

Aug 21 attack

FROM PAGE 1
Sripur in Magura in the 24 hours preceding 3:30pm yesterday. Rab Additional Director General (ADG) Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed told a news briefing yesterday.

The Rab ADG also said five other persons with suspected links to banned Islamist militant organisation Harkatul Jihad al Islami (HJI) were also arrested during a raid on Kurshi village under Baliakandi in Rajbari, who were handed over to police stations concerned.

A joint team of Rab intelligence wing, Rab-6 and Rab-8 also seized some papers, other documents, and two books on Jihad.

The arrestees, who were paraded at the news briefing at Rab Headquarters in the capital, told reporters that they took part in the August 21 attack to kill former premier also AL chief Sheikh Hasina, who is also currently in detention on charges of corruption and abuse of power.

"Before the attack, Mufti Hannan at a meeting in his Meral Badda home in Dhaka convinced us that Sheikh Hasina is causing harm to Islam, so she should be killed, and I agreed to throw the grenades," Sabuj told reporters.

He said he joined HJI in 2002, on an invitation from a detained HJI leader also a suspect in the August 21 attack case Moulana Abdur Rouf, while he was a student in a qommi madrasa in Baliakandi.

He said 12 attackers divided in three groups carried out the attack. "We were four in a group led by detained HJI leader Moin Uddin alias Abu Jandal," he said adding that two other members of his group were Towfiq and Mostafa. He said he heard that the two are now in Saudi Arabia. Towfiq left the country during Ramadan in 2004 and Mostafa fled about a year ago.

He said after a briefing, Hannan gave six grenades to each group and asked them to throw those at the AL rally from different sides. He however did not identify the other grenade throwers.

Sabuj said in the morning of the day of the attack, their group was given six grenades in Hannan's residence in Badda which was also his office.

"I was given two grenades which I hid in my pants and went to the rally venue on a bus," Sabuj said adding that they however were not trained in how to throw a grenade.

The detained HJI members said Hannan just briefed them on how to remove the pin of a grenade and throw the deadly weapon at a target.

Sabuj told the reporters that he however could not throw any grenade as he was caught in the middle of the onrush of panicked people running around at the venue after several grenades had already exploded.

He also said he abandoned the grenades he had and left the place. He said none threw any grenade from any rooftop or from inside any building.

The other detained and confessed attacker Uzzal Hosain alias Ratan said he was lying at a nearby shrine after the attack, pretending to be a vagabond sleeping there. He also said after several grenades had already exploded he threw away the two he possessed and melted into the fleeing crowd.

Rab officials said with the arrests of Sabuj and Ratan, eight grenade throwers are now behind bars.

They are Abu Jandal, Jahangir, Bulbul, Jewel (brother of a Narayanganj based slain criminal David), Sabuj, Ratan, Khalil, and Anif Hasan Sumon.

Besides, Muttakin and Mursalin, two other suspects who are also brothers, are currently in a jail in India after their arrest there.

Three other suspected attackers already died or were killed. Ehsan Ullah Kajol was killed in an

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1
with influencing the tender process, while the CPA officials were charged with helping Gato win the deal ignoring the tender evaluation committee's report that described the firm as unfit.

But during investigation ACC found involvement of 11 others and pressed charges on May 13.

The case was transferred to the Special Court-3 set up on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises on May 28.

The anti-graft watchdog pressed charges on May 5 against Khaleda and 10 others for abuse of power and graft in awarding a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko.

According to the charge sheet, the accused in collaboration with each other struck an anti-state "joint venture agreement" with Niko, causing a loss of Tk 13,777 crore to the state coffers.

The case was transferred to the Special Court-9 on May 20. The ACC filed the Barapukuria coal case against Khaleda and 15 others including 10 former ministers from BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami for graft in awarding the coalmine operation contract to a Chinese company on February 26.

The case is now at the last stage of investigation. The accused are charged with causing a loss of over Tk 158.71 crore to the public exchequer by awarding the production, management and maintenance contract through abuse of power.

Hasina's graft case

FROM PAGE 1
however pronounced yesterday's verdict on Hasina's petition overturning its earlier rulings regarding the writ.

The court also simultaneously rejected eight other similar petitions in unrelated cases filed by defendants, former state minister Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, and former lawmakers Mosaddak Ali Falu, and AHM Mostafa Kamal alias Lotus Kamal.

