

Terror strike foiled in Kashmir

Say Indian police

AFP, Jammu

Indian police said yesterday they had foiled a major suicide strike in Indian-controlled Kashmir with the arrest of three Islamist militants, including a Pakistani soldier.

Under interrogation, the militants said they had been planning to drive a truck laden with explosives into a "vital installation," Jammu and Kashmir police chief Kuldeep Khuda said.

The three were waiting for delivery of the explosives and confirmation of the intended target when they were arrested, Khuda said.

The arrests came amid heightened tensions between India and Pakistan in the wake of the attacks in Mumbai, which New Delhi has blamed on a Pakistan-based militant group.



Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik (R) shakes hands with Interpol secretary-general Ronald Noble in Islamabad yesterday. The Interpol chief said that India had not yet authorised the sharing of any information with the global police agency about those allegedly involved in the Mumbai attacks.

PHOTO: AFP

Indian PM calms war rhetoric, demands Pakistani action

Delhi has not shared info on Mumbai attack, says Interpol chief

AFP, New Delhi/Islamabad

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday dismissed talk of war with Pakistan but again demanded it act against militants blamed for cross-border attacks.

But the chief of Interpol said yesterday that India had not yet authorised the sharing of any information with the global police agency about those suspected of involvement in the Mumbai attacks.

"The issue is not war. Nobody wants war. We would like an objective effort to dismantle terror infrastructure," Singh told reporters in New Delhi.

Singh's comments followed similar remarks by Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee.

"My request to our friends in Pakistan would be they should address the issue. The issue is not creating war hysteria or raising finger against others," Mukherjee told reporters earlier Tuesday.

"The question is there has been a sinister and heinous terrorist attack on Mumbai from elements in Pakistan," Mukherjee said.

"India has requested Pakistan to take action against perpetrators of these attacks."

New Delhi has blamed last month's attacks, in which gunmen killed 163 people, on the banned Pakistan-based extremist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which is fighting Indian rule in disputed Kashmir.

India says the gunmen were trained and equipped by LeT and travelled to Mumbai on a hijacked trawler from the Pakistani port of Karachi.

Earlier Interpol secretary general Ronald Noble made the statement after talks with Pakistani interior ministry chief Rehman Malik about the ongoing investigation into the attacks, which India has blamed on Pakistan-based militants.

"To date, India's government has not authorised India's police agencies to

enter any data relating to the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai into Interpol's databases," Noble told a joint press conference.

"The information Interpol has about what happened in Mumbai is the same information that you have -- it's information that was read in journals, that was read on the Internet or that was seen on TV."

New Delhi has blamed last month's attacks, which left 172 people dead, on the banned Pakistan-based extremist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which is fighting Indian rule in disputed Kashmir.

India says the gunmen were trained and equipped by LeT and travelled to Mumbai on a hijacked trawler from the southern Pakistani port city of Karachi. The group has denied any involvement.

Under pressure from India and the United States, Pakistan has cracked down on the group and an Islamic charity regarded as a front organisation, but New Delhi says it has not done enough.

Coup in Guinea follows president's death

AP, Conakry, Guinea

A military-led group declared a coup in the West African nation of Guinea yesterday, announcing it had dissolved the government and constitution hours after the death of the country's longtime dictator.

The nation of 10 million has been ruled by only two men since it gained independence from France half a century ago.

President Lansana Conte, who took power in a military coup after the death of his predecessor in 1984, died Monday night, the country's National Assembly president announced at about 2 a.m.

A uniformed spokesman for a group calling itself the National Council for Democracy began broadcasting its announcement of the takeover at around 7:30 a.m. local time on state-run radio and TV.

"The constitution is dissolved," the unidentified spokesman said. "The government is dissolved. The institutions of the republic are dissolved," he went on. "From



Lansana Conte

this moment on, the council is taking charge of the destiny of the Guinean people."

He said presidential elections will be organised shortly, but did not elaborate.

