate agent Brandon Allen, 32, said he expected the storm to be "a heck of a lot worse" after Katrina trashed New Orleans and much of the Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama coastline on August 29 killing more than 1,000 people.

Authorities held nine people for looting in the town and ordered a curfew to prevent an escalation of lawlessness, mayor Oscar Ortiz told CNN.

Meanwhile, the White House, with pants pushing infants in strollers while students beat makeshift drums.

Washington organizers said the crowd exceeded 100,000 protesters and police said the estimate was probably right.

Opponents of the US-led war also marched in central London. Police said 10,000 people converged on Hyde Park though organisers said there was 100,000.

"It's not as bad as I feared ... We were fortunate," said John's police chief, Don Dixon.

In Louisiana, coast guard said they had rescued 40 people in heavily flooded areas, despite battling tropical storm force winds.

In Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi 1.14 million customers were without power and the number was expected to rise.

Altaf Hossain said export growth last fiscal year was \$1 billion more than that of the previous year while donors had forecast that Bangladesh would face a major setback after the phasing out of quota from January this year.

Mahfuz Anam said that the main problem of Bangladesh was bad politics, which was leading to bad economics, which in turn was creating bad social conditions.

The question to ask is not what Bangladesh has achieved, which is reasonable, but what Bangladesh could have achieved given good policies, which would have been spectacular, he added.

Sayeedul Islam said, "As a nation we should have a vision and it is a realistic vision that our per capita income should reach \$1,000 by 2021."

The DCCI president urged all political parties to forge a consensus on economic issues so that overall development of the country is not affected.

DCCI Senior Vice President Manzur-Ur-Rahman (Ruskin) also spoke at the function.