

Militants hole

FROM PAGE 1
Meanwhile, detained security officer of parliament secretariat Abu Taleb (Babul Ansari) and four of his accomplices—Saimum, Azizul Haque, Giasuddin Azad, and Mizanur Rahman Badsha—were transferred yesterday to the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) for intensive interrogation. Detectives arrested them for suspected links to JMB and the August 17 blasts.

Monirul Islam Monu from Bandarban reports: In the face of the recent country-wide crackdown, the religious extremists have started to hole up in the remote border areas of Bandarban, said sources.

Hiding in inaccessible Naikkhongghari and Alikadam upazila, they are organising themselves in collusion with Myanmar insurgents belonging to Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) and Arakan Rohingya Nationalist Organisation (ARNO), added the sources.

Two Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) operatives arrested recently in remote Faitong area have disclosed to the interrogators the existence of the militants' dens in the area.

Sources said JMB might have gathered a huge cache of firearms and explosives from the Myanmarese gun-runners. The explosives and ammunition seized from Naikkhongghari on different occasions are similar to the explosives used in the August 17 and October 3 serial blasts.

Following the disclosure of militants' dens, the authorities on Friday night sealed off the bordering areas to prevent the infiltration of foreign terrorists and gunrunners. Forces in the bordering areas have also been increased significantly.

A vast 288-km bordering area hemmed in by deep forests is known to be safe haven for the terrorists.

Bandarban police had detained five militants, including Moulana Abdul Malek, after the August 17 blasts, but after some time set them all free.

Members of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) picked up Malek after finding a similarity between his handwriting and that on the envelopes mailed by JMB to different places.

Sources at Faitong said a few days before August 17, outsiders posing themselves as vendors had rented houses in Bandarban town and adjacent areas. They fled the area soon after the countrywide explosions. But they were soon found wandering in the area again in the run-up to the courthouse blasts in three districts on October 3.

Locals of Faitong caught Shaifur Rahman and Abdul Hafiz after the October 3 blasts on suspicion after the two had shaved off their beards.

Bandarban Superintendent of Police (SP) Iqbal Bahar said of the three arrestees, only Abdul Hafiz has admitted his role in the blasts.

"We do not have any confirmed information about militant activists in this area. Yet, we have set up 50 check points in the district to ensure security," the SP said.

He said security has been beefed up at Radio Bangladesh Bandarban, court premises, the District Collectorate

Building, police stations, and other important places of the town.

KHULNA
Our staff correspondent from Khulna adds: JMB cadre Shahidullah alias Lokman, 18, told police on Saturday that all but one who took part in the August 17 serial bomb blasts hail from Sathkira district.

Police said 11 JMB cadres were assigned to stage blasts at eleven spots in Khulna city.

The diary recovered from the possession of schoolteacher Abdul Hakim Gazi contains the names of some of the participants in the August 17 blasts in the city.

Six of them have been identified as Shahidullah, Moulana Arif, Musa, Shahidul, Khokon and Mahmud alias Palash alias Liton. Of them, Palash and Anisur Rahman Khokon are now in Sathkira District Jail. They had gone into hiding soon after exploding the bombs, but were arrested on August 24 in Sathkira.

A police source quoting Shahidullah said Mahmud is the operations commander of the Khulna division unit of JMB. He and Moulana Arif had distributed bombs among the JMB cadres of Sathkira, Bagerhat and Jessore on August 16. The bombs were made in the house of Abdul Hakim.

Saarc summit

FROM PAGE 16
IF there is any possibility of further deferment of the twice-postponed meet of South Asian leaders in the wake of the earthquake in the sub-continent.

The foreign minister hoped that the natural calamity -- which mainly left some parts of Pakistan and India in ruins -- would not affect the holding of the 13th summit.

"The Dhaka summit is still one month away. I don't think it will affect the summit," he said.

Morshed said the summit had to be postponed first as Tsunami hit some Saarc countries just a few days ahead of the meet in January.

