

Key JMB den busted

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Rangpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Mahub Mohsin said, "We asked the government high-ups to freeze the bank accounts and investigate the transactions."

THE RAID
On information, a Nilphamari police team led by SP Soheb Ahmed went to the Noorpur house at 10:00pm. They informed Rangpur SP Mohsin about the operation only after cordoning off the building.

SP Mohsin rushed to the spot with a large contingent of police and aided in the raid that continued until 6:00am yesterday.

The raid was conducted on information disclosed by JMB leader Hafez Sairur Rahman arrested in Kurigram on November 18 in connection with the August 17 countrywide orchestrated bomb blasts.

However, some sources said the police received the information about Awal's hide-out from Awukat, a militant hailing from Dimla of Nilphamari arrested earlier and now undergoing interrogation at the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) in Dhaka.

The police could not contact the owner of the house, Abu Musa Mohammed Johuru Hoque, a former trade union leader of Shyampur Sugar Mills. He was at his village home in Baderganj upazila.

Musa, a former Awami League activist joined the workers front of Jatiya Party immediately before he retired from his job around two years ago. The police held Musa's son and the caretaker of the house named Nasima.

Police sources said Nasima claimed she came to know that the man living in the second-floor flat was the son-in-law of the JMB chief only after his November 18 arrest in Thakurgaon.

She said Awal posed as a fruit trader and gave his name as Rafiqul Islam. Rangpur Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Bazlur Rahman told The Daily Star Awal lived at the rented flat with his wife and a child for two and a half months.

A police officer preferring anonymity said, "Awal came to stay in Rangpur to organise the local JMB members and to carry out bombing operations in the adjoining districts."

An official of Detective Branch of police said JMB planned to keep Rangpur peaceful in order to hide its base and intended to kill judges and political leaders of the adjoining districts.

Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police of Rajshahi Range Baharal Alam visited the Noorpur house yesterday morning. He admitted that JMB has a strong network in the region and its members may have plans to carry out more destructive operations in the northern districts as they did on August 17.

A case under the explosives act was lodged with Kotwali police yesterday afternoon.

Our Nilphamari correspondent quoting some police officials adds: Veiled women used to frequent Awal's flat. The operations of JMB in the northern region used to be coordinated from this flat. The four-room apartment has adequate arrangements for accommodating visitors.

After the arrest of Awal, his wife and the child fled the flat.

DEATH THREATS TO JUDGES

UNB reports a JMB suicide squad threatened to kill Munshiganj District and Sessions Judge Monsoor Ali and Additional District and Sessions Judge Monir Hossain Patwari along with their family members if they do not quit their jobs immediately.

The militants in a letter to Judge Monsoor Ali said the rule of Allah must be implemented instead of the existing laws. The letter was mailed Tuesday.

Earlier on October 10, JMB cadres threatened in a letter to bomb the district judge court.

NURJAHAN KNEW JMB CHIEF

Our court correspondent reports that Nurjahan, the woman arrested in Dhaka for renting a house to JMB chief Abdul Rahman's family, gave a confessional statement to Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Nani Gopal Biswas yesterday. She admitted to knowing that Rahman was the chief of JMB and still renting her house to his son-in-law Alam on August 16.

Khilaigon police produced her before the court at the end of her term.

She said Awal sometimes used to stay in the flat but it was his wife Afifa who would hand over the rent to her.

NOAKHALI
Our Noakhali correspondent reports:

Govt won't stop

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However, the government believes these are very minor and stray incidents.

Moreover, the four recruiting agents, who sent female ansars to Saudi Arabia, have asked the government to take initiative to send more female ansars to the Middle East and other European countries.

An inter-ministerial meeting held at the home ministry yesterday discussed the problems and complaints of the female ansars working in Saudi Arabia. State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar chaired the meeting.

"Most of the female ansars returned on their own," a government official, who was present at the meeting, told reporters.

The official mentioned homesickness, work pressure and failure to adapt with the culture and food as reasons for their return.

The official said the number of sexually harassed ansars are not over two to three.

The meeting also formed a four-member committee headed by the additional secretary of the foreign ministry to look into the problems of the female ansars.

"Committee members will talk to the ansars, the recruiting agents, ansar officials and will fly, if need be, to Saudi Arabia and talk with Saudi officials and the employers to find a remedy," the source said. The committee will submit its report in 45 days.

As many as 406 female ansars were sent to Saudi Arabia to do household work and 19 of them came back, the meeting was told.

