

AL-QAEDA THREAT

PM's security beefed up

HASAN JAHID TUSHER, from BNS Bangabandhu, Bay of Bengal

Security of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been beefed up following the threat issued through an audiovisual message purportedly by al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri on Saturday.

PM's security adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique told this to journalists yesterday at Bangladesh Navy warship BNS Bangabandhu in the Bay of Bengal after the completion of the Navy's 16-day Exercise Sea Thunder 2014.

The government, said the adviser, has already traced the location from where the threat was made, but it would not disclose the location for strategic reasons.

In the message, the al-Qaeda chief urged the Muslims in Bangladesh to wage an Intifada (popular uprising) to confront the "crusader onslaught against Islam".

On the last day of its annual exercise, the navy yesterday fired missiles, rocket

depth charge and mortars. Some 70 warships along with several hundred naval officers and personnel took part in the exercise that began on February 2.

The surface-to-surface missiles were launched from the frigate BNS Uttal and Durbar, while the surface-to-air missiles were fired from the frigate BNS Bangabandhu.

Most of the naval ships, including frigates, offshore patrol vessels, mine-sweepers, patrol boats, gun boats, torpedo boats and newly inducted maritime patrol aircraft, participated in the exercise.

Senior officers of the three armed services witnessed the exercise.

Naval chief Vice Admiral Farid Habib said they firmly believe that the navy will become a three-dimensional force within five to ten years.

"The navy is now making drones, which will be used to trace any illegal ships within our sea territory in future to gain absolute control over our maritime boundary," he mentioned.



A ship fires a missile during an annual exercise of Bangladesh Navy in the Bay of Bengal yesterday. Inset, warships returning to the shore as the 16-day Exercise Sea Thunder 2014 concludes.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Titas cuts

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Locals of Mouchak said the illegal connections in Kaliyakoira area were set up in broad daylight and some local ruling party men and people belonging to the BNP-led alliance helped people obtain illegal gas connections in exchange for money.

People who obtained the illegal connections said they had paid Tk 60,000 to 1.5 lakh for a single gas connection. A number of Titas officials were also involved in supplying gas to homes illegally, they claimed.

Titas official Saiful Islam at Chandra said they would take departmental actions if they find any involvement of their staffs in the illegal act.

The government had stopped issuing new connections in mid-2010 following a daily supply-demand shortfall of around 500 million cubic feet of gas.

However, late last year, the government made legitimate nearly one lakh illegal gas connections that had been obtained after the government stopped issuing new connections.

This encouraged people to have illegal gas connections.

Md Nowshad Islam, managing director of the Titas, said no illegal lines would be spared during the drive. "We will conduct drives if the illegal lines are set up again. The lines connected to the network of Titas Gas are totally unacceptable."

In another drive, a team of Titas disconnected gas connections to Nayeem Restaurant and nine households in Ashulia. The team also removed around 150 feet of pipes from the area.

11 back home

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Employment and Training (BMET).

They spent their savings and had passed dreadful days during their confinement at the camp as they lacked adequate food and proper accommodation.

Some workers were beaten up by the employer when they asked him to either provide them with job or arrange their return trip to Bangladesh.

"I lost my money and also the confidence of my parents. Even my health deteriorated at the camp in last several months," said Shyamal Das, a 27-year-old from Munshiganj.

Local recruiter Meghna Trade International had sent him to Iraq with the promise of a job in a construction company.

"Yes, we had an employer but he turned into a tyrant as he could not offer us any job. When I asked the Iraqi man to send me back home, he beat me up," he added.

Shafiqul Islam of Tangail said, "We got a loaf of bread for breakfast and two meals of rice and lentils a day. So we were becoming sick gradually but we couldn't ask for any medicine."

The workers demanded compensation for their loss and suffering from the four recruiting agencies, which had sent them to Iraq.

The nine other ill-fated workers are Ilias Hossain and Saidul Islam of Faridpur, Humayun Kabir, Mosharraf Hossain, and Mohammad Yusuf of Tangail, Rubel Miah of Mymensingh, Abdur Rahim of Noakhali and Abul Kalam Azad and Mir Kasem of Naogaon.