Six hours earlier, the head of the armed forces had stood at the side of the president of the National Assembly, Alpha Omar Konate, as they broadcast the news of Conte's death. The show of military and government unity gave the impression the military might allow the transfer of power to follow the rule of law,

which calls for the head of the National Assembly to be sworn in as the new president.

Sompore called on the Supreme Court to follow the constitution and name him president. In addition to the head of the army, he was flanked by numerous officers in military uniform, giving the appearance that the politicians and the military had agreed on a course of action.

The joint news conference was not held until 2 a.m. local time Tuesday, hours after Conte reportedly died. Conte was believed to be in his 70s and in poor health.

Conte, an authoritarian ruler for 24 years, was the country's second president. He was one of the last members of a dwindling group of so-called African Big Men who came to power by the gun and resisted the democratic tide sweeping the continent.

The 1984 coup was carried out a week after the death on March 26, 1984, of President Ahmed Sekou Toure, who had ruled Guinea since the country's independence in 1958.

Mullah Omar denies talks with Kabul

AFP, Kabul

Fugitive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar yesterday refuted reports of any talks between the Afghan government and the militants on ways to put an end to the seven-year insurgency.

"The truth is that the Afghanistan Islamic Emirate (Taliban) has had no negotiations in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates or anywhere else," said a Taliban statement signed with Omar's name and emailed to AFP.

"All of these reports are baseless and nothing but planned propaganda by certain circles."

Afghan and international media have recently reported that talks were being held between Afghan officials and Taliban representatives in Saudi Arabia under Riyadh's mediation.

Omar said he had "not received any letter" from Afghan President Hamid Karzai or from the Saudis about possible talks.

Karzai said last month he would go to "any length" to protect Omar in exchange for peace, even if that meant defying Kabul's international partners.



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli soldiers escort blindfolded and handcuffed Palestinian men who were caught trying to cross the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel near Kibbutz Kissufim on Monday. Hamas agreed Tuesday to hold fire against Israel for 24 hours, but warned it would resume suicide attacks if the Jewish state launched an offensive against its Gaza stronghold.

Giant pandas make historic trip to Taiwan amid eased China ties

AFP, Taipei

Two giant pandas made their long-anticipated, groundbreaking trip from China to Taiwan yesterday, in the latest sign of fast thawing ties between the two former bitter rivals.

Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan, both four, landed at 5:03 pm (0903 GMT) after a flight of more than two-and-a-half hours from Chengdu, the capital of China's Sichuan province.

"They are finally brought to Taipei after so many years of efforts. This marked another step forward in the cross-strait civil exchanges," said Yang Hsiao-tung, the Taipei city government spokesman who led a delegation to China Monday to bring the animals to Taiwan.