Yesterday's HC judgment observed that the rule on completing the trial proceedings of any criminal case within 60 days after a court takes it into cognisance is rather directory than mandatory.

"As per section 6(A) of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1958, trial proceedings of any criminal case shall be completed within 60 days after a court takes it (case) into cognisance. But, there is no rule mentioned in the law, what if the trial proceedings are not completed within this period," the HC verdict said.

Counsel for both sides of the cases said the HC verdict removes any bar on continuing the trials of the corruption cases against Sheikh Hasina and the other petitioners.

All the cases were filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), which have been pending with the special judges' courts set up on the parliament building premises in the capital.

Counsel for the writ petitioners Barrister Rafique-Ul-Huq told journalists yesterday that following the HC verdict, trials of the cases against the petitioners including Hasina will now go on.

Upon separate writ petitions, the HC earlier issued rulings ordering the government, ACC, and the judges concerned to explain why the continuation of trial proceedings of the cases against the petitioners should not be declared illegal. The court recently started hearing the replies.

After hearing arguments and submissions of both sides, the court delivered the verdict yesterday.

Home ministry

FROM PAGE 1
chaos in the garment industry. "The government wants to clearly state this arrest drive is not politically motivated or an attempt to politically undermine and harass anyone," a ministry press release said.

"Only those who have specific complaints against them are being arrested," the release added. "In the last 24 hours, special drives by the police and other law enforcement agencies have arrested 584 people, who are using arms or are criminals with specific allegations tying them to a number of crimes," the ministry said.

The ministry also added that the drives have been taken to combat the law and order situation that may otherwise trigger panic among the people. The ministry said the police were directed to launch a country-wide drive to combat these crimes on May 28.

The military is helping the police in this drive. UNB adds: The United States has sought clarification from the caretaker government on the reasons behind the arrests of political party leaders over the past several days.

"We understand that many people, including political party leaders, have been arrested over the past several days. We are seeking clarification from the government regarding the reasons behind these arrests," a spokesman for the US Embassy in Dhaka told UNB yesterday.

The spokesman said the US has consistently stated that any individual arrested and charged with a crime should be treated fairly and accorded the full range of legal and constitutional rights that meet international standards of transparency and due process.

Govt trying hard

FROM PAGE 1
"Now it is their duty to join the dialogue," Quader told reporters at Bangladesh Secretariat.

Trying to explain that the government is not the opponent of political parties, he said, "We would not contest the upcoming (parliamentary) elections."

The elections will be fair and the future would be better if an understanding between political parties could be reached, "which we want", said Quader, also the adviser for housing and public works.

He said the government is in constant contact with the two political parties. Asked about what the next government move is since the two major parties said they would not join the dialogue without their freed chiefs to lead their delegations, Quader said, "The government will use all available means to persuade them."

He, however, declined to make any comment when asked if the government's initiatives included the release of the two detained former premiers, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia.

Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman, also involved in coordinating the dialogue process, said the demand for the ex-premiers' release is being seriously considered to make the ongoing dialogues a success.

1,637 held as crackdown

FROM PAGE 1
Superintendent of Police Obaidur Rahman Khan said all the eight arrestees are accused of different charges.

The arrestees are district Juba Dal Sports Secretary Monir Miji, former UP chairman of Kochua Sadarpur Delwar Hossain Patwary, AL leader Saddam Hossain, BNP leaders Zahir Hossain, Azad Hossain Sarkar, Mubarak Ali, Nur-e-Alam and Wasim.

Our correspondent from Sirajganj reports: Rab arrested two persons including a Juba Dal leader in separate drives in Sirajganj.

They are Sirajganj Abu Sayeed, general secretary of district Juba Dal and Russel, a listed criminal.

Sources said a team of Rab-12 raided the areas near Amlapara graveyard in the town yesterday noon and arrested Abu Sayeed. They held Russel from his house during a raid in several areas at Sandarpara village yesterday morning.

They were arrested on several charges including extortion, sources said.

Our staff correspondent in Rajshahi reports: the joint forces yesterday held two Awami League leaders at Puthia upazila in the district.

They are former vice-president of Bangladesh Chhatra League Ahsanul Haque Masud and sports secretary of Puthia Juba League Amirul Islam.

