

# JMB man held with explosives

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg**

Police arrested a leader of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) with explosives and grenade-making materials in Chittagong city yesterday.

The arrestee, Ershad Hossain Mamun, is a regional commander of JMB's Chittagong district unit.

At Akbar Shah Police Station, he confessed before the media that many activists were running the outfit's activities under the guise of hawkers.

Some of them are also involved in cosmetics, stationery and food businesses in the city, he said.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of police conducted a drive in Baganbari area around 7:30am and arrested Ershad from a rented house.

Grenade-making materials, a detonator, 200gm gunpowder, 250gm potassium, three crude bombs, electronic cables and jihadi books were recovered from the house, said OC Sajib Kumar Das.

Talking before the media, Ershad, son of Riyajul Islam of Birol in Dinajpur, said he had been an active member of Shibir since his school life.

With the help of Shibir leaders, he met the members of the JMB whose aim is to establish an Islamic state across India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, he said.

In January 2014, Ershad came to Chittagong taking the responsibility of a JMB organiser. He also took a job at a stationary shop in Colonel Hat area.

Many members of the outfit took training in Pakistan, Ershad told the newsmen.

After his arrest, senior officials of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP), including Commissioner Abdul Jalil Mandal, interrogated Ershad for about three hours.

The JMB leader confessed that the outfit had connections with Harkatul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji), Jamaat-e-Islami and other militant groups in the country and abroad, police sources said.

Nowadays militant groups are working collectively with an aim to attack the members of law enforcement agencies, said the CMP commissioner.

He added their drive to nab the militants would continue.



**Detained JMB leader Ershad Hossain with bomb-making materials and jihadi books recovered from a house in New Monsurabad Baganbari residential area of Chittagong. Inset, three detonators that were also recovered during the police swoop yesterday.**

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

# CITY CORPORATION POLLS EC urged to ensure level-playing field

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Election Working Group (EWG) yesterday urged the Election Commission (EC) to take necessary steps for ensuring a level-playing field for the candidates of upcoming Dhaka and Chittagong city corporation polls.

It pushed for ensuring sufficient security measures to alleviate the tense political situation, which is causing fear and anxiety among the voters.

The EWG, a platform of 28 civil society organisations that works on election and democracy, made the call at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital.

Although the city corporation elections are non-partisan in nature, different political parties are announcing names of their party leaders as mayoral aspirants. The commission should take action against this, said a statement of the EWG.

It also criticised the EC citing that the commission hardly takes any action against mayoral and councillor aspirants for violating electoral code of conduct.

"Absence of implementation of laws encourages the aspirants to violate electoral code of conducts," the statement read.

Public trust on the country's electoral system is declining after the one-sided parliamentary election on January 5, and upazila parishad elections in 2014. To regain public trust, the commission must play a transparent and impartial role in every step of upcoming elections, EWG Director Abdul Alim said while reading out the statement.

The EWG also demanded deployment of female polling officers at every polling booth and comprehensive training for the polling officials.

In response to a question on the necessity of deployment of army, the EWG Steering Committee Member Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah said the EC would take the decision considering law and order situation at that time.

Taleya Rehman, another member of the EWG steering committee, chaired the programme while several members of the organisation spoke on the occasion.

The elections to Dhaka and Chittagong city corporation polls will be held on April 28.

# Can Khaleda become game changer?

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candidates had won the mayoral posts in Dhaka and Chittagong while BNP favourites won in Rajshahi and Khulna city corporations.

However, it's also possible that voters in the capital will find it very difficult to remember those days in 1994 when they had last exercised their democratic rights to elect a mayor.

People who have obtained voting rights after 1994 do not have any memory of such a city election. This is because the DCC has become the victim of partisan politics and its elections could not be held on time.

The second DCC election was held in early 2002 when the BNP-led alliance was in power. But the then main opposition AL had not allowed its leaders to contest the polls, letting BNP men get elected almost uncontested. In that election, voters were not

required to exercise their rights to elect the city mayor.

The tenure of the corporation formed in the 2002 polls expired in the middle of 2007. But no election was held for various reasons. Finally, the DCC was split into two at the end of 2011. Since then both the corporations have been run by administrators. People did not have any say in the process.

Against this backdrop, the elections to the two city corporations in Dhaka along with the one in Chittagong on April 28 come with immense political significance.

This time the situation is, however, different than what it had been in 1994 during the maiden DCC election.

Back then, both Hasina and Khaleda were able to join the battle seeking support for their party-backed mayoral candidates.

This time, however, electoral laws

prevent Hasina and senior leaders of her party holding ministerial posts or office of profit from electioneering for their party-blessed mayoral aspirants.

The Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, has endorsed its candidates in the three city polls. But neither JP Chairman Ershad nor Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad will be able to campaign for their party-backed candidates in the mayoral race. It is because both Ershad and Raushan are holding office of profit.

The battleground of ballot, however, welcomes Khaleda. She and all her party men and also her party-led alliance leaders are free to campaign for their candidates. They will not face any legal restriction to step openly in the battlefield of ballots to drum up people's support for mayoral aspirants backed by the BNP-led alliance.

The BNP-led alliance will face no hurdle for around three weeks during

electioneering to bring out processions and rallies in the capital and Chittagong. Khaleda and none of her party-led alliance leaders hold any office of profit in parliament as they boycotted the January 5 parliamentary election. Thus the city polls offer the BNP ample opportunity to reorganise the party.

Once Khaleda will ask her party men to join the city polls, mercury in the political landscape will keep rising. Various issues of national importance are likely to dominate the electoral campaigns. The outcome of the battle of ballots will determine largely the popularity of both the sides.

The 1994 polls in the DCC were a struggle for the existence of the then main opposition AL. For the BNP it was a fight for consolidation of power and self-assertion. This time, however, the outcome of the battle will just be the opposite.

# Swimming training must for students

**Education ministry's proposal**

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Students of schools, colleges, madrasas and technical institutes will have to take swimming training as part of their regular academic activities.

The education ministry made the decision and posted a draft circular on its website yesterday, seeking public opinion.

Quoting a Unicef study done on children aged between five and 17, the circular said more than 48 children drown every day (about 18,000 kids every year) in the country as they cannot swim.

"That's why the government has decided to introduce swimming training at all higher secondary, secondary and junior secondary schools, equivalent madrasas and technical educa-

# MISSING SALAHUDDIN Police form probe body

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Dhaka Metropolitan Police recently formed a three-member committee to investigate whether BNP Joint Secretary General Salahuddin Ahmed had gone missing or went into hiding.

The committee has started working but it is yet to find any specific information to this end, Monirul Islam, joint commissioner of Detective Branch, DMP said at DMP media centre yesterday.

Seeking anonymity, a deputy commissioner of the DMP told The Daily Star that the committee, headed by DMP Joint Commissioner (Crime and Operation) Mir Rezaul Alam, was formed four to five days ago. The two other members are Uttara Division DC Iqbal Hossain and DB (north) DC Shaikh Nazmul Islam.

# North smooth, South not BNP looks



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The PM hoped all the political parties would participate in the April 28 elections to the two Dhaka city corporations and Chittagong City Corporation, according to the sources.

On February 26, Hasina, also the AL chief, decided to back former FBCCI president Annisul Huq in Dhaka North and Sayeed Khokon, son of late Dhaka mayor Mohammad Hanif, in Dhaka South as mayor candidates.

Her decision sparked an open discord among party leaders.

A number of AL leaders said neither Annisul nor Khokon had a rich political career. As a result, both will suffer a serious setback in case a BNP-sponsored contender took part in the polls.

Most city AL leaders oppose Khokon's candidacy mainly for his controversial role in 2007 when he joined the Progressive Democratic Party, launched by Ferdous Ahmed Qureshi during the political changeover.

Moreover, despite being the organising secretary of the city AL, Khokon is inactive in the party, insiders said.

In Dhaka North, city AL Vice-president and Dhaka-15 MP Kamal Ahmed Majumder had started campaigning as mayor candidate, but he recently decided to quit the race on Hasina's instructions.

"The leader [Hasina] told me that it's not decent for me to run in the city polls as I'm an MP," Kamal told The Daily Star.

But in the South, Haji Selim, also an MP, remains firm about running.

He said he would resign from parliament on March 28 to take part in the city election.

"Many people in my area say they will commit suicide if I don't run in the city polls," he claimed.

On Sunday night, Khokon went to Selim's Nazirabazar residence to seek his blessings but failed, as Selim was not home.

Selim told this correspondent that he did not know Khokon would visit his home.

But Selim is not the only challenge Khokon faces. Recently, a private bank wrote to the Election Commission that Khokon was a loan defaulter, and requested the commission to consider the matter while scrutinising the nomination papers.

Under the law, a loan defaulter cannot run in polls.

Asked about this, Khokon said he already sold his Banani house to repay the loan of over Tk 100 crore with Premier Bank.

"Now I have no problem in contesting the polls," he said.

Khondker Fazle Rashid, managing director of the bank, said Khokon was yet to pay back the loan but the process to this end already started.

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correspondent that the party is looking for suitable, dedicated and loyal candidates, who have a strong possibility of winning the polls.