It was again put off for a second time in February when India unilaterally pulled out on the plea of 'royal coup' in Nepal and 'security concern' in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, the foreign minister Khan, Foreign Affairs Advisor Reaz Rahman and senior foreign ministry officials yesterday visited the Jamuna state guesthouse and Bangladesh-China International Friendship Centre, the two major venues of the summit.

The Saarc Committee of Experts is scheduled to meet in Islamabad on October 18-19 for final round of negotiation on Safta.

The Committee on Economic Cooperation headed by Saarc Commerce Secretaries will meet on October 20-21 and Saarc Commerce Ministers on October 22 in the Pakistan capital.

Besides Safta, the meetings would focus on increasing intra-regional trade and investment in South Asia.

Govt to bask

FROM PAGE 1
Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will address the nation this evening at 6:30pm on her government's four years in office. Bangladesh Television (BTV), Bangladesh Betar and satellite television channels will air the Prime Minister's address simultaneously. Khaleda is expected to describe her government's success in different sectors during the past four years.

The Leader of the Opposition and Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina will also address the nation at 3:30pm at the city's Institute of Diploma Engineers Hall. Hasina will highlight the failures of the present government and may urge people to force the government to step down.

The BNP-led alliance formed the government on October 10, 2001 following a landslide victory in the general election of October 1.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) will bring out a procession from city's Noor Hossain Square to observe the fourth anniversary of the coalition rule as a black day for the nation. The JSD will also hold a rally in front of its party office. Similar programmes will be organised across the country, a JSD press release said yesterday.

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), in a press release yesterday, said the party will observe the day as a black episode for the nation marked by rise of extremist groups under the direct patronisation of the ruling alliance leaders, price spiral of essentials and deteriorating law and order.

Swadhinota Forum will hold a discussion on the four-year alliance rule and its success and failures at the Jatiya Press Club lounge today at 3:00pm. Forum president Abu Naser Mohammad Rahmatullah will chair the discussion where Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah al Noman, AL president member Suranjit Sengupta, Jatiya Party (Ershad) leader Kazi Firuz Rashid and Jatiya Party (Manju) leader Sheikh Shahidul Islam are expected to speak.

President Iajuddin Ahmed in a message yesterday said the alliance government has taken initiatives for development in all the sectors including education, health, industries, environment, law and order, poverty reduction and social security as per its electoral pledges.

"People are now enjoying the success of these initiatives," the message said.

The president said the roles of the ruling and the opposition parties are very important in the parliamentary system. Describing parliament as the centre of the system, he hoped all concerned would be more careful about discussing national issues in the House to make the parliamentary system more dynamic and lively.

In her message Prime Minister Khaleda Zia greeted the people on the eve of her government's four years in office. She said her government worked for the people and hoped the ongoing development will accelerate in the rest of the five-year term.

Flood situation

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Nearly 25,000 people still remained marooned in remote villages of the two upazilas. Most of them took shelter on the nearby embankment with house-hold stuffs and cattle.

As nine Hindu temples in Gobindaganj upazila have been submerged by floodwater, the devotees started Durga Puja yesterday installing the idols on rafts made of banana tree.

Meanwhile, the ground floor of the Gobindaganj Upazila Health Complex went under knee-deep water, seriously disrupting the medical services. Rafts are being used for carrying patients to and from the hospital.

A total of 12 kilometres brick-soled and 20 kilometres earthen roads in the upazila were damaged by the floodwater. Standing crops, including vegetables on 1,500 acres of land, were destroyed completely.

The relief allocation was found to be too scanty to meet the needs of the flood victims. "We have distributed Tk 60,000 among the flood-victims," said Abul Kalam Azad, chairman of Gobindaganj Pourashava.

Our Rangpur correspondent adds: The flash flood caused by incessant rain and water from the upstream India marooned at least 20,000 people of three unions under Badarganj upazila.

At least 2,000 mud houses collapsed, rendering 8,000 people homeless, officials said.

