

Militants still use 14 mosques and 8 madrasas in Jhenidah

Top 5 men including Allahr Dal leader evading arrest: Security tightened in Kaliganj, Harinakundu

HOSSAIN SERAJ, back from Jhenidah

MAGURA: Islamist militants still continue their activities from 14 mosques, eight madrasas and five dormitories in Shailakupa, Kaliganj, Harinakundu and Sadar upazilas in Jhenidah district, according to intelligence sources and locals.

Activists of Harkat-ul-Jihad (Huji) and Allahr Dal, an alleged offshoot of JMB (Jama'at ul Mujahedin Bangladesh), are still active, taking advantage of lax vigilance by law enforcers, the sources claimed.

"We have enough information that mosques and madrasas are being used by militant groups. But as the government does not give green signal, police can not nab the militants," a source declining to be

named told this correspondent.

A large number of activists of Huji and JMB are active from different mosques and madrasa complexes in Chaklapara, Chhoto-Kamarkundu, Upashaharpara, Kancharpur, Pabahati, Hamdah, Adarshapara, Boro-Kamarkundu and Bapirpara in Jhenidah municipal area, it was gathered during this correspondent's recent visit.

The militants have also strongholds in Balidapara Quami Madrasa in Kaliganj upazila; Bhabanipur Madrasa in Harina-kundu; Modhupur, Bharuapara and Kandsha villages in Sadar upazila and Borodah, Garaganj, Kashimpur and Bakshipur in Shailakupa upazila, intelligence sources said.

Although 45 suspected militants have been listed by police, they so far arrested 15 including Huji top

trainer' Abul Kalam Azad alias Bulbul. Top five militant cadres who recruited and trained militants are yet to be netted by police.

Talking to The Daily Star, Jhenidah Police Superintendent Akram Hossain denied the allegation of lax vigilance. Fifteen suspected militants including Huji trainer Bulbul have already been arrested and police hunt is on to nab the rest five top militants, he said.

Although Bulbul, son of Ator Ali of Bajkhal village in Shailakupa upazila, was arrested from near Borodah Dakhil Madrasa in the upazila on November 18, one of the top chiefs of Allahr Dal and alleged kingpin of August 17 blasts in Jhenidah Matin Mehedi alias

Matin Mehedi, son of Enamul Huq hailing from Bridge Road in

Gaibandha town, was arrested earlier by Jhenidah police on October 20 in 2003 along with 10 other suspected militants during a training but were released on bail.

Meantime, security has been tightened in Harinakundu and Kaliganj upazila headquarters as JMB operatives in separate letters threatened to blow up Harina-kundu police station and Kaliganj Upazila Parishad office, local police station and cinema halls.

In the letter sent to the Officer-in-Charge (OC) Harinakunda thana Shafiqul Islam on December 8, the militants threatened to blow up the police station if they continue to harass its cadres. After getting the letter, OC filed a general diary.

In the hand-written letter sent by post to the Kaliganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Moazzem Hossain on

November 29, JMB operatives asked him to stop all 'anti-Islamic' activities. Otherwise the establishments including the UNO office will be blown up, the letter said. This created panic among policemen and other officials.

SP in Jhenidah however said that police were never afraid of any threat. Police at six police station and 34 outposts have been asked to be more cautious only, he said.

Talking to this correspondent, UNO Moazzem Hossain also said he is not scared. Security has been tightened in the upazila headquarters and officials have been suggested to be careful in their movement, he said.



Abdul Jalil's family at their house in Kochurgul village in Juri with oranges plucked from their garden (right).



PHOTO: STAR

Orange growers growing without much support

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

The government initiative to encourage farmers in Moulvibazar for commercial cultivation of orange has brought some positive changes but as lot more has to be done to realise the full potential.

Farmers in the Orange and Pineapple Development Project (OPDP) area are now convinced about bright prospects of commercial cultivation of the winter fruit. The three-year project launched in 2002 was extended by more three years in June this year.

The short training and supply of saplings under the project benefit them but these help a little to remove the main hurdles, farmers told this correspondent during a visit to orange growing areas in Baralekha, Juri and Kulaura upazilas.

The main problems are irrigation and transporting the products to nearby markets, which need development of infrastructure facilities. These can be solved only by the government, they said.

