

Suicide bombers

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Awal with them to arrest Murad and the others from the New Slum area in the district. Panchagarh District Senior Police Super Skeikh Nazmul Alam led the operation.

Murad told The Daily Star that he is the key planner of the operations to kill the judges in the district. "I had planned to kill the judges including District Judge Rashidul Hasan Patwari two times earlier but failed due to police vigilance at the court and at the judges' residential area," he said adding that a person named Rakib (alias) hailing from Dinajpur, who is the district leader of JMB, had instructed him to kill the judges.

"Aval met me in my residence Friday morning and gave me two packets containing bomb making materials. He asked me not to open the packets until further instruction. We had an hour long meeting and I took him to the bus terminal to see him off Friday afternoon," Murad said.

He said he had met Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman during his five-day stay in Bagmara upazila when he took part in operations against the Sarbaharas (different factions of underground armed left groups) there.

"A month and a half after the August 17 serial blast across the country, the JMB high command directed us to establish Islamic rule in the country by killing the judges and from then on we have been planning to kill the judges," he said.

He claimed himself as a former activist of the Debiganj unit of the ruling alliance partner Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) and said he joined the JMB in 2002 during the US attack on Afghanistan when one of his friend Jamil, also a former ICS member, asked him to join the outfit.

"At least 300 JMB cadres including myself were trained in operating AK-47s, 9mm pistols, and six shooters on Tistar Char (shoal on the Tista River) area under Haragas upazila in Rangpur. We used to stay in different mosques as members of Tablig Jamaat," he said.

"If the JMB high command had approved my plan to kill the district judge before the killing of the two judges in Jhalakathi then our suicide squad members would come to the district and kill the judge," he said. "I don't know whether anyone will come to kill the judges now."

The police have been interrogating Murad till filing of this report at 2:00pm. Panic gripped the people in the two district headquarters since the arrests of several JMB cadres in the last two days.

Judges of the districts expressed fear for their lives. Additional police have been deployed on the court premises and the residential areas of the judges in both the districts.

Police Super of Panchagarh Shafiqul Islam told journalists that they have foiled JMB's plan to kill the judges, as they have been alert. "Security has been beefed up in the district and the police have been asked to stay alert," he said. "The plans of the JMB could not be executed as we have been alerted."

SECURITY BEEFED UP IN TANGAIL
Our Tangail correspondent reports that plainclothesmen of different intelligence agencies have been keeping strict watch on different mosques in Tangail fearing possible bomb attacks by members of the Islamist suicide squads of the banned JMB and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB).

The law enforcers deployed additional plainclothesmen around the mosques before the Juma prayers on Friday, intelligence sources said.

A suicide squad of the JMB killed two judges, Shohel Ahmed and Jagannath Pandey, in Jhalakathi on Monday.

After the incident the Tangail police beefed up security around the judge court, quarters of the judges, the district jail and at other strategic installations of the district headquarter. Several check posts have also been set up.

Earlier during the Ramadan, the JMB had threatened to blow up the district jail through leaflets circulated at the district headquarter mosque.

AWAL ON REMAND
Our Dinajpur and Rajshahi correspondents report that the Thakurgaon police took six Islamist militants including Awal, the number three man of the seven-member Majlish-e-Sura which is the leading core of the JMB, to a 10-day remand. The police said they produced the militants to the court asking for a 15-day remand but the court granted 10 days. Awal, who used to look after the financial matters and the logistics of weapons procurement for the JMB, was scheduled to be handed over to the Joint Interrogation Cell in Dhaka last night.

Charge sheet

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The locals caught Akhtar minutes after the attack on October 18 and handed him over to police.

During interrogation, he admitted that he had taken the bombs from a small room of the Bhangatikor mosque rest house in the afternoon of October 18. Later, his companion Obayed took him on a rickshaw to the Kumarpara area of the city to carry out the attack. He had been in Sylhet since September 20 and had two known leaders there, but he declined to give more details in this regard. The bombs were concealed in a lunch box, he added.