Sources said Ahsanul was accused in seven cases on different charges including murder and extortion while five cases were filed against Amirul on charges of extortion and other criminal offences.

However, the detainees were not shown arrested in the cases filed against them. They were held under the Emergency Power Rules.

Meanwhile, Puthia Awami League general secretary Golam Faruk strongly condemned the arrest of the party leaders.

"The cases were filed against them during the period of BNP-led coalition government to serve political interests. They were granted bail in all the cases," he said.

Our Rangpur correspondent said: joint forces arrested district BNP joint secretary Masud Khan from his Jummipara residence on Saturday night.

Police said a case was filed against Masud under section 16(2) of the Emergency Power Rules and he was handed over to police after the arrest.

He had also been accused in a number of cases on different charges including extortion and possessing illegal arms.

Our Chapainawabganj correspondent reports: joint forces in separate drives arrested AL activist Abdul Malek of Bholahat upazila and Jamaat activist Habibur Rahman Hobi of Gomostapur early yesterday. They were handed over to police.

Our staff correspondent from Khulna city: six people including Khulna AL leader Birendra Nath Ghose were arrested by joint forces on Saturday night and yesterday.

The other arrestees are AL leader Bulu Biswas, Juba League leader Rafiqul Islam, Jatiya Party leader Moniruzzaman Elu, Zahidur Rahman and Imran Khan.

Rajuk demolishes

FROM PAGE 16
semi-concrete structures including 55 shops constructed on the Bagunbari canal.

He said all illegal structures on Hatirjheel and Begunbari canal will be demolished gradually.

The drive was conducted without giving any prior notice to the residents of the area.

"We did not get any prior notice about the drive... that is why we had no time at all to move our goods," said Abul Hossain who has four shops there.

"It is our legal property and the drive left me emptied," he claimed. Rajuk so far pulled down over 600 illegal structures in Hatirjheel-Begunbari area since March to implement the project.

On February 7, the government under the Tk 1,473.59 crore project started building a road along the canal.

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Dhaka Wasa), Armed Forces Division alongside city development agencies are implementing the project.

The government and Japan Debt Cancellation Fund are jointly financing the project. The government has already allocated Tk 50 crore for the project in the current fiscal year, an official of Rajuk said.

Rajuk is to spend Tk 1,218.69 crore, LGED Tk 175 crore and Dhaka Wasa Tk 77.98 crore for their part in the project. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology will spend Tk 1.92 for conducting a survey there.

3,000 appeals

FROM PAGE 16
Meeting sources said the EC is for using fresh election materials in the parliamentary polls. The materials purchased earlier for the postponed ninth parliamentary elections, scheduled for January 22, 2007, would be used for local government elections, added the sources.

Directed by the EC, its secretariat is now making preparations to hold elections at four city corporations and seven municipalities in the third week of July.

Asked about the schedule for upazila parishad elections, Election Commissioner Sakhawat said the schedule would be announced as soon as it is finalised.

The EC decided in principle to hold the upazila parishad elections, but it has yet to fix any timeframe for the elections.

Asked whether the latest crackdown on grassroots political leaders would create any obstacle to holding the local government elections, Sakhawat declined to make any comment.

MOVE TO REGISTER EXPATRIATE VOTERS
In an effort to register eligible Bangladeshi voters living abroad, the EC finally made a draft proposal to amend the electoral rolls ordinance.

EC sources said the draft proposal was supposed to be finalised at the EC's meeting yesterday. The EC is likely to discuss the proposal in today's meeting, they added.

Upon finalising the proposal, the EC will send it to the law ministry. It might also call on the chief adviser to discuss the issue.

As per the draft proposal, expatriate Bangladeshis with dual citizenship would be eligible for enrolment as voters.

Two election commissioners -- Muhammad Sohul Hussain and Sakhawat Hussain -- in November last year visited the UK and told Bangladeshi citizens living there that they would take steps to register expatriate Bangladeshis as voters.

Moudud said if the government considers Niko a bad company why the agreement with it has not yet been scrapped.

Describing the anti-corruption drive nothing but a farce, he said good people were arrested, but the real corrupts were being sheltered.

The former law minister demanded immediate lifting of the state of emergency.