"India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the

The police submitted a charge sheet against Abdur Rahman, JMB Operations Commander Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai and a cadre named Masumur Rahman Masum, charging them with involvement in the August 17 countrywide bomb blasts.

According to the charge sheet, Rahman and Bangla Bhai instigated Masum to make the bomb strike in the name of establishing an Islamic rule in the country.

Thirty-four people were named as prosecution witnesses in the charge sheet.

Masum, son of Mofazzel Hossain, hails from Narayanganj. Locals caught him red handed on November 3 soon after he hurled a bomb at a Laxmipur judge. A man name Abdur was killed in the attack.

Later Masum confessed to having link with the August 17 serial blasts.

Meanwhile, the police arrested five suspected militants from a rented house near Tamruddi Bazar under Hatia upazila in Noakhali on Tuesday night.

Hatia Police Station Second Officer Sub-Inspector Farid told The Daily Star the arrestees rented the house a few months ago in guise of small vendors and have been working to inspire people in Islamist activities.

The arrestees are Mozammel Haq, 20, from Dinajpur, Mizanur Rahman Dulal, 22, from Barguna, Mohammad Yunus, 16, from Charfashion in Bhola, Tajul Islam, 20, from Lalmoah in Bhola, and Kazi Abu Taleb, 24 from Paharotli in Chittagong. They were arrested after local residents had informed the law enforcers about their suspicious activities.

BRAHMANBARIA
The DB police in Brahmanbaria submitted a charge sheet against six JMB members yesterday accusing them of blasting bombs in the district on August 17.

Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports the six accused are Deen Islam, Saifullah Akand, Shamim Mia, Sohag Mia, Moji Chowdhury and Shah Alam. Alam is still in hiding. Fifty-two people were named as prosecution witnesses in the charge sheet.

DINAJPUR
Our Dinajpur correspondent reports that the scheduled visit of the Indian high commissioner to Kantanagar temple on Tuesday was cancelled following arrests of three suspected militants from the temple area Sunday evening.

The police arrested Monir Hossain and Shah Alam of Brahmanbaria and Rabiul Islam of Satkhira when they were moving around suspiciously in the Raach Meha being held near the temple.

SYLHET
Our staff correspondent in Sylhet reports that an anonymous caller Tuesday night threatened to blow up a newspaper office, the courts and the government offices in Sylhet.

An official of the Dainik Kazirbazar, a Bangla daily of the city informed journalists that the caller had said, "We will blow up the courts tomorrow, as the newspaper also has been engaged in writing against the bomb attacks it will also face the same fate."

When the recipient of the call asked for the identity of the caller, he declined and said, "What I had to say, has already been said, there is nothing more to say."

Terrorism

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irrespective of their party affiliation and opinions agree that terrorism and corruption are the main problems of the country. Dr Kamal urged the students to be united to free the country from militancy.

The Gano Forum president said the Public Service Commission (PSC) failed to play its neutral role as the question paper of the most important examination in the country has leaked out.

He said the people expect the government to run the country following the main state principles. "The main state principles enshrined in the constitution can not be violated," he said.

Dr Kamal said the people of the country must be aware and conscious of their rights and laws of the country. He said the people in the country want the safety of their lives and properties.

Chhatra Dhara Adviser Commander Abdur Rouf and Habibur Rahman, father of the slain BUET student Sony, also spoke in the meeting.

Philippines see a rate of 25 percent return in such cases. In comparison with that rate, ours is much low. It is only 5 percent," said the government official.

The government, following its June 19 decision, sent 150 ansar-VDP women aged between 25 and 30 years to Saudi Arabia to work as housemaids in July, giving them a one-month training at Shaipur Ansar Academy.

The women, assured of 400 rials a month, had to pay Tk 35,000 each to recruiting agencies for arranging their travel to Saudi Arabia.

State minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammed Quamrul Islam, Home Secretary Safar Raj Hossain, the director general of ansar, and representatives of four recruiting agents were present at the meeting.

11 die

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Three more people were killed and five others injured as a bus and a private car collided at Gokul under Bogra district on the Bogra-Rangpur highway.

As the private car from Bogra reached Gokul, a bus from the opposite direction collided with it and the car driver, Md Shahin, died instantly, while two others -- both named Shamsul Islam -- one a student of Akbar Ali College and the other son of Mukhter Hossain from Jaypura, died later, witnesses said.

At least five people were injured in the incident.

Police sent the dead bodies to hospital for autopsies.

Dawn-to-dusk

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Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), left 11-party alliance and National Awami Party (NAP) declared the shutdown from Tuesday's rally at Paltan Maidan.