He said that he was involved with the JMB since 2001 and was an activist of the Islami Chhatra Shibir since 1996.

Based on Akhtar's confessional statement, police arrested Obayed from Bishnupur of Chandpur district on November 10 and brought him to Sylhet the next day. After a four-day remand, he was sent to jail on November 16.

During the remand, Obayed denied his complicity with the incident, claim-

ing that he had never been to Sylhet. However, he admitted that his brother-in-law hails from Sarishabari of Jamalpur, from where Akhtar hails.

Police will soon press charges against Akhtar. Obayed and Delwar in the other case in connection with the bomb attack on the judge, an official informed. Delwar, who had rented the room in the mosque rest house, could not be arrested yet. Police hunted him in different areas of the country during the last one month.

A madrasa student and JMB activist, Delwar hailing from Muktagachha of Mymensingh district, came to Sylhet a month before the attack and rented the said room, from which police recovered bomb making materials following Akhtar's statement.

Judge killing

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Chowdhury said the lawyers of the country are concerned at the killing of the two judges in Jhalakathi.

He urged the people and lawyers to build up a united resistance to the militants.

JS session begins

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Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the ruling BNP is also planning to hold a grand rally early next month, instead of confining its activities inside the parliament, declaring a set of programmes.

The BNP-led ruling alliance, which has rejected the opposition's demands for reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission before the next parliamentary polls, will decide its strategy, observing the outcome of the opposition's November 22 rally, sources in the ruling parties said.

The current JS session beginning in the afternoon today will be a short one as it sits only to meet the constitutional obligation so that the gap between two JS sessions does not exceed 60 days.

The Business Advisory Committee will sit prior to the session to decide the duration of the session.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar last week hinted that the 19th session will not have more than 10 workdays.

If the session witnesses 18 workdays, the political scenario will take a dramatic turn, observing whether the AL attends the session to save the membership of its chief Sheikh Hasina, which will be vacated as she did not attend parliamentary sessions for the last 72 consecutive days.

According to the constitution, a lawmaker will lose his/her membership if s/he remains absent from parliamentary sessions for 90 consecutive days.

However, the AL policymakers are not worried about it at the moment. They are rather busy to make the grand rally a success, making hectic campaigns in the districts around the capital and urging people to join the rally.

Meanwhile, many AL lawmakers have submitted a number of notices to the parliament secretariat, demanding discussions on different important issues, including the August 21 grenade attack, the brutal killings of two judges, Monga and the law and order situation.

The lawmakers of the second largest opposition party in parliament, Jatiya Party (JP), have also submitted notices, demanding discussions on different issues. "But I am sure that the ruling party will not hold any discussion on any burning issue," JP lawmaker GM Quader, who has submitted several notices for discussion, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides the regular question-answer session, the House is expected to pass a number of bills at this session.

DRAMA BLAST CASE

Galib to be produced in court today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Asadullah Al Galib, chief of Ahle Hadith Andolan Bangladesh (Ahab), will be produced before Gaibandha Sessions Judge's Court today for the hearing in the Takierbazar drama stage bombing case.

Amid tight security Galib was transferred to Gaibandha from Bogra Friday night. He was put in Gaibandha jail with additional forces deployed in and around the jail.

A case was filed with the Palashbari Police Station against 22 people for the bombing of a drama stage at Takierbazar on December 20, 2004 that injured 15. Police later submitted charge sheet against six people relieving 16 others.

Death threat to Sirajganj journalist

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

A local journalist received death threat on Friday night from an unidentified miscreant that created panic among the journalists of the district.

The miscreant phoned Swapan Mirza, Enayetur upazila correspondent of the Dhaka-based daily Dainik Amardesh and threatened to kill him with bombs. He was also warned not to inform police, saying if he does, all his family members will be killed by bomb attack.