Providing irrigation in the hill areas and developing feeder roads involve a huge expenditure which the local people can not afford.

The three-day training under the OPDP project has created awareness and enthusiasm among the farmers who earlier raised gardens

as a hobby, they said. Most of the orange now available in markets, particularly in greater Sylhet, are produced in Moulvibazar because the production has increased.

There is good prospects to increase the yield and expand the area under cultivation, they said. The government's lukewarm response to the need for development of irrigation and infrastructure facilities has frustrated farmers, many of them said.

After training, each grower is given 10 saplings; five of orange, two of shaddock and one of Shatkara (both orange-like fruits). A trainee also gets Tk 120 per day. They are trained on how to raise a garden, use fertiliser and pesticide and grow saplings.

Growers have to carry the orange manually to distant markets from gardens in hills, which increases the cost.

So far, 1200 out of 1500 growers in Baralekha, Kulaura and Juri upazilas have been trained. Moulvibazar district administration has given identity cards to OPDP trained orange growers to save themselves from alleged harassment by BDR and police on the plea of smuggling orange from across the border. Now, the growers are happy as they can market their products without any harassment by law enforcers, they said.

There are around 1000 orange

gardens in the areas covering more than 90 hectares of land and involving over 7000 people. The area was 69 hectares earlier.

The numbers of trees vary from 200 to 500 in a garden and each tree yields 150 to 200 oranges.

According to OPDP estimate, there are about 70,000 orange trees in Moulvibazar district. Productivity per hectare is 3.5 tons.

The production is good this year. According to an estimate, more than 315 tones of orange have been produced this year. OPDP Project Officer Anwar Hussain at its Moulvibazar office said that 28 new orange gardens have been raised in the areas in last three years.

But the number of trees in gardens is less than optimum as growers plant saplings in a scattered way due to lack of knowledge. Six hundred trees per hectare is the optimum level.

If the OPDP project continues and the government provides infrastructure facilities,

Moulvibazar may be able to meet a considerable portion of the country's demand of orange, which will also save a huge amount of foreign exchange, he said.



PHOTO: STAR

Hurdles for litigants... Visitors to courts in Nilphamari sitting in rows for check. Police introduced the rigorous system fearing bomb attack by JMB militants.

CRACKDOWN ON MILITANTS

BDR, BSF intensify border patrol

STAR NATIONAL DESK

BDR patrol has been intensified and security tightened along borders in Nilphamari and Brahmanbaria districts to prevent cross-border movement of criminals and smuggling of in explosives allegedly from across the border.

The step has been taken against the backdrop of activities by Islamist militants and a government drive in the country to nab them, according to BDR sources.

Our Nilphamari Correspondent reports: Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) is on 'high alert' along the 51-kilometer border in Nilphamari district to prevent smuggling of explosives allegedly from across the border and cross-border movement of criminals and militants.

On the other side, Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has also tightened security and reinforced its strength, the sources said.

BSF personnel are on round the clock patrol, using searchlights from observation towers, the sources said.

Locals in the border area said the intensified border patrol by BDR and BSF has created a tense situation along the border.

The sources said the Indian government has decided to increase the number of outposts along Bangladesh to 1200 from present 500. There will be one outpost after every three kilometres, and the outposts will be reinforced with more BSF personnel.

When contacted, Maj. Shafique of BDR said, "Everything has been done to ensure security and our forces are on alert".

Our B'baria Correspondent reports: The 73-kilometre border along Brahmanbaria and parts of Habiganj district has been 'sealed' by BDR, sources in BDR said.

BDR has intensified border patrol to prevent cross-border movement of criminals and smuggling.

BDR has also set up three new check posts at Chandura, Ganasagar and Imambari in Brahmanbaria as part of security measures.

All trucks and suspected people moving within five kilometres of the border from the 'zero line' are being checked, the sources said.

There are several spots on the 73-km border where India could not erect barbed wire fencing. These gaps are under intensive patrol, they

ARMS HAUL Rangpur police file GD

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Police lodged a general diary with Kotwali police station in connection with Saturday's recovery of a huge quantity of ammunition, home made grenades, time bombs, explosive substances and bomb making materials.