About the jail condition, Moudud said he is deprived of basic rights in jail. "Where is the rule of law?" he asked to know.

New CJ

FROM PAGE 16
accordance with the law and the constitution, as expected by lawyers and citizens of the country.

"I hope that Justice MM Ruhul Amin, as a learned and experienced judge, will play an outstanding role in protecting the constitution, rule of law and human rights at a crucial moment of the nation," he said.

While talking to journalists at his SCBA office, barrister Shafigue also said that the SCBA did not felicitate the new chief justice as per a decision made by the association earlier.

At an urgent meeting on May 11, the SCBA decided not to give farewell to the outgoing chief justice and not to felicitate the new chief justice.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Speaker Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar and outgoing Chief Justice Md Ruhul Amin were present at the oath-taking ceremony that was conducted by Cabinet Secretary Ali Imam Majumder.

Advisers, special assistants to the chief adviser, the chief election commissioner, judges of the Supreme Court, chiefs of the three services, the attorney general, secretaries, vice-chancellors of different universities, former chief justices, editors of newspapers, eminent lawyers, journalists and senior military and civil officials were also present at the ceremony.

On May 25, the president appointed Justice MM Ruhul Amin, a judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, as chief justice.

Khaleda tells Delwar

FROM PAGE 1
suggestions to Delwar, also her lawyer, during a closed-door meeting after she appeared before the special court yesterday. The meeting lasted about 20 minutes.

She asked him to keep the party united and prepare the party for a movement to restore democracy in the country.

Khaleda replaced BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan with Delwar just before she was arrested last September.

Earlier in the day, the special court granted Khaleda's lawyers 40 minutes for legal consultation after she appeared before the court, for the first time since her arrest, to stand trial in a corruption case.

Before the meeting between Khaleda and Delwar, five lawyers -- Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Abdur Rezaque Khan, Sanaulah Miah, Khorsheed Alam and Masud Talukdar -- went to another room for consultations with Khaleda Zia.

"I had a long discussion with the chairperson but I will not disclose the contents as well as her directives right now," said Delwar addressing a meeting organised by Jatiyatibadi Juba Dal in the city yesterday.

Her directives would be reflected through the party's activities and programmes, he said, adding that the chairperson said they have to forge a movement for a free and fair election and to overcome the current situation.

Sources close to Delwar said he briefed the chairperson about the latest situation in the party and sought suggestion from her on a number of key issues like reorganising party committees and what to do with leaders of the other faction of BNP.

Recently, Delwar reconstituted BNP Sylhet district committee and front organisations Jatiyatibadi Tanti Dal and Jatiyatibadi Muktiyoddha Dal. He even approved an expulsion order against BNP US chapter vice-president Solaiman Bhuiyan and general secretary Zillur Rahman Zillu.

Following his directives, Barisal (north), Sunamganj, Moulavibazar and Rajbari district committees decided to expel BNP pro-Saifur faction leaders Shah Abul Hossain, Mosharraf Hossain Mangu and Zahiruddin Swapan, Nazir Hossain, Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, Ali Nawaz Khan and Nasirul Haque Sabu.

A top leader of pro-Khaleda faction of BNP told The Daily Star last night that the chairperson had several times sent messages to Delwar asking him not to bring any changes to BNP front organisations and BNP district committees.

Addressing the Juba Dal discussion meeting at Engineers Institution auditorium, Delwar said his party will not participate in any rigged elections and governments formed through rigged polls do not last long.

The meeting was organised to mark the death anniversary of late

Khaleda, Hasina

FROM PAGE 1
Even the pedestrians were not allowed to use the road.

Apart from security concerns, the law enforcement agencies blockaded the road so that the supporters and activists of the political parties cannot gather at the gate of the special courts, sources said.

The two leaders were in the courts for more than two hours from 10:00am.

The road was re-opened for vehicles after around 12.30pm, but it took one hour more for the traffic situation to become normal.

Though Hasina appeared in the court several times before, Khaleda was produced in the court for the first time yesterday since her arrest in September 2007.

This was also the first time the two former prime ministers were produced in the special courts the same day.

Ex-Jamaat MP

FROM PAGE 16
sub-inspector at Satkania Police Station, submitted the charge sheet to the court of Senior Judicial Magistrate Abdullah Al Mamun. Jamaat leader Shahjahan has been mentioned as the prime accused in the charge sheet.