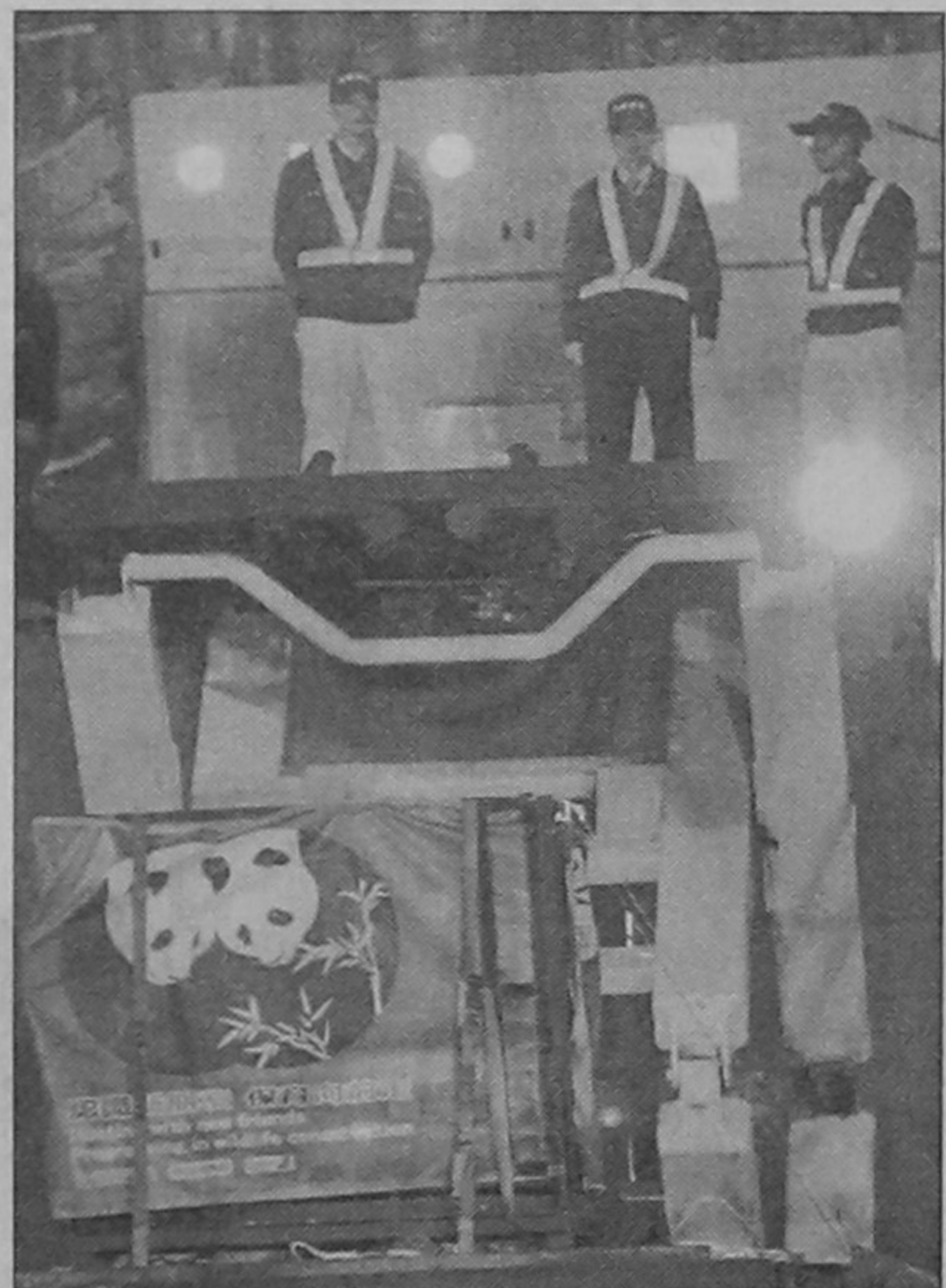


PHOTO: AFP

A forklift unloads a carton containing a giant panda from a charter jet upon its arrival at Taoyuan airport, northern Taiwan, from China's Sichuan province yesterday. A pair of giant pandas arrived in Taiwan from southwest China on a historic mission amid warming ties between the two sides.

11 aspirants

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Hafiz Ibrahim of Bhola, Awami League's ASM Firoz Alam of Barisal and Sazzatuj Jumma of Jhenidah and Liberal Democratic Party's M Yakub Ali of Chittagong lost their candidatures.

The others, all independent aspirants, are Md Jahur Hossain, Yusuf Ali Chisty, Mahmud uz-Zaman, Hafez Habib Ullah and Sarfuddin Ahmed.

EC's counsel Shahdeen Malik told The Daily Star that the SC rejected their appeals on grounds that there was no scope to move writ petitions at the High Court against the Election Commission's decisions regarding holding of the polls if the questions of quorum non-judice and malice in law are not raised.

These candidates can no longer contest the December 29 poll.

Shahdeen Malik also said that the HC earlier upheld EC's decisions cancelling the nomination papers of these candidates on different grounds, including conviction against them in criminal cases and for being bank loan defaulters.

Meanwhile, the chamber judge yesterday rejected an appeal filed by Syed Abul Hossain Babla, a grand alliance candidate for Dhaka-5, who was seeking allocation of the 'boat' as election symbol for himself.

The judge also rejected the appeal of BNP candidate Abdul Gafur of Comilla-10 who appealed for the 'sheaf of paddy' election symbol.