Sub-inspector Dibakor lodged the diary while another Sub-inspector Rezaul Karim was assigned to investigate the matter. Officer-in-Charge of Kotwali police station Bazilur Rashid told this correspondent that police in five teams are continuing operation to nab the men who left the ammunition and explosives in Lalbag in the town on Saturday.

He said, they suspected that the haul belonged to JMB. Law enforcers are haunting for JMB outfits at different boarding houses adjoining Carmichael College. Police believed that a number of members of the outfits has taken shelter in these boarding houses.

said.

BDR sources said joint BDR-BSF patrol is continuing as per a decision of a flag meeting held on December 15 in Akhaura border. Alongside, BSF has intensified patrol on the Indian side and reinforced their strength at several outposts, they said.

Lt. Col Sayed Qumruzzan, Commanding Officer (CO) of BDR-1 Battalion told this correspondent that the three new check posts have been set up to ensure a security so that Islamist militants can not cross the border.

The flag meeting also decided to stop smuggling and other cross-border crimes and 'unauthorised' erection of barbed wire fencing by BSF.

"The border in the district is peaceful", he said.



PHOTO: STAR

A Bangalee tradition not forgotten...A Pitha Ustab (display of traditional cakes) was held at Nipaban Preparatory School in Barisal city on Saturday.

DEATH OF 25 FREEDOM FIGHTERS IN MOULVIBAZAR

Painful memories back again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

December 20 is back again with painful memories for the people of Moulvibazar and Sylhet. On this day in

1971, just three days after of the victory in the Liberation War, 25 valiant freedom fighters of Moulvi-bazar town embraced martyrdom.

The warriors returning home with great enthusiasm. They were join-

ing, in batches, with their fellow freedom fighters amidst great cheers of people at a makeshift transit camp at century-old Moulvibazar Government Boys' High School. All were taking rest at the camp, keeping aside their arms, ammunition, and explosives and mines they had carried. On December 20 morning, some freedom fighters were coming to the camp while some others were going out to see their near and dear ones in Moulvibazar town.

All of a sudden a mine fell on the floor from the hand of a freedom fighter. It burst with a big bang, killing 25 freedom fighters instantly.

The martyrs were buried with due honour in the south-eastern corner of the play ground of the school.

A Shaheed Minar was built in front of the burial ground. Now this Shaheed Minar has become the Central Shaheed Minar in Moulvibazar. After the tragic incident, different political parties, student organisations and freedom fighters demanded an investigation into the incident.



PHOTO: STAR

The Shaheed Minar built at Moulvibazar Government Boys High School in memory of the 25 freedom fighters killed in a mine explosion on Dec 20, 1971.

JMB threatens to kill DC, SP of Bagerhat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

JMB has threatened to kill the Deputy Commissioner and the Police Superintendent of Bagerhat and blow up the Shilpokala Academy building there.

The DC and the SP received two separate computer-composed letters on Thursday. The letters were mailed to them from Dhaka in the name of JMB.

When contacted, the Deputy Commissioner Md Moinuddin admitted that he received the letter on Thursday in the afternoon and filed a general diary with Bagerhat Sadar thana in this connection.

It has been mentioned in the letter that JMB took a decision recently to kill four deputy commissioners, four judges and six upazila nirbahi officers in the country.

JMB has threatened to blow up Bagerhat Shilpokala Academy building because cultural functions not based on Islamic culture are held, general secretary of the academy Monwar Morshed Shohage said. He filed a general diary on Friday.

Bagerhat Police Superintendent Mostafa Kamal said that a vigorous investigation has been initiated about the JMB letter.

Put JMB men on 'crossfire'

BNP MP demands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

President of Bagerhat district unit of BNP MAH Selim MP has demanded killing of JMB leaders and cadre in 'crossfire'.

He made the demand while addressing a Victory Day function at Bagerhat ShilpaKala Academy auditorium.

The BNP lawmaker said he will personally meet with the Prime Minister and appeal to her to 'exterminate' JMB leaders and cadres to put an end to militancy as has been done in case of terrorist activities in the south western region of the country. "Crossfire is the ultimate solution to crush countrywide militant activities by JMB", Selim said.

Presided over by Bagerhat Deputy Commissioner Md Moinuddin, the function was attended by, among other, Police Superintendent Mostafa Kamal



PHOTO: STAR

Tribal youths at work at Ekzada Sweater Factory in Khagrachhari.