The leaders of Sirajganj Press Club condemned the incident and demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the miscreants.

A general diary was filed with the Enayetur Police Station.

27th BCS test

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the BCS exam. Find somebody else."

On the other hand, condemnations and protests swept through the country yesterday against the question leak. A number of political, social, cultural and student bodies demanded immediate cancellation of the examination and stern action against those involved in the leak.

Students of Dhaka University (DU) brought out a procession and staged demonstrations on the campus demanding cancellation of the test.

A combine of seven student organisations led by Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), Bangladesh Chhatra Motri and Bangladesh Chhatra Union also took out processions and held rallies demanding resignation of the education minister and the PSC chairman for their failure to bring the culprits to book.

Our Rajshahi correspondent reports: Leaders of Rajshahi University (RU) BCL and Pragotishil Chhatra Jote brought out separate processions and held rallies demanding immediate cancellation of the examination and resignation of the PSC chairman and the education minister. Otherwise, they threatened to launch tougher agitation.

PCJ leaders alleged cadres of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra DA (JCD) and Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS), the student wings of ruling BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, jointly carried out the leak and distributed copies of the questions among their co-workers at every university dormitory. The RU PCJ demanded of the government to identify the culprits immediately and award them exemplary punishment.

An RU BCL team led by the unit General Secretary Ayeen Uddin also placed the demands to RU Vice Chancellor Prof Altaf Hossain at his office. The team requested the VC to immediately inform the education minister about the question leak and to ask him to announce a fresh date quickly.

Ershad's JP

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favour" the four-party alliance candidate Jamaat leader Moulana Aftabuddin Mollah for the December 5 by-election in Dinajpur-1.

Sheel is now contesting the election as an independent candidate.

Intra-party conflicts in the beleaguered JP have also surfaced in several districts including Bagura, Dinajpur, Barisal, and Thakurgaon while the leaders deserting the JP are reportedly mobilising support for creating yet another JP.

Several JP big wigs blamed Ershad for the recent troubles in the party.

"If he cannot still clear his position he will lose the bargaining power before the elections. Besides he will have to identify the bad elements in the party who are actually working for the interest of some other party," said a party leader.

However, Ershad, apparently unfazed by Proddhan's leaving, told the JP presidium members, "The party has got rid of a 'bad element'."

Outdoor ad business

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netted adman said. As the PM's son owns Advance AD, nobody dares to raise any question about what they alleged was 'the most obvious nepotism' going on.

Whomever the two firms approach, be it the DCC or a government agency that owns ad spot sought, they get quick approval offer setting up ad apparatus, while similar applications of although others' ad firms files remain put on ice.

They also usually don't have to pay the rent for the ad spot straight away, the businessmen alleged, adding the rent too is but a token amount. That is why the DCC in the last two fiscal years (FY04 and FY05) has earned only Tk 70 lakh against a target to the tune of Tk 30 crore from the ad sector.

INNERWORKINGS MONOPOLISATION

The project of Dhaka City beautification was spanned by the Good Governance and Development Committee of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Following the PMO's approval of the project, the DCC on August 26 last year handed over the major city roads and avenues including the medians, islands, roundabouts, roadsides etc to 65 private and government organisations to beautify and maintain them for the next four years.

Advance AD was entrusted with the road sections from the Bijoy Sarani Fountain to Agargaon Link Road beside Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre and from Jahangir Gate via Mohakhali rail crossing to Kakoti crossroads.

Arkay Group received the road section between Farm Gate and Bangla Motors, the road-island at Farm Gate, the roundabout at the eastern end of Manik Miah Avenue, Panthakunja Park beside Sonargaon Hotel and the road corner in front of Pharmadesh Laboratory premises in Teigaon.

At the contract awarding ceremony, the DCC mayor and his staff categorically warned that none of the bodies commissioned to beautify and maintain specific road areas would be allowed to use them for any commercial purposes including displaying ads. They were allowed to display a small signboard of their own in their respective lots.

