

IGP rules out IS existence in Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque yesterday said there was no organisational existence of terrorist outfit Islamic State (IS) in Bangladesh.

"Anyone may personally believe in their (IS) ideology. But we will not let our country become a terrorist state," he said at a quarterly crime conference at the police headquarters in the capital.

"We will thwart all conspiracies that are being hatched for our country," the police chief said.

In a press release, Shahidul said the police previously had achieved success in curbing militancy, extremism and other criminal activities and it would have to maintain the success.

He urged his subordinates to remain alert so that banned militant outfits like Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji) cannot regroup in the country with different names.

The recent killings of two foreigners were also discussed in the meeting attended by the deputy inspector general and high-ranking police officials from across the country.

On September 28, Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella was gunned down in Gulshan while Japanese national Hoshi Kunio was shot to death in Rangpur on Saturday.

He asked the police officials concerned to immediately bring the killers to book.

The meeting also discussed the security of foreign nationals staying in the country.

Seeking anonymity, an official of the police headquarters said the police boss asked the officers to strictly follow his previous instruction to collect intelligence about foreigners residing in the country.

In another meeting with Hindu community leaders, the police chief said adequate security measures have been taken to ensure peaceful observation of Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindus.

Law enforcers were directed to remain alert so that no quarter could make any trouble or create possibility to deteriorate law and order during the celebration, the IGP said, adding that the vulnerable puja mandaps would be kept under foolproof security.



A DB team arresting Javed, suspected commander of JMB Chittagong unit, and two other members of the outlawed militant outfit at a building in Chittagong city's Khoyaz Nagar on Monday night. The next morning, Javed was killed in a "grenade explosion" during a raid by law enforcers on a militants' den in the city's Bayazid area. Right, grenades and bomb-making materials seized from the building in Khoyaz Nagar.