Mohammad Shahjahan, a BNP candidate for Chandpur-4 constituency, told the Daily Star yesterday that the chamber judge yesterday rejected an appeal filed by his rival, BNP candidate Harun-ur Rashid, to stay the High Court order, which had earlier directed the EC to accept Shahjahan's nomination paper.

"Since the Appellate Division has rejected the appeal filed by Harun-ur Rashid, I am now the only valid candidate for BNP for the Chandpur-4 seat," Shahjahan said.

ADP still slow

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Only 18 percent of the ADP was implemented during July-November period this year and 16 per cent during the corresponding period last year.

According to a report of Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Department (IMED) of the planning ministry, of the Tk25,600 crore ADP for FY 09, only Tk4,520 crore programmes were implemented until November.

In FY08, only Tk 4,173 crore programmes of the Tk 26,500 crore ADP were implemented until November.

Floods and cyclone Sidr affected ADP implementation last year, planning ministry officials said.

Government bank borrowing this fiscal year however does match with ADP execution. It took almost 60 percent of the targeted bank borrowing this year for implementing the ADP in the first five months.

The central bank data show that until December 3, government borrowed Tk 8,004 crore from banks against its annual

target of Tk13,498 crore.

Experts said the government's concentration on easing political situation to ensure free and fair national elections in time mainly affected ADP implementation.

"The mid-fiscal year transition due to preparation for national elections and settling down of the newly elected government could have adverse effect on the overall ADP implementation performance in FY09," observed Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), a local think tank.

In a report on 'State of the Bangladesh Economy in the run-up to the National Election 2008' released yesterday, the CPD also said hence reaching a reasonable ADP implementation level -- usually 80 percent to 85 percent -- by the end of FY09, will be a challenge for the new government.

Notwithstanding the obvious concerns, delivering a reasonable level of ADP will be crucial, particularly considering its implications for employment creation, poverty alleviation, generating domestic demand and meeting public investment demand to sustain growth, the CPD report said.

In implementing the ADP in the first five months of this fiscal year, Tk 2,670 crore or 20 percent was spent from local resources and Tk1,833 crore or 15 percent from donors' assistance.

ADP implementation of the large 10 ministries and divisions who get about 80 percent of the allocation also seems gloomy.

The IMED data show that ADP execution by the agriculture ministry was 20 percent, that of water resources ministry nine percent, health and family welfare 13 percent, local government 27 percent, communication nine percent, primary and mass education 21 percent and education ministry 36 percent, energy and mineral resource division three percent, power division 20 percent and post and telecom 10 percent.

Crime, politics made rickshaw garage

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parliament on a BNP-led four-party ticket, earns nearly Tk 1 crore annually and has a huge amount of cash deposits, shares, and properties worth over Tk 37 crore, reveals his wealth statement submitted to the Election Commission (EC) with his nomination papers.

He also owns a number of business establishments and lands in various places in and around the city, says the disclosure.

The former president of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the erstwhile student wing of BNP, said in his statement that his annual earning is Tk 97.56 lakh while his expenditure is Tk 2.70 lakh.

Pintu, who first became a lawmaker by winning the 2001 parliamentary election in the area on a BNP ticket,

said the major chunk of his earnings comes from his savings and shares while Tk 10.18 lakh and Tk 52,700 come from his businesses and houses respectively.

His wife, Nasima Akhter, is also wealthy enough. She earns about Tk 11 lakh annually while her total wealth amounts to Tk 3 crore.

The long list of Pintu's assets mentions he has Tk 17 crore invested in various financial instruments like fixed deposit receipts (FDR), bonds, shares and different other securities such as savings certificates. He has Tk 1.16 crore in cash, and vehicles worth Tk 68.74 lakh.

He estimated the value of his 26.93 bigha land at Tk 2.04 crore while the value of his two tin-shed houses were estimated at Tk 56.23 lakh. He is the proprietor of Asha

Enterprise, the director of Diamond Bread House, and the managing director of Diamond Spinning Mills Ltd.