But the practices of Advance AD and Arkay Group have been quite contrary to the conditions set by the DCC Beautification Cell. Business insiders said, right from the start, the pair has been making a fast buck by using the roads and roadsides for displaying billboards, neon signs, megasigns, unipoles and digital display screens of giant business houses in exchange of hefty sums.

The road and roadsides from the Bijoy Sarani Fountain to Agargaon Link Road under Advance AD are saturated with such ads.

The firm of Arafat usually fences in the ad spots with corrugated tin before setting up advertisement boards there, even along Bijoy Sarani, which distinguishes it from other ad houses. "If we see an ad board is being installed by fencing in the spot, we know Advance AD is doing the job, because no one would be allowed to erect a fence on footpaths or in the middle of a road except Advance AD," an adman remarked.

Arkay has been equally active in misusing its trust. It has been renting ad spaces at all the DCC lots assigned to it at cut-throat rates. A number of Unilever ads now occupy Panthakunja and surrounds the roundabout, while the citizens have been barred from entering the park since September last year, when its face-lifting completed. The case is the same for the road medians, the roundabout and roadsides of Manik Miah Avenue.

Besides, Arkay installed a huge digital ad display board at Farm Gate. Though Arkay officials refused to disclose the rate, business insiders said, on an average, it charges a client Tk 10 lakh to 12 lakh a month for displaying its advertisement on the huge screen hung on the side of a cinema hall.

According to sources, Advance AD charges its clients Tk one lakh to as high as Tk 10 lakh a year for a billboard, depending on its size. In case of unipoles, it takes Tk 3 lakh to Tk 5 lakh based on its size and advantage of the location.

But, according to the Tax Schedule of 2002, the rate for billboards on private

property was only Tk 3 per square foot and Tk 6 per sq ft on lands owned by the DCC or the government. Even though the government has restructured the rates recently, fixing them at Tk 50 per sq ft in case of private property and Tk 150 in case of DCC or government land, the charges Advance AD make are really exorbitant.

The rates for neon signs have also been increased from Tk 30 to Tk 75 per sq ft in case of private property and from Tk 75 to Tk 150 in case of DCC or government land.

Business sources alleged, using their political clout, Advance AD and Arkay Group have been making the DCC and other government agencies concerned, like Roads and Highways, cancel existing deals with other ad firms on outdoor advertisements and then grab those themselves.

It was, why, some firms alleged, the DCC evicted the admen and ad firms from Airport Road about two years ago, stating that no ad would be allowed there from then on. But, later it handed the route over to Advance AD.

A victim of that eviction said, "I also had a number of ads on Airport Road. After the DCC had issued the order, I withdrew the billboards. When my firm and a few others, who had also been evicted, tried to get permission from Bangladesh Railway and the Dhaka Cantonment authorities to set up billboards on their lands as an alternative, we failed. But Advance AD did get it."

From Zia International Airport (ZIA) to Uttara, Advance AD has installed unipoles and billboards, breaking the road dividers, in violation of the DCC advertisement guidelines, which prohibits setting up any billboard on road medians. It also has installed unipole ads on Bangladesh Railway land along the rail-tracks parallel to Airport Road.

The firm also has received permission to install advertisements on the road median of Manik Miah Avenue, which no company ever did. Driving out another house, it is now in the process of setting up a digital billboard on Panthapathoo.

It charges extremely high rates for displaying billboards along the road from ZIA to Uttara. It takes Tk 10 lakh to Tk 15 lakh a year per billboard, meaning its annual income from this route alone is around Tk 30 crore.

Mizanur Rahman, an official of Advance AD, however claimed, "We have installed the billboards with permission of the respective authorities. It's not true that Advance AD is using power for doing business, rather, it's doing business according to the general rules and regulations."

When The Daily Star tried to contact Advance AD Chairman Arafat Rahman, one of his employees conveyed his reluctance to talk on the issue.