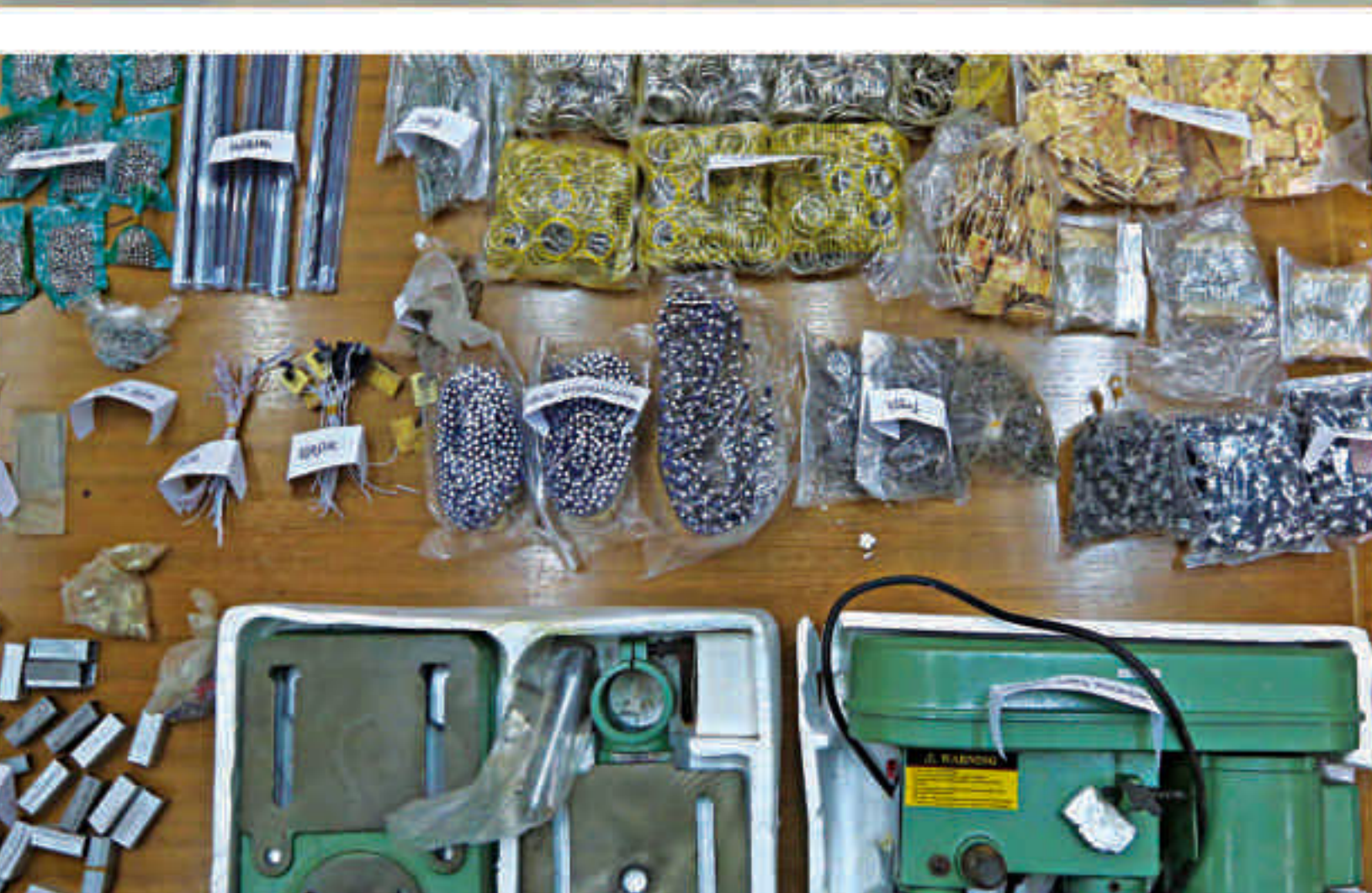


PHOTO: STAR

Teachers threaten non-stop strike

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Teachers Association (FBUTA) at a central committee meeting at Dhaka University decided to go for the non-stop agitation.

A 15-member FBUTA delegation, led by Prof Farid, met Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid at the latter's office at the secretariat around 3:30pm. It was the second meeting between the minister and the university teachers since the cabinet approved the eighth national pay scale on September 7.

"We categorically said that we are not waging a movement for salaries and allowances. Rather, we want to ensure our dignity. The teachers would not accept if their dignity is compromised," Prof Farid said.

He said they are concerned about students' education and do not want their studies and exams get disrupted. "But we're under pressure from the teachers. Five months have passed. If no solution is reached after six months, things will be out of our control."

The teachers said their main

demand is a separate pay scale. If the government forms a commission to implement the pay scale, there would be permanent solution to the problem, they observed.

The minister said he learnt about the teachers' demands and will take them to the cabinet committee of which he is also a member.

"Once the finance minister returns home from abroad, a meeting of the committee will be convened. I will present and discuss our teachers' demands there," mentioned Nahid.

The government on September 18 reconstituted the committee to review the complaints of discrimination in the eighth pay scale.

Nahid said he will try to do everything possible to keep the dignity of teachers unimpaired as the government gives utmost priority to them.

Asked whether he agrees with the teachers' four-point demand, the minister said he would not have sat with the teachers if he had not agreed on the demands.

Queried whether the teachers have any reservation over the finance minister being at the helm of the cabinet committee, Prof ASM Maksud Kamal, secretary general of FBUTA, said they would greet the committee if their demands are met by October 31.

Teachers of all 37 public universities under the banner of FBUTA have been staging protests since May to press home their demands.

They intensified their agitation after the approval of the national pay scale as they complained that the post of selection grade professors (senior teachers) has been abolished in the new pay structure, although bureaucrats have got a special grade for themselves.

The teachers demanded revision of the pay scale and fixing of salaries of senior professors in grade-1, professors in grade-2, associate professors in grade-3, and assistant professors in grade-4 until the government formulates a separate pay structure for them.

Every step taken

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and verify the reported claim of Islamic State (IS) that it was behind the murders.

"We asked for the open-minded approach regarding the possible IS involvement in the two recent tragedies," a diplomatic mission chief told The Daily Star. "As you understand, your government said that there is as of now no evidence to support the IS element in these cases."

Asked whether the diplomatic missions created any sort of pressure during their deliberations, he said, "Not really but diplomatically."

Another mission chief told this correspondent that there was no comment from the Italian side, but Japanese Ambassador Masato Watanabe asked the government "to clear clouds of doubt over the murders of the two foreign nationals."

The Japanese envoy suggested that there should be collaboration with the international community in this regard.

Several other diplomats, including US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat, UK High Commissioner Robert Gibson and EU Ambassador Pierre Mayaudon, also spoke on the occasion.