To drum up support for today's hartal, the 14-party yesterday brought out processions and staged demonstrations in the city and other parts of the country. AL General Secretary and Coordinator of the opposition combine Abdul Jalil urged people to make the hartal a success.

Ambulances, newspaper vehicles, drug stores, garbage carrying vehicles and other emergency vehicles will remain outside the purview of the 6:00am to 6:00pm shutdown.

The government will deploy around 5,000 police, BDR, Rab and Ansar personnel in the capital to prevent any untoward incident.

The opposition combine has declared a series of agitation programmes for the next two months to press home their demands that include reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission for a free, fair and neutral election.

They also threatened to go for indefinite hartals and other tougher programmes if the BNP-Jamaat alliance government stay in power without realising their demands.

FRESH TRANSPORT STRIKE
Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation called the transport strike from today demanding realisation of their three-point demands that include stopping extortion on the highways, harassment of the transport workers, random requisition of vehicles and introduction of weighing system for the overloaded trucks.

Some leaders of the pro-BNP North Bengal Transport Workers Federation earlier enforced the nationwide transport strike on Monday and Tuesday demanding release of their leader Mujibur Rahman. The strike was withdrawn Tuesday evening shortly after the opposition's grand rally ended. Mujibur was released on bail on the same night.

Meanwhile, a section of transport workers yesterday enforced a strike in Dinajpur district protesting the release of Mujibur Rahman.

Farhad Hossain Chowdhury, general secretary of Dinajpur Motor Transport Group, threatened to launch a tougher action programme if Mujibur is not punished.

BFJ condemns

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the time remained silent when her cabinet colleagues and party legislators launched the attack on the media. The speaker instigated them to enact a new law against what they called "yellow journalism", the BFJ leaders said in a statement.

The journalists' leaders bitterly criticised the speaker, deputy speaker and some state ministers and BNP lawmakers for 'irresponsible' comments made by them against the media.

"Besides, the anti-media comments made by the prime minister, Finance Minister, Law Minister, Foreign Minister, Shipping Minister and Industries Minister made the journalists more vulnerable and tarnished the image of the country," they added.

The journalists' leaders also alleged that these provocative comments by the government high-ups against the media, also encourages its field-level leaders to journalist repression.

Painting a gloomy picture of repression on journalists during the last four years of the alliance government, the BFJ leaders said: "Though 13 journalists were killed during the period, trial of any such killing is yet to be held."

"Moreover, the government created hindrance to holding a national convention protesting against the journalists' repression," they added.

Regarding ruling BNP lawmaker's demand for enacting a new law the media, the leaders said: "The journalists will not accept any new act to control the media."

They also urged the journalists' to continue their works with professional attitude defying the threat.

The signatories to the statement included BFJ President Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Secretary General Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, President of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) Altaf Mahmud and General Secretary Shah Alamgir, CUJ President and General Secretary Mostaq Ahmed and Shahidul-Alam and leaders of other journalists unions.

116 mostly

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Many were overstayers although at least 14 had entered Singapore illegally.

The group had been living in squalid offices that had been turned into dormitories, with up to 14 people to a room.

The man who rented them the premises has been referred to police for allegedly harbouring immigration offenders, the report said.

Immigration officials were not immediately available for comment.

Those found guilty of overstaying or illegal entry in Singapore can be jailed for up to six months and receive at least three strokes of the cane.

BNP offers talks

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The talks offer came in the wake of the Awami League (AL)-led opposition alliance's 23-point common minimum national programme, which is virtually its election manifesto, announced from Tuesday's grand rally at the city's Paltan Maidan.

BNP stalwart and Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahamn also proposed a dialogue with the opposition on their demands.

The government also is in favour of reforming election regulations for the sake of free and fair elections. "But for that they (opposition) will have to come to parliament. We cannot have a dialogue at Paltan Maidan," Saifur told journalists yesterday at his Secretariat office.

On the 23-point demand, Mannan Bhuiyan said, "BNP also has the same demands. Many of these demands have already been realised while some others are in the process of being met."

Regarding reforms in the caretaker government and the Election Commission, Bhuiyan said BNP also wants to do everything for holding free and fair elections. "The opposition parties should come to parliament and raise their demands there. We are ready to consider any suggestions to rid the elections of black money and terrorism. My party will be the beneficiary if polls are held in a free and fair manner," he said.

The BNP secretary general however ruled out the opposition demand for appointing chief adviser of caretaker government on the basis of consensus of all quarters. "In the present context, it is difficult to find a person who is acceptable to all. This is a confusing demand," he added.