Karotoa, Ghagot, Jamuneshwari and Akhira rivers overflowed, inundating 9,000 hectares of croplands, mostly of aman paddy, the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) sources said.

The homeless people have taken shelter at local schools and madrasas as the government has not opened any flood shelter anywhere in the upazila.

People are suffering from scarcity of food and pure drinking water. The government has distributed 8 tonnes of rice and Tk 10,000 among the flood victims.

Upazila administration sources said they arranged 90 tonnes of rice and Tk 3 lakh on emergency basis for the rehabilitation of the flood affected people.

Political and social organisations are also distributing relief materials among the poor.

Election officer

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An operative of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Janajuddho faction, Mizanur Rahman Mizan, 28, was lynched at about 9:30pm on Saturday when he went to Kalpataru Market at Daulatpur to extort money from a local businessman.

According to Daulatpur police, Mizan had wanted Tk 3 lakh in toll from Kalu Sarder and threatened to kill him from non-compliance with the demand.

Businessmen of the market filed a general diary with Daulatpur Police Station on Saturday morning, fearing

Quake toll crosses 20,000

FROM PAGE 1
children, aged between 4 and 6, lay under a sheet of corrugated iron. Relatives said they were trying to find sheets to wrap the bodies.

"We don't have anything to bury them with," said a cousin, Saqib Swati.

Elsewhere in Balakot, shop owner Mohammed Iqbal said two primary schools, one for boys and one for girls, also collapsed. More than 500 students were feared dead.

President Gen. Pervez Musharraf appealed to the international community for medicine, tents, cargo helicopters and financial assistance.

"We do seek international assistance. We have enough manpower but we need financial support ... to cope with the tragedy," Musharraf said in Rawalpindi, a city near the capital Islamabad, before touring devastated areas.

He told the British Broadcasting Corp. the only way to reach many far-flung areas was by helicopter because roads were buried by landslides.

"Our helicopter resources are limited," he told the BBC. "We need massive cargo helicopter support."

The president said he knew of as many as 20,000 people killed, but "I wouldn't be able to make an accurate assessment for days."

The United States, the United Nations, Britain, Russia, China, Turkey, Japan and Germany all offered assistance. An eight-member UN team of top disaster coordination officials arrived in Islamabad on Sunday to plan the global body's response.

In Pakistan's northwestern district of Mansehra, police chief Ataullah Khan Wazir said Saturday that authorities there pulled 250 bodies from the rubble of a girls' school in the village of Ghari Habibullah. Dozens of chil-

dren were feared killed in other schools.

Mansehra was believed to be a hotbed of Islamic militant activity during the time the Taliban religious militia ruled neighbouring Afghanistan. Al-Qaida operatives trained suicide squads at a camp there, Afghan and Pakistani officials told The Associated Press in 2002.

At least 215 Pakistani soldiers died in Pakistan's portion of Kashmir, Sultan said. On the India side of the border, at least 54 soldiers were killed when their bunkers collapsed, said Col. H. Juneja, an Indian army spokesman.

The only serious damage reported in Islamabad was the collapse of a 10-story apartment building, where at least 24 people were killed and dozens were injured. Doctors said the dead included an Egyptian diplomat, and the Japanese Foreign Ministry in Tokyo said two Japanese were killed.

On Sunday, Pakistani rescue teams pulled two survivors from the rubble. The boy and woman, who were listed in stable condition, told doctors others were trapped alive and calling for help beneath the debris.

"These people heard voices and cries during the whole night," said Adil Inayat, a doctor at PIMS hospital in Islamabad.

The death toll in India rose Sunday to 465 after rescue workers and soldiers pulled out 90 more bodies in the frontier Tangdar region, 65 miles north of Srinagar, the summer capital of India's Jammu-Kashmir state. Most of the deaths were in the border towns of Uri, Tangdar and Punch and Srinagar, where the quake collapsed houses and buildings.