"We talked about additional and tightening of security measures everywhere and thanked Bangladesh government for the measures already in place," British High Commissioner Robert Gibson, who is also the dean of Diplomatic Corps in Bangladesh, told reporters after the hour-long briefing, held at the state guesthouse Padma.

Attended by some 45 ambassadors, high commissioners and charge d'affaires from different missions, the briefing was jointly organised by the ministries of foreign and home.

Talking to reporters, Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali said the government is confident that the perpetrators will be brought to book and "best efforts are in place". And it is doing everything to make sure that foreign nationals feel safe and secure in Bangladesh.

Asked if the US shared information beforehand about attacks, the minister said, "Yes, it was there but it didn't happen as per the information. Those who commit such crimes say one thing but do something else. This is how they operate."

Responding to another query, he said they do not yet have any credible information about any IS link. "We don't have any proof. We don't have any credible information," he said.

"The US is also working to verify the claim," the minister added, referring to US Ambassador Marcia Bernicat's statement that they are in the process of knowing whether those claims were accurate.

According to a foreign ministry press release, Mahmood Ali at the briefing said it was regrettable that when Bangladesh was being globally lauded for its impressive socio-economic development, as seen in the United Nations last week, certain quarters were once again out to destabilise the situation to discredit the country, the government and the people.

Talking to reporters, British High Commissioner Robert Gibson said the government gave them a "full picture" of what the government is doing after the two incidents. He also said that as the dean of Diplomatic Corps, he requested the government for the updates.

He said they have been assured by the government of a fair and professional investigation into the matters.

Responding to a question, the diplomat also said the government assured them of bringing the killers to justice after a fair probe. "We're assured by the government that no stone will be left unturned."

The diplomats at the briefing expressed gratitude for the additional security measures taken in the diplomatic zone, he said, adding they all look forward to working closely with each other to address the risks here in Bangladesh and across the globe.

Speaking at the briefing, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan shared the status of investigations into the two murder cases and reaffirmed the government's resolve to find out the real motives and capture the assailants.

"The government is giving the highest priority to the arrest of the killers of Cesare Tavella and Kunio

STEPS TO ENSURE FOREIGNERS' SECURITY

- Security in diplomatic area of Dhaka city and all over the country has been strengthened.
- The number of check posts, vehicle checking teams and mobile teams have been increased.
- Plainclothes duty teams have been increased in diplomatic area.
- Personal safety of the foreigners residing and working in Bangladesh has been ensured in their working, recreation and social gathering places, and their transportation route in Dhaka and all over the country.
- Police are collecting intelligence regarding terrorist outfits in the country.
- SPs, DIGs and commissioners have been instructed to provide special security arrangements for foreign nationals.
- Online propaganda of terrorist groups is being strictly monitored, and drives to detain terrorists is going on all over the country.
- Special Task Group has been formed to monitor terrorist activities and ensure security for foreign nationals.

BNP man, neighbour

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But he declined to say how they were involved.

Hira is one of the four people police admitted to have picked up for "questioning" soon after the murder. The next day, one detainee, Zakaria Bala, owner of the house where Hoshi was a tenant, was admitted to a hospital with "chest pain".

Cops kept the three others, including Hira, in their custody, repeatedly insisting that none of them were suspects.

On Monday, Hira's family members claimed that police were torturing him to extract a confessional statement.

Police would not make any comment in this regard either.

Biplob was allegedly picked up along with another BNP man, Anisur Rahman Lacku, on Saturday afternoon by plainclothes police and Rab members, something officials of both the agencies repeatedly denied.

Until yesterday, police, detectives and Rab maintained that they had no information regarding the arrests of Biplob, a member of Rangpur BNP,



Biplob



Hira

and Lacku, an assistant organising secretary of pro-BNP youth wing Jubo Dal's central unit.

Lacku's wife yesterday said law enforcers handed her husband over to Joypurhat police for "possessing yaba tablets".

Asked, OC Rezaul Karim yesterday refused to say anything about how Biplob ended up in their hands or why cops now considered Hira as a suspect.

Locals said Hira was a close friend of Kunio Hoshi, 66, who used to go to his grass farm at Alutari village riding on

Hira's motorbike often. Hira himself owns a fishery in the same area.

People in Hira's neighborhood Robertsonganj said he was never in politics and fishery was his family business, third generation running.