However, Arkay Group Director Mizanur Rahman did talk. He said over telephone that they have been doing business legally and suggested contacting the DCC in this regard.

The Daily Star contacted DCC Chief Executive Officer and Beautification Cell Convener M Saifuddin Ahmed for his comments on the issue. He said, "We will look into the matter, so that in future advertisements of other organisations are not installed on (beautified) road medians."

Earlier, on July 15, 2003, a meeting chaired by the then DCC chief executive officer maintained that billboards had mushroomed in the city and needed to be brought under control. The meeting decided to remove the billboards and other outdoor advertisements from DCC land and not to renew the ad contracts expiring on June 30, 2003.

The DCC in the last two fiscal years (FY04 and FY05) has earned only Tk 70 lakh against its target of some Tk 30 crore from the ad sector.

On July 19, 2003, after expiry of the contracts with admen, the DCC dismantled the advertisements expressly to beautify the city by reducing 'vision pollution'. They then decided to allow only a small number of billboards to be installed. But, now the city sky has once again become cluttered with a huge number of unapproved billboards, unipoles, neon signs and other ads, thanks to whom?

Govt did mistake

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government did a mistake by not timely taking into account the activities of militants based in Rajshahi region.

"The alliance government is now fully aware of their activities and the militants will be defeated at any cost."

Asked about continuous newspaper reports on militancy since 2000, he said, "The government should have acted against militants long ago."

He also said, "Abdur Rahman [Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh chief] and Bangla Bhai [operations commander of Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh] are agents of another country. They are on a mission in Bangladesh to destroy the image of Islam."

Asked which country is backing militants in Bangladesh, he however said it generally held.

Commenting on the recent statement of BNP lawmaker Abu Hena on militancy, Minu said he [Hena] has acted against the party's code of conduct.

"The BNP is a big party, it may have differences of opinions. Hena's opinion cannot be similar to that of others, especially when the govern-

ment has gone tough against the militants."

Minu, also BNP organising secretary, however, said his party will take stern actions against insiders if anyone found to have been involved in prompting the militants.

The mayor was blamed for supporting militant lynchpin Asadullah Al Galib, as he had said the latter was not linked to militants.

Galib was known to him as a faculty of Rajshahi University, he explained, saying, "I certified him on simple belief as I do to all citizens."

On the militants' anti-outlaw operations in Bagmara last year, he said they took an opportunity of people's weakness.

"People wanted to resist the outlaws. Seizing this opportunity, the militants started working openly among the commoners."

"Some of our party leaders also failed to recognise them. But special actions are on way to eliminate the forces now."

He ruled out the possibility of any links between the militants and BNP lawmakers as well as ruling coalition partners.

Gulshan Lake

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their old-style housing settlement intact, the government in 1991 declared Batera Mouza de-requisitioned. However, the decision is yet to see any gazette notification.

"According to the official map, the de-requisitioned area of Batera Mouza extends over the lake, where private owners have bought, sold and resold hundreds of acres of land over the years. Many of them also have taken large loans from banks by mortgaging the lake areas in their possession," Islam told The Daily Star.

"All we can do now to stop developers from filling up the lake is to file cases under the Wetland Protection Act," he said, adding hundreds of such cases are now pending with the courts.

Commissioner of DCC Ward 18 Mohammad Anwar Hossain said the site marked by a signboard reading Gulshan Lakeview Housing Project he is filling is a private land far away from the lake. "This is not the lake. You see that tall Marican Tower -- it is built in the lake. But we are far behind that building."

Throughout yesterday workers were seen dumping earth and rubbish into the lake on the northern side of Manarat Link Road. Rafiqul Islam, a resident of Shahjadpur, said the biggest mistakes of the government were not to demarcate the lake and readjust the boundary of Batera Mouza.