Rejecting the demand for resignation of the government, Bhuiyan said the opposition had been making this demand since the first day of this government. An elected government cannot be forced out of power in this way. "If a grand rally could dislodge an elected government, our government would have to resign every month," he observed.

He advised the opposition to wait for the public mandate in the next elections.

The present government's tenure will expire just after 10 months. So, instead of wasting their (opposition) energy by agitating in the streets demanding the government's resignation, they should utilise the time by mobilising public support in their favour, Bhuiyan thought.

Asked about the huge gathering at Tuesday's grand rally, he said the number of people attending a rally is no indicator of popularity.

The LGRD minister mentioned that the government took adequate security measures to ensure that the opposition

could hold the rally in a secure and peaceful manner.

He denied allegations that people were barred from attending the rally, saying police did only what was necessary to make sure that no untoward incidents could take place at the rally.

Bhuiyan expressed his happiness at the demand that BNP should not give any access to terrorists and their godfathers or allow them to join the election race. But the AL is yet to expel any godfather from the party, he said, adding it only 'half-expelled' Hazary.

BNP has not created any godfathers, and it is the AL who had created and patronised godfathers," Bhuiyan claimed.

He said his party will soon go for mass contact, organise grand rallies and meetings and announce its political programmes aimed at the coming elections, and not to counter the opposition programmes.

PMO order

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The police served the order to the organisers at 2:00pm when the workshop was in progress.

The organisers stopped the workshop after receiving the order.

A total of 68 representatives from different NGOs were participating in the workshop to find ways to resolve the land disputes as well as to raise a 'uniform demand' to ensure the land rights of the indigenous people in the region.

Six NGOs -- Hill Tracts NGO forum (HTNF), Tangya, Maleya, Mrochet, Kateng and Movement for the Protection of Forests and Land Rights in CHT (MPFLR), jointly organised the workshop with the financial assistance from the Royal Danish Embassy in Dhaka.

The organisers later protested the government order to stop the workshop. At a press conference in the evening they termed the move 'undemocratic' and 'unconstitutional.'

The PMO office might have been misguided by wrong information and influenced to stop the workshop, said Gautam Dewan, former chairman of Rangamati Hill District Council. "We held such workshops earlier, but there was no bar," he added.

"We arrange the workshop with the participation of grassroots people to find out concrete solutions to the land disputes. It could help the government in this regard," Gautam said.

Lalit Chandra Chakma, secretary of HTNF, Shaktipad Tripura, advocate Shaktiman Chakma, Santushita Chakma Bakul, Tuku Talukder and Sudata Bikash Tanchangya, among others, were present at the press conference.

High-ups

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called 'fake news'.

The lawmakers too are demanding that the press council should be strengthened as they believe that the existing law is inadequate to control the media.

The existing provision in the law empowers the press council to warn, admonish or censure the editor or journalist of a newspaper or news agency, if it is proved that they committed any professional misconduct or breach of the code of journalistic ethics.

The provision also provides for an opportunity of hearing of the editor or journalist concerned and for holding an inquiry as prescribed in the act.

The press council chairman in the report observed that the provision is being violated frequently. "I hope the ministry concerned will immediately concentrate on the issue to bring an acceptable amendment to the law," he suggested.

LAWMAKERS CONTINUE CRITICISING THE PRESS

Like the previous day, parliament yesterday witnessed another spell of broadside against the media as Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Shah Mohammad Ruhul Qudus accused the press of damaging the country's democracy.

"Some newspapers in the name of freedom of press are damaging our democracy by practising yellow journalism," Qudus said expressing his support to the ruling BNP lawmakers' demand for enactment of a tough law against the media.

Replying to his point of order, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar said the press cannot be controlled without enacting a new law as the press is enjoying freedom guaranteed by the constitution. "The chairman of the press council also told me that journalists do not care about the warning [issued by the council]," he said.

Agree to reforms

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obstruction, arrest, and harassment of the opposition leaders and workers willing to join Tuesday's grand rally.

But the opposition's proposed discussion with the government over the reforms in the caretaker government and the EC will have to be held outside parliament, he added.

Later, the opposition combine brought out a procession that paraded city thoroughfares chanting slogans in support of today's hartal.

On Tuesday, top opposition leaders at the Paltan Maidan rally announced that they would not participate in any election without reforms in the caretaker government and the EC.

Earlier on July 15, the opposition combine gave a 31-point guideline for the reforms that include appointment of the chief advisor to the caretaker government through consultation with political parties.