The other accused in the case are Satkania Jamaat Amir Dr Nurul Hoque, Shibir activists Abu Musa alias Gaalkata Musa, Moazzem Hossain, Mokhter, Musa, Nurul Islam, Mohiuddin, Enamul Hoque, Nezamuddin, Abu Syed, Mohammad Alam, Nazrul Islam, Nurul Alam, Abdul Mannan alias Balu Mannan, Shawkat Ali, Shahedul Hoque Siddique, Abdul Mannan, Rafique, Hamid, Nesar Ahmad and Nasir.

Three of the accused -- Dr Nurul Hoque, Abu Musa and Mohiuddin -- are in jail now.

On March 24, 2007, Abdur Rahim from Garangia area of Sonakaya village in Satkania upazila filed the extortion case with Satkania Police Station against 39 Satkania Jamaat leaders and activists for extortion of Tk 3 lakh.

president Ziaur Rahman, founder of BNP.

He said, "BNP did not boycott the dialogue, it's just that the release of Khaleda Zia is a must for a meaningful dialogue."

Condemning the recent crackdown on political leaders and activists, he said it was an effort to destroy the image of political leaders.

There is no atmosphere to speak freely and party leaders even do not have any political rights, he said urging the government to create the necessary environment to hold the elections neutrally.

Taking part in the discussion, BNP chairperson's adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah urged party leaders not to do anything which is not approved by the party constitution.

Juba Dal acting President Mia Mohammad Selim presided over the meeting. Juba Dal acting General Secretary Abdus Salam Azad and leaders of BNP's front organisations also spoke at the meeting.

Australia withdraws troops from Iraq

AFP, Nasiriyah, Iraq

The 500-strong Australian troop contingent deployed in Iraq withdrew from their bases in the south of the country yesterday, a local official said.

The soldiers left following a flag-lowering ceremony at the Imam Ali Airbase, west of the city of Nasiriyah, the capital of Dhi Qar province, governor Aziz Kadoum Alwan said.

"The Australian soldiers left today from Dhi Qar and Muthanna provinces," Alwan said. Australian troops had not taken part in direct combat operations and instead trained local security forces.

The new Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had promised to withdraw all 500 combat troops from southern Iraq by the middle of the year.

Australia lost just one soldier in Iraq and that death in April was judged the result of an "irresponsibly self-inflicted" gunshot wound, according to an inquest held in Australia.

Iraqi security officials said about 400 Australians were headed home while the balance will remain in Iraq where they could be deployed in a security detachment in Baghdad.

When it announced its troop pullout in February, Australia said it would still have about 1,000 military personnel in and around Iraq, including a 110-strong security detachment in Baghdad.

It will also have personnel for Hercules and Orion aircraft based outside Iraq as well as a warship in the Gulf.

Australia has also offered permanent residence status to hundreds of Iraqi employees who worked with Australian troops.

Immigration officials were preparing to travel to Iraq and neighbouring nations to process applications from Iraqi employees of the military, the Australian government said last month.

Pak reforms

FROM PAGE 16
During the Kargil conflict in early 1999, then prime minister Sharif claimed the army did not take him into confidence about the operation.

Though President Pervez Musharraf, who was then the army chief, has contested Sharif's claim, the PML-N chief has continued to insist that he was in the dark about the operation. Sharif recently said Musharraf should be tried in court for his role in the Kargil operation.

AFP adds: Pakistan's election commission yesterday cleared the way for former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his younger brother, a former chief minister, to contest June 26 by-elections, officials said.

The Sharif brothers were not allowed to take part in February 18 elections after the commission cited criminal convictions dating back to events surrounding a 1999 coup and pending criminal charges.

"All objections raised against the nomination papers of Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif have been rejected and now they can contest by-elections," a spokesman for the commission told AFP.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N party has joined forces with slain former premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which won the most seats in the February polls, in which President Pervez Musharraf's allies were trounced.

A number of constituencies are set to hold by-elections, mostly after candidates' deaths or because politicians gave up seats after winning in more than one constituency.

The ruling coalition is increasing the pressure on Musharraf to quit and they are mulling a constitution amendment package to clip the wings of US-backed president.

Sharif, a two-time prime minister, was ousted by Musharraf in a 1999 military coup.