The 11 workers, along with 16 other Bangladeshis, went to the Middle Eastern country between January and March last year through four Bangladeshi recruiting agencies -- Morning Sun Enterprise,

Meghna Trade International, East Bengal Overseas and Idea International. Each of them had spent about Tk 4 lakh for landing an Iraqi job with a monthly salary of \$350.

But their Iraqi employer failed to start his construction project and kept them in the camp, restricting their movement.

Talking to The Daily Star, BMET Director General Begum Shamsun Nahar said they would realise compensation from the recruiting agencies and take legal action against the owners of the firms.

REPATRIATION OF WORKERS

Of the 27 workers, 11 returned home on November 30 last year, while two fled the camp. Their whereabouts are still unknown.

Following demonstrations by the returnees and their relatives on January 22, Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain held a meeting with the representatives of the workers.

The minister assured them of bringing all 14 migrant workers back home.

The Bangladesh embassy in Iraq communicated with the Iraqi government to send the workers home.

Yesterday, 11 workers returned home, but two others were barred from boarding a plane at Najaf airport on Sunday as they lacked necessary documents, said the returnees.

Besides, one more Bangladeshi has been missing since he was taken away by the employer from the camp to an unknown place recently.

Meanwhile, victim Shafiqul Islam filed a case with Airport Police Station yesterday against recruiters Morning Sun Enterprise, Meghna Trade International and Bangladesh Migrants Foundation under the anti-human trafficking act.

Hurdles

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The decision to drop Bangladesh from the list came at the FATF's plenary on February 13, following a review of the country's progress under the time-bound action plan provided by the global body in October 2010.

The government has fulfilled most of the 28 tasks that include criminalising money laundering and terrorist financing, establishing and implementing procedures to identify and freeze terrorist assets, and implementing procedures for confiscating funds related to money laundering.

As part of its efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist funding, the government set up Financial Intelligence Unit, headed by Hasan, to detect suspicious transactions and coordinate with government agencies.

In November last year, a team of FATF's Asia-Pacific Regional Review Group visited Bangladesh to verify the government measures.

"The FATF welcomes Bangladesh's significant progress in improving its AML/CFT [anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism] regime and notes that Bangladesh has established the legal and regulatory framework to meet its commitments in its action plan regarding the strategic deficiencies that the FATF had identified in October 2010," the watchdog said in a statement.

"Bangladesh is therefore no longer subject to FATF's monitoring process under its on-going global AML/CFT compliance process," it added.

Tender on for 'last'

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in early March, the tender would be opened on April 1, and the PDB aimed at completing the tender within May.

"Of course when we open the bids we will declare the lowest 'read out' prices of the bidders. But that would not determine the lowest responsive bidder. We will then technically evaluate their proposals and evaluate the total financial package to determine the actual lowest responsive bidder as per the tender terms and conditions," he noted.

The PDB official added the organisation floated tender for around 10 public sector power projects in similar manner in 2009. "All of those power plants have come into operation, mostly within the deadline," he pointed out.

However, the PDB in 2009 actually could not award all the 10 power projects in one go, and a few had to be re-

tendered.

Insiders say the one-envelope tender system would create the scopes for inefficient bidders to bag the deal quoting low price by influencing the PDB in different ways to overlook their technical shortcomings.

A remarkable aspect of this project is financing it under the PDB's "Maintenance and Development Fund" that was opened in mid-2011. This fund was opened as per a directive of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission and is powered by monthly deposit from a part of PDB's power sales.

PDB officials say the fund currently has around Tk 1,600 crore. "Every month it is increasing by Tk 50-60 crore," an official informed.

"We would need to pay to the South Bibiyana contractor after one year of signing of the contract. Therefore, there would not be any problem financing it," the official added.

Section 144 clamped

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people. The move led to second thoughts about the next day's programme among some students, who were of the view that Section 144 should not be violated. Indeed, twenty of the twenty four members of the All-Party State Language Committee of Action voted to call off the strike scheduled for 21 February. The remaining four did not agree with the majority.

The action committee's decision to back down in the face of Section 144

met with a negative response from the larger body of general students of Dhaka University. The situation reached a stage where the action committee felt it necessary to place the entire matter of the strike and Section 144 before the students for a final decision.

On the eve of February 21, it was tension which gripped not only the university campus but the entire city of Dhaka as well. The moment of reckoning was fast approaching.

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