Jalil posed a question to BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan as to why the government created obstacles on the way of people's joining the opposition rally and staged a "drama of transport strike" if they were not afraid of getting toppled by the grand rally.

Despite widespread arrests, torture, and repression by Rab and police, the government could not resist the mass wave," he said, adding that the day is not far away when the people will show victory sign as days of BNP-Jamaat government are numbered.

Other speakers at the rally asked the government to accept the proposal of reforms in the caretaker government and the EC systems and hold elections soon.

Presided over by Dhaka City AL General Secretary Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, the rally was addressed, among others, by Gono Forum leader Mostafa Mohsin Montu, JSD leader Mir Hossain Akhter, Workers Party leader Kamrul Ahsan, Gonoatnri party leader Shawkat Ali and Sanyabadi Dal leader Harun Chowdhury.

CEC Aziz

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He had also said the EC would take steps to increase the existing ceiling of election expenditure in the national elections, and to bring back its (EC) authority to cancel one's candidature in the elections for violating electoral laws.

But no such initiative has been taken in the last six months since his taking office.

As the mainstream opposition parties reiterated their demand for reforms in the EC at Tuesday's grand rally in the city, Aziz again said yesterday the EC has taken initiatives to reform election laws.

He did the same on July 15 this year when the opposition parties jointly announced their 31-point guideline for reforms in the caretaker government system and the EC.

The CEC yesterday stressed that an independent EC is a must for holding elections in a free and fair manner.

Asked about the opposition announcement not to participate in elections without reforms in the EC, he said necessary initiatives have already been taken in this regard in consultation with Election Commissioners.

Aziz said recruitment of two lakh 40 thousand data collectors and 60 thousand supervisors would be completed this month for preparing a new voter list.

"Preparatory work for new voter list will begin in the first week of January and be completed by February," he added.

The EC has taken initiatives for the first time since 1990 to include people of the enclaves in the voter list, and will start in this regard following permission from the Home and Foreign Affairs ministries, Aziz said.

NGOs asked to work

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Institute of Administrative Management (BIAM) auditorium yesterday.

The finance minister alleged that when the NGO officials go to seminars or workshops abroad, they do not even bother to contact or cooperate with the government delegation.

There is an impression abroad that "it is the NGOs that are doing everything and the government is doing nothing", Saifur said, adding, "This has emerged as a disturbing factor for the government."

Emphasising the need for a healthy partnership between the NGOs and the government, he said, "It is the government that first took all the good initiatives in education and health sectors. The NGOs and others joined in later."

The finance minister gave away the first instalment of Tk 1,00,000 each to 58 small NGOs at the programme.

The NGO foundation started its journey with a fund of Tk 100 crore to provide grants to the local small and medium NGOs, which do not have the support of any foreign funds.

Cabinet Secretary and foundation Chairman Dr Sadat Hussain said 58 small NGOs from 45 districts were

selected out of 2,133 applicants for a grant of Tk 2,00,000 each, of which the first instalment was given away yesterday.

Joint Finance Secretary and Managing Director of the foundation Md Abdul Majid said the awardees, selected on the basis of some select criteria, have been working in the remote areas of 80 upazilas in the fields of education, community-based rehabilitation of the disabled, sanitation, drinking water, agriculture and others.

The eight-member governing board of the foundation comprises Md Hafizuddin Khan, managing director of Social Development Foundation, Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, chairman of Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh, Rokia A Rahman, president of Women Entrepreneurs Association, Dr Fakruddin Ahmed, managing director of Palli Karmahayak Foundation, M Khalid Shams, managing director of grameen Telecom, Rasheda K Cowdhury, executive director of Gana Shakkharata Abhijan-CAMPE, Md Shaifiqul Haq Chowdhury, president of ASA, and CQK Mustaq Ahmed, director general of NGO Affairs Bureau.

Top Sunni leader

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In a recent meeting of Iraqi factions, the restoration of internal security and the buildup of the Iraqi army were given high priority -- as well as calls for a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

In televised remarks in Washington, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice indicated that troop reductions could be imminent.

"The president has said that as soon as Iraqi forces are ready, we want to see a reduction in our own forces, and I think those days are going to be coming fairly soon when Iraqis are going to be more and more capable of carrying out the functions to secure their own future," Rice told Fox News Channel.

About 159,000 US troops are currently deployed in Iraq ahead of the vote that is expected to produce the country's first democratically-elected permanent government since the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein dictatorship in April 2003.