Hundreds of angry villagers blocked roads in the region Sunday,

protesting the slow pace of rescue efforts. On the main road between Baramulla and the border town of Uri, locals demanded that journalists and soldiers with aid go to their mountain-side villages.

"Everything is destroyed the ground shook and took everything down," said Syad Hassan, pointing toward the peaks surrounding the valley road. "All the government people, the press people, they are just driving past."

Most people in Jammu-Kashmir spent the night in the open, lighting fires with wood pulled out from fallen houses to keep warm in the near-freezing temperatures.

Afghanistan reported four killed. The US Geological Survey said the quake was centered about 60 miles northeast of Islamabad, six miles below the forested mountains of Pakistani Kashmir. That was followed by at least 22 aftershocks within 24 hours, including a 6.2-magnitude tremor. Hospitals moved quake victims onto lawns, fearing more damage, and many people spent the night in the open.

India, a longtime rival of Pakistan, offered help and condolences in a gesture of cooperation. The nuclear rivals have been pursuing peace after fighting three wars since independence from British rule in 1947, two of them over Kashmir.

Afghanistan appeared to suffer the least damage. In its east, an 11-year-old girl was crushed to death when a wall in her home collapsed, police official Gafar Khan said. Three others also died.

The US military said the quake was felt at Bagram, the main American base in Afghanistan, but there were no reports of damage at bases elsewhere.

Sircar

FROM PAGE 1
on the parliament premises.

To make for a foolproof security of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) complex, besides stricter vigilance, from now it will be a lot more troublesome and tough to obtain a visitor's pass to enter the JS building.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar yesterday phoned State Minister Lutuzzaman Babar and demanded of it to introduce a counter intelligence agency for the JS secretariat to monitor all activities of all including its own security men.

"The state minister for home assured me to deploy counter-intelligence forces," Sircar told reporters at his office. However, Babar told him that it was the parliament secretariat's responsibility to monitor the overall security measures."

On the arrest of a JS secretariat security official last week in connection to militancy, the Speaker said he knows nothing about the arrestee, whether he was involved or not with any subversive activities. "It may be," Sircar said, "he is waiting for a fortunate moment to do the thing."

Later yesterday, the Speaker also sat in meetings with the chief whip, whips and some chiefs of parliamentary bodies and decided to relocate the Public Works Department office, branch of a bank and a medical centre from the JS building to MP hostel premises.

Sircar said he will soon issue letters to 345 lawmakers seeking their cooperation to ensure the security of the parliament building. "From now on visitors of the lawmakers will have to obtain pass from officials of deputy secretary rank in the parliament secretariat," the speaker said.

Govt ready

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yesterday said the government is ready to take action against anyone found to be patronising militant activities in the country.

On the allegation made by 14-party against former home minister Ataf Hossain Choudhury and State Minister for Water Resources Goutam Chakroborty for giving support to militants, Mannan said it requires proper documents of proof.

On the 14-party demand to sack these two ministers within November 14, he urged the main opposition Awami League to come to parliament and place its demand.

About the recent countrywide bomb blasts, he said, "We have inherited it--there were lots of bomb blasts in last term of Awami League and the blame for any incident would directly come upon BNP."

"We are capturing those responsible for these blasts and taking stern actions," he added.

ACC catches

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drawer, Samirul could not give a satisfactory answer.

Samirul was then taken to the commissioner of the customs house. The commissioner after an instant enquiry found two others involved in the bribery. The three were suspended immediately, said the ACC source.

The ACC team comprises of Abdur Rakib, deputy commissioner of taxes and two inspectors ASM Akhtar Hamid and Mirza Zahidul Alam.

The ACC has sent two vigilance teams to Chittagong Port Customs House and Benapole land port after Commissioner Maniruddin Ahmed visited both the places.

Over \$600 loans

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schools and colleges get enlisted for MPO by means of power and influence.

"They [donors] are now saying that an independent body has to be constituted. That body will inspect a particular school or college and if an institution qualifies under the set criteria that will be awarded with MPO," he said.