Emdadul Islam said considering the massive value of the lakebed, Rajuk thought it would be impossible for the government to acquire it. So, in 2001, Rajuk proposed to acquire a forty-foot-wide strip of land along the lake on the Shahjadpur side to build a walkway and demarcate the water-body in order to save it from grabbers. But the project proposal is still gathering dust at the Planning Commission.

Office-bearers of Gulshan Society yesterday expressed their concern at the lake filling. Mohammad Anwarul Alam, general secretary of the society, said the lake must be demarcated immediately, adding, "We have been appealing to the government to do that time and again to save the lake."

Journalists

FROM PAGE 16

Goutam Das, Faridpur bureau chief of Dainik Samakal, was strangled in his office on Wednesday night.

Journalists' leaders in Dhaka yesterday strongly protested the killing of Gautam Das and gave a three-day ultimatum to the government to arrest the killers.

Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) at a rally on the Jatiya Press Club premises threatened to go for a tougher action programme against the government if it failed to arrest the culprits involved in the murder by the deadline.

Bitterly criticising the government for its failure to ensure the security of the journalists, the apex body of the journalist unions and the DUJ also announced a three-day programme protesting the killing.

The programmes include holding of a protest rally at Faridpur and wearing black badges.

Addressing the rally on the Jatiya Press Club premises, BFUJ President Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury demanded immediate arrest and trial of the killers of Goutam Das.

The rally was addressed, among others, by BFUJ Secretary General Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul and DUJ President Altaf Mahmud.

Later, the journalists took out a procession in the city.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) yesterday strongly protested and condemned the killing of journalist Goutam Das.

Expressing grave concern over the deterioration of law and order, the business body, in a statement, also demanded arrest of and exemplary punishment to the killers.

Road crashes

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Begum, 64, her grandson Shahidul Islam, 30, and the rickshaw-puller Fazley Haque Mollah, 35, dead on the spot. The three hailed from Kalagachia village of Amtali upazila.

Locals caught the bus driver, Dulal Khan, and handed him over to the police after giving him a beating. The bodies were sent to a local hospital morgue for autopsies.

Meanwhile, a motorcycleist died following an accident at Kanhor in Trishal upazila of Mymensingh district, our Mymensingh correspondent reports.

Jahangir Alam, 42, was critically injured when he lost control over the motorbike and crashed, police said. He was rushed to MMCH where the attending doctors declared him dead.

Hasina condemns

FROM PAGE 16

Hasina in her statement urged all to launch a united movement to oust the alliance government for what she said was its failure to ensure the security of journalists.

Hajj agencies

FROM PAGE 1

board on Friday, a day after axing of state minister Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin from the civil aviation ministry amidst a growing hijab flight fariasco.

Haab yesterday resumed depositing 'Muallim Fees' and ticket booking that it kept suspended since November 8.

As per previous schedules, today (November 20) is the last date for depositing 'Muallim Fees' to the Saudi Government but Haab yesterday appealed to the religious affairs ministry to persuade the Saudi authorities to extend the time limit by five days.

Haab General Secretary Jinnur Ahmed Chowdhury Dipu told The Daily Star yesterday that the question of getting enough flights for ferrying the pilgrims still remained unresolved as the hajj agencies agreed to ask all non-ballottee pilgrims to pay a fare of \$100 each more than the ballottee pilgrims.

Area Manager of Saudi Arabian Airlines, which had traditionally been equally sharing with Biman in flying Bangladeshi pilgrims each year, is on a visit to Jeddah and Saudi's view could

Criminals hurl bomb at cops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two criminals hurled a bomb at policemen around 7:15pm near Daulatpur bus stop in Khulna city yesterday.

The bomb exploded a few yards from an duty Sergeant Faisal Ahmed and Constable Kamal of Traffic Division of Khulna Metropolitan Police. None was hurt in the explosion.

Eyewitnesses said the criminals hurled the bomb from the motorbike they used for fleeing from the scene. Meanwhile, panic-struck shopkeepers closed their shops and the transport services were suspended following the attack. Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and the police