The BNP chairperson wants to be sure that the government and the Election Commission are sincere in holding free and fair elections in Dhaka North and South, and Chittagong city corporations scheduled for April 28.

Once the party picks competent candidates, BNP high-ups will press the EC to make arrangements for deploying army in the elections, said a senior party leader.

A BNP delegation is likely to visit the EC to discuss a number of issues that include inviting foreign observers to monitor the city polls and giving bail to detained party leaders who are prospective candidates, said party insiders.

"Madam [Khaleda] wants that the authorities create a level-playing field in the local body elections," said a party source.

According to the polls schedule, all mayoral and councillor aspirants have to file nomination papers by March 29. It means the BNP has six days to pick candidates of its choice.

Sources close to Khaleda said she has chosen her adviser Abdul Awal Mintoo as mayoral candidate in Dhaka North.

"But she [Khaleda] is in a dilemma over selecting a mayoral candidate in Dhaka South, as the party leader of her choice, Mirza Abbas, is facing a number of cases," said another party source.

"Madam has asked a team of senior BNP leaders, which includes Nazrul Islam Khan and Khandaker Muhib Hossain, to find a competent and trusted candidate in Dhaka South."

She has also sought suggestions from senior party leaders and former Dhaka city mayors Sadeque Hossain Khoka and Mirza Abbas.

Over the last three days, Khaleda called her adviser and Chittagong city BNP President Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury at least twice, asking him to contest for the mayoral post in the Chittagong City Corporation elections.

At first, he agreed but later changed his mind, said sources close to Khasru.

If Khasru decides not to contest the CCC polls, Khaleda might pick existing mayor M Manjur Alam, also her adviser, as mayoral candidate.

The BNP chairperson has assigned three teams to select a single councillor candidate in every ward of the three city corporations, said party sources.

# Consultant set to become builder

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population in the east side and promote "One City and Two Towns" development model adopted by Shanghai, the largest city in China.

The tunnel is also necessary because heavy siltation on the Karnaphuli riverbed is a major threat for proper functioning of Chittagong Port and also for building new bridges. The existing two bridges are inadequate to accommodate the rapidly increasing huge traffic flow.

The eastern side of Chittagong across the Karnaphuli is abundant with heavy industries. If the planned deep-sea port is built in Sonadia, the cargo traffic through Chittagong is likely to increase significantly.

The Karnaphuli tunnel project will take four years to complete from the date of signing the agreement.

During the prime minister's visit to China in June last year, an MoU was signed between the communications ministry of Bangladesh and the commerce ministry of China stating that the "Chinese side would support capable and reputable enterprises" in the tunnel project.

However, it did not mention the CCCC.

But in December, the BBA signed an MoU with the CCCC for the tunnel's construction. And in January, the road transport and bridges ministry asked the CCCC to submit a detailed commercial proposal while seeking concessional loan from China.

The Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Chinese embassy in Dhaka indicated that the project would be funded by China, but Bangladesh should begin negotiations for a commercial contract with the CCCC.

"Awarding construction contract to the same project's consultant is unusual anywhere in the world," notes a Bangladesh government official, adding that multilateral financiers like the Asian Development Bank or the World Bank specifically prohibited such practices.

Speaking anonymously, the official said the authorities were bending the rules due to the influence of a former Awami League minister. A company run by the former minister's family was unofficially acting as the CCCC's agent and representing some other Chinese companies in Bangladesh, the official added.

The CCCC and its affiliated company China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) were black-listed for corruption for eight years by the World Bank in 2009.

The ex-minister holds such strong influence over the government that his family company represents both the Chinese companies that were awarded the Padma Bridge construction and the Padma river training projects.

Besides, his family-run company is currently involved in the following projects: Khulna 150 megawatt Simple Cycle (Isolux-Spain), Khulna 75MW Upgrade (Shanghai Electric), Sirajganj 335MW Combined Cycle Power (Isolux-Samsung), Ghorashal Re-Powering (Alstom), Sylhet 150MW Peaking Plant (Shanghai Electric), Bibiyana South (Isolux-Samsung), Locomotive Supply under Korean EDCF Funding (Daewoo International), and Dhaka-Chittagong four-lane (Sinohydro).

# Ebola outbreak over by August: UN

**BBC ONLINE**

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa will be over by August, the head of the UN Ebola mission has told the BBC.

Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed admitted the UN had made mistakes in handling the crisis early on, sometimes acting "arrogantly".

A year after the outbreak was offi-

cially declared, the virus has killed more than 10,000 people.

The medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres says a "global coalition of inaction" led to tragic consequences.

Looking back over the year, the charity suggests its early calls for help were ignored by local governments and the World Health Organization.