The minister however said the education ministry has informed him at the meeting that paper work on the establishment of the independent institution has almost been finalised. The institution will be set up by this month, he told reporters.

"Some of World Bank and ADB projects are moving slowly whereas some others are not being implemented for various reasons. Consequently the funds for these projects are not being released," Saifur said.

The rise of petroleum prices has already put a tremendous pressure on the country's foreign exchange reserve. Moreover, the WB and ADB have not released the pledged funds, increasing the pressure on balance of payment and resources, he explained.

Referring to the \$200 million flood rehabilitation project, which is to be undertaken mostly in Sylhet, Saifur said roads for the rehabilitation have been identified, evaluation completed and the WB consultant has okayed the tender process.

"But the World Bank's local office is claiming that the allocation for some of the roads have been higher than they should be and on this ground they have stopped release of the loan," the minister explained.

As the government is yet to corpora-

tise the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa), a lot of money is stuck up in the power sector, he pointed out.

The power ministry officials however told Saifur at the meeting that they are going to do it very soon. Hardly inspired by the assurance, the minister said: "They always tell me they are doing it, but let's see if they can really do it by the time they have promised."

Again, there was a communications ministry project of constructing an access road to the Chittagong Port outside the city but a dispute over revenue sharing between the city corporation and the ministry is delaying the project.

"If Chittagong City Corporation is given a share, all other city corporations will demand the same, which is not possible. It is against our fiscal discipline," Saifur said.

Recently the WB has sent a report on the assessment of fiscal policy in Bangladesh, outlining various factors that impede Bangladesh's getting foreign aids.

Mentioning that there is about \$7 billion aid in the pipeline for Bangladesh, the report pointed out that the institutional and procedural bottlenecks on the part of the government and donors are impeding the smooth release of foreign grants.

The review also mentioned that Bangladesh has been experiencing a decline in net foreign financing, from 4.8 percent of GDP in FY90 to around 2 percent in FY01-03. Net foreign financing reached a 15-year low of 1.1 percent of GDP in FY04.

BCL-Shibir clash

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at least six ICS men injured.

Soon after the attack BCL and its six left-leaning allies brought out a procession and held a rally at the main gate of the arts building demanding a ban on ICS in the campus.

After being beaten up the ICS men gathered at the Mall Chhatra area and tried to bring out a procession for the first time in DU protesting the attack on their activists.

As soon as the ICS men chanted slogans, the BCL men and their allies rushed to the spot and attacked the ICS men again. The ICS chanting slogans in the name of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of the ruling BNP, made a counterattack.

The BCL men then chased the ICS men out of the campus. At least 10 ICS men and two BCL activists were injured during this clash.

The BCL-led alliance student organisations brought out another procession, following the attack, and held a rally at the foot of Aparajeyo Bangla with a direction to the BCL activists to resist ICS wherever and whenever they are found.

In another clash between the BCL and ICS men in front of DMCH at least two persons, Ramzan Ali Ronny, 22, and a 70-year old woman, were injured. The two parties engaged in throwing bricks at the emergency gate of DMCH.

Witnesses said a group of 35 to 40 ICS men gathered at the emergency gate of DMCH and were taking preparation to

Hundi trader

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Police are yet to say anything about the missing Tk 1.62 crore and blamed five of its sources for looting the money.

"They [the police sources] fled away with some bags of money but returned those after higher officials learnt the matter," the duty officer at Savar Police Station told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

Well-placed sources said a Dhaka district police officer, Savar police, plain-clothes police and their sources were involved in the entire incident of looting. The attempt, however, ultimately proved futile as the owner of the Uttara Group took the matter to higher authorities of police.

Some police sources, who earlier used to work for the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), provided police with the information that Uttara Group officer Liakat Ali was carrying a lot of money in a land cruiser from Jessore to Dhaka. Savar police, detectives and some informants intercepted the vehicle at Ashulia at around noon Saturday, according to the sources.