He reportedly started with a small makeshift rickshaw garage built illegally on a land that he had encroached upon in Hazaribagh area in the late 1980s.

In the '90s he became a follower of former Awami League (AL) lawmaker of the area, Haji Selim, and got promoted to the major league of unlawful activities, including extortion.

Later, Pintu deserted Selim and formed his own gang of hooligans in Old Dhaka and joined JCD. He started earning notoriety through extortion and illegal grabbing of lands, while he was the Dhaka city unit leader of JCD.

He managed to climb to the posts of the general secretary and the president of JCD, despite being the thug he was.

He and his gang were responsible for a number of gun battles and killings on Dhaka University campus during the last AL regime.

A total of eight cases, including for murders, were filed against Pintu during that period but he was acquitted in all of them.

Since the launching of the anti-graft drive by the current military backed caretaker government, 11 criminal cases were filed against him on a plethora of charges including tax evasion, extortion, and amassing of illegal wealth.

He was subsequently exonerated from two of the cases, and was granted bail in the remaining nine. Now in jail, he might come out any time, many fear. He maintains

control over his criminal gang from jail, JCD sources said.

Although there is widespread doubts about Pintu's educational qualification, he claims he has a master's degree in commerce, while his followers claim although he studied only up to class V, he 'managed' a certificate of higher education from Jagannath College.

He will spend Tk 14 lakh in his election campaign, he declared in the statement, Tk 5 lakh of which will come from his own pocket while he will get Tk 4 lakh from his cousin Harun-ur Rashid, and another Tk 5 lakh from his brother Nasim Ahmed.

Known as a notorious godfather of thugs, Pintu owes Tk 7.45 crore to individuals and financial institutions.

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victims of a conspiracy. We would file appeals with the High Court soon."

Three persons--Special Branch Assistant Sub-Inspector Kamal Uddin, Habibur Rahman Habib and college student Zobayer Ahmed Rubel--were killed while the Bangladesh-born British high commissioner was hurt along with about 70 others in the grenade attack after Juma prayers on May 21, 2004 on the Hazrat Shah Jalal (R) shrine premises in Sylhet city.

According to prosecution records, Mufti Hannan and a few others had held a secret meeting at Badda in the capital and plotted to kill Anwar Choudhury Hannan supplied a grenade to Huji operatives Bipul and Ripon, who brought it to Sylhet in a coffin carrier.

The Huji men offered Juma prayers at the shrine and Ripon hurled the grenade at the British high commissioner who was advancing towards the main gate.

A few days after the cases

were filed--one for killing and another under the Explosives Act, those were transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) as police failed to gather any clue.

On June 7 last year, CID's Senior ASP Munshi Atiqur Rahman filed two charge sheets against four persons--Mufti Hannan, his brother Mofizur Rahman and Huji operatives Ripon and Bipul.

Later, the CID got information about others' involvement and started further investigation. Inspector Zobayer Ahmed filed supplementary charge sheets in the cases on March 11 this year against another Huji operative Abu Zandal.

On July 12 last year, the Sylhet district judge acquitted 20 accused caught after the incident as their names were dropped from the charge sheet of the murder case.

The then judge of the tribunal, Diproman Sarkar, started the trial on August 13, 2007 but he was transferred on January 27 this year without any replacement and the trial was

pending for nine months.

Judge Shamim Mohammad Afzal resumed the trial on November 5 and arguments in the case were completed on December 17.

Examining the records and deposition of 56 prosecution witnesses, Judge Shamim Mohammad Afzal yesterday convicted Mufti Hannan of Hiron village of Kotapara upazila in Golapganj, Bipul of Moishadi village under Chandpur Sadar and Ripon of Konagaon village under Kulara upazila in Moulvibazar. He awarded them death sentence and fined each of them Tk 10,000.

Besides awarding life term to Muhibullah and Abu Zandal, the judge also fined them Tk 10,000 each, in default of which they will have to spend one year more in prison.

Pronouncing the judgment, the judge asked the convicts to file appeals in 30 days.

The case filed under the Explosives Act is under trial at the additional district and sessions judge's court, Sylhet.