Hira is one of those who took Hoshi to Rangpur Medical College Hospital. Police arrested him from there.

On Monday night, his wife Sultana Khatun alleged that her husband's face was swollen beyond recognition from torture.

"Please do something for us. What

kind of country do we live in? Where is justice?" she told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday, after coming to know that police took her husband on remand.

Plainclothes police also detained her father Zafar Ali yesterday afternoon, but later freed him.

Police had been tightlipped all along since the murder, even restricting journalists' movement, especially while visiting family members of the four detainees.

The two others are Monnaf Ali, on whose rickshaw Kunio Hoshi was riding when shot thrice, and Murad Hossain, a local. Both of them are still in police custody. Reportedly, police are trying to make them witnesses.

Asked about the detention yesterday, one police officer said on condition of anonymity, "We call it detention for questioning until they confess to the crime. This is how we work... The same is true about those who go missing after being picked up by our plainclothes colleagues. We recognise their arrest once they confess to a crime. Or else, their fate is uncertain."

A man loved by everyone

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tongue and he didn't ours. It was his way of living that earned our respect," said Mostofa Hossain, one of the three men who took Kunio to a hospital after he was fatally shot by unidentified gunmen at his grass farm in Alutari of Kaunia on Saturday.

On hearing the gunshots, the 50-year-old rushed to the farm, some 250 yards from his small grocery shop.

At the spot, he saw a number of villagers had already gathered there.

"He [Kunio] was still alive and we had to do something," said Mostofa.

"Somebody called an auto-rickshaw. I with the help of two others carried him on to it and started for Rangpur [Medical College] Hospital... Even the auto-rickshaw driver loved him so much that he didn't charge even a penny."

But Kunio could not be saved. "At least, we tried to save him. We were honest to our conscience," he

said, looking towards a clear blue autumn sky.

Abdur Rashid lives only yards away from the Kunio's two-acre farm and worked for him on many occasions.

"He would often sit under a tree beside the field and watch us working. He loved the grass. He could spend hours by simply looking at it," said the landless farmer.

"He enjoyed serenity more than anything else and would stop at nothing in search of mental peace," said Salam, who lives near the farm.

Kunio was a man with a dream, said Sultana Khatun, wife of Humayun Kabir Hira with whom the Japanese man lived whenever he came to Bangladesh.

"It's a developing county and a lot can be done for it," she quoted Kunio as saying soon after he arrived in Bangladesh this time.

With a calm and placid demeanor, Kunio went beyond his ethnic and social identity and became one of them.

"Kunio was a good soul. He was a brother. How else could he start a farm in this remote area if we didn't take him as one of us?" said Salam.

"Do you know some reports are claiming that he was killed by the operatives of the Middle East-based Islamic State?" asked these correspondents.

"Jongi [militant]? What jongi? This jongi term is something you people bring to our life. There are no such people here," Salam said furiously.

Three days have passed since the murder but the locals are yet to come out of the shock. Mourning for a good friend, for a brother is still going on in their everyday life, in discussions at tea stalls and dinner tables, in interviews with investigators and journalists.

Ex-UN General Assembly head charged with bribery

AFP, New York

US federal prosecutors announced charges yesterday against six people, including a former head of the UN General Assembly, in a \$1.3 million bribery and corruption.

The charges allege that John Ashe received the bribes from Chinese businessmen while serving as the ambassador to the UN from Antigua and Barbuda and president of the General Assembly, the Manhattan US Attorney's office said.

In return, Ashe is alleged to have introduced a document at the UN in support of a UN conference center in Macau being developed by a businessman identified as David Ng as well as other actions in support of business interests of various Chinese businessmen.

Hoshi," he said.

Right at this moment, nearly 2,24,000 foreign nationals are living in different cities, towns, villages and even remotest places of the country, and "we have collected information about them, they are all in safe and sound state," the home minister added.

He informed the diplomats that the government took note of the reported claims of responsibility by a certain international terrorist organisation for these murders, and that the intelligence and law enforcement authorities were looking into such reported claims.

The minister said the government strongly believes that Bangladesh will not be the hub of terrorist groups in any way. The people of Bangladesh are not fanatic in nature but they are very much pious, he said.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam, senior home secretary, foreign secretary, inspector general of police, director general of Rab and DMP commissioner, were also present at the briefing and interacted with the envoys.