After looting the money, they returned to the Savar Police Station and showed Liakat Ali and his driver Ali Hossain arrested as hundi traders. They showed Tk 58 lakh on the seizure list prepared by the Savar thana nirbahi officer.

The arrestees, however, claimed innocence and said they were bringing the money earned from selling fertiliser and rice from their offices at Nawapara, Jessore, to their Dhaka office.

On information from the owner of the organisation about the amount of money kept in the vehicle, high police officers inquired the police officials concerned about the looted money.

The persons involved in the looting returned a part of the looted money, Tk 2.38 crore, in the early hours of yesterday.

ADhaka district police officer visited the Savar Police Station yesterday noon and held a secret meeting with the local police allegedly to fix the share of the rest of the money.

Savar police, meanwhile, said they arrested police informants Zahurul Islam, Monirul Islam, Sona Mia, Abu Taber and Zakir Hossain for attempting to loot the money.

They sent the five along with Liakat Ali and Ali Hossain to the jail under Section 54 yesterday.

One of the police informants said there was Tk 4 crore in the vehicle. The owner of the organisation could not be reached for confirmation.

Officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station Tareq Alam told The Daily Star yesterday that a money laundering case will be filed in this connection.

held a press conference. A group of BCL men comprising 15-20 activists rushed to the gate and began to throw bricks at the ICS men.

The ICS men also threw bricks at the BCL men which continued for at least 10 minutes forcing the on duty police to fire at least six tear gas shells. The BCL men were chased away and the situation came under control.

Additional police were deployed at the DMCH area to avoid further untoward incidents. Panic gripped the patients, doctors and staffs of DMCH during the clash.

ICS president Shishir Mohammad Monir of DU unit at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club said 20-25 BCL leaders attacked their men without any provocation. More attacks may occur on ICS men at different residential halls of the DU by the BCL 'cadres' at night, he added.

The ICS in a statement demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the BCL leaders and activists.

Meanwhile, the BCL-led seven organisations submitted a memorandum to the Vice-chancellor of DU demanding immediate action taken against the ICS. They also threatened to go for tougher movements if the authorities tried to safeguard the ICS men.

Condemning the ICS movement on the DU campus, Bangladesh Chhatra Union and Samajtantrik Chhatra Front in separate statements urged the student community to resist the ICS in DU campus.

Dhaka still sleeps

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earthquakes as most were constructed in deep marshy land, without any geological survey.

"Almost 65 per cent of the city areas, developed through earth-fillings, are at tremor risk," Maksud Kamal said at a recent seminar, referring to the 1958 aerial survey.

Maksud, who conducted the survey at 184 city points with a micro-tremor machine, found that the ground of Dhaka represents 17 different soil types and exhibits its own characteristics in responding to earthquake-caused ground motion.

But the city authorities do not have the least preparation to conduct rescue work.

The authorities' utter helplessness in rescue work was revealed after the Savar building collapse tragedy in April this year.

After the collapse of the nine-storied Spectrum Sweater building there, the government deployed hundreds of rescuers comprising personnel from the Fire Service and Civil Defence, army, police and other departments.

Ill-equipped as they were, the large team took seven days to finish the rescue work, resulting in the gradual death of a number of trapped workers.

"We do not have equipment to carry out such a massive rescue operation," Selim Nevaz Bhuiyan, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, told reporters during the rescue operation in Savar on April 11, 2005.

"We have some equipment and we are trying to get some more. We have been conducting a training programme for our rescue crews especially emphasising the earthquake," said Brigadier General Rafiqur Rahman, the director general of the Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The fire service department said they expect some equipment from USAID, and the disaster management department is also processing to buy light rescue equipment worth Tk 200 crore.

Due to the unplanned expansion of the city, the lanes and by-lanes are most unfit for conducting any rescue operation, experts say.

Emphasising preparation of city maps indicating the soil structure and quality to avoid tremor risks, the experts several times called for developing adequate land-use regulation for urban earthquake risk management, as well as updating the 1993 National Building Code and its implementation.