



JMB men behind it

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The faction came into being towards the end of last year or early this year after inclusion of some operatives from Islami Chhatra Shibir and different other radical Islamist organisations.

The faction's operations commander, Albani alias Hozza Bhai alias Member Bhai alias Shahadat alias Mahfuz, who was killed in a "shootout" with detectives late Wednesday night, had planned and executed the Hossaini Dalan blast and attacks on the two checkpoints.

Shahadat also led the Ashulia bank heist on April 21, Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam of DMP's Detective Branch told a press briefing yesterday.

But on May 31, Dhaka Superintendent of Police Habibur Rahman at a media briefing claimed to have arrested the Ashulia bank heist mastermind, identified as Mahfuzul Islam Shamim alias Suman, an operative of banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team.

Mahfuzul Islam is still in jail.

Detectives yesterday also said Shahadat was directly involved in October 5 murder of ex-PDB chairman Khijir Khan. The operative himself slew Khijir at the latter's residence in Badda.

On October 15, detectives claimed that JMB leader Tariqul Islam Tareque murdered Khijir for religious and ideological differences.

Tareque was arrested in Tangail on Wednesday.

Replying to a query after the briefing yesterday, Monir said DB's version on Khijir murder changed as investigators found that Shahadat slew Khijir while Tareque held him tight.

After the Ashulia checkpoint attack, Shahadat sought water from a witness who saw roses on both of his hands, Monirul said. The hands of dead Shahadat also had roses, he added.

Visiting Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue, a reporter of The Daily Star found both the hands of Shahadat swollen. There were also marks of scab on the wrists.

Detectives came up with the latest versions following the arrest of Tareque and four other suspected JMB men from different areas in the capital on Wednesday.

Of the arrestees, Kabir Hossain alias Rashed alias Ashique, who took part in the Hossaini Dalan blast, is trained in suicide bombing.

Three others are Chan Mia, Omar

Faruque alias Manik, Shah Jalal and Hafez Ahsan Ullah Mahmud. A Dhaka court yesterday placed the five on five-day remand each.

During the arrest, police recovered a pistol, which detectives believed was used in Ashulia Checkpoint attack, a motorcycle and a guerrilla knife from their possession.

Chan Mia, a skilled driver, took part in the Trishal prison van ambush on February 23 last year. He waylaid the van with a truck during an operation to free three condemned JMB leaders.

On the Hossaini Dalan blast, Monirul said five JMB men including Shahadat and Rashed took part in it. Shahadat himself threw five grenades, three of which exploded, killing two -- Sajjad Hossain Saju and Jamal Uddin.

Regarding the Ashulia checkpoint incident in which constable Mukul Hossain was killed, Monirul said Shahadat led the attacks there to destroy policemen's morale and create anarchy.

Another new Boeing joins Biman fleet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Meghdoot, a brand new Boeing 737-800, joins the fleet of Biman Bangladesh Airlines today.

The 162-seat aircraft purchased from Boeing is scheduled to land at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 1:00pm, said officials of the national flag carrier.

A Biman team has recently gone to the USA to bring the aircraft, worth around \$1.5 million.

The airlines is likely to get another Boeing 737-800 by the next month, says its press release.

"With the joining of Meghdoot and another one in December, our fleet will become stronger and we will open new routes to Colombo in Sri Lanka, Male in Maldives and Guangzhou in China. We will also be able to resume our New Delhi operations," said a top Biman official.

Biman has already received four brand new Boeing 777-300 ER aircraft following a 2008 deal under which 10 new generation planes -- four Boeing 777-300ERs, two Boeing 737-800 and four Boeing 787 Dreamliners -- will be added to its existing fleet of 13 aircraft.

Restore full independence of media

European Parliament adopts resolution urging Bangladesh govt

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Parliament (EP) yesterday adopted a "non-binding" resolution calling upon the Bangladesh authorities to restore the full independence of the media.

The resolution condemned the increasing attacks by "Islamist extremists" on secularist writers, bloggers, religious minorities and foreign aid workers in Bangladesh.

The EP expressed its concern at the "growing restrictions on freedom of expression which have accompanied the rise of religious fundamentalism, intolerance and extremist violence in the country".

It also urged the Bangladesh authorities "to drop all charges against publishers and journalists who have published contents critical of the government".

The EP called upon the government to "allow the immediate re-opening of all media houses which were closed", and to urgently fulfill the country's commitments and apply the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity endorsed in 2013.

The non-binding resolution was adopted by 586 votes to 31, with 25 abstentions.

A non-binding resolution is a written motion adopted by a deliberative body that cannot progress into a law. The substance of the resolution can be anything that can normally be proposed as a motion.

Earlier, the EP witnessed over a half an hour of debate on Bangladesh issues under a joint motion.

Taking part in the debate, Green Party Member Jean Lambert said, "There is a need for political sort of agreement in Bangladesh to move the country forward."

She hoped that the government of Bangladesh will put in place a "system of protection" for those at risks and that extends to the members of the political opposition too.

"Because they have also been under attack in many circumstances."

At the beginning of her statement, she said she very much regrets the need for the resolution today as she had seen very vibrant press in Bangladesh in the past which she feels "under attack" now. "...but it [vibrant press] is part of democratic development as our active NGOs and civil society."



Locals taking Moazzem Hossain, muezzin of a Shia mosque at Shibganj in Bogra, to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital after unidentified gunmen shot him at the mosque during Esha prayers yesterday. He later died at the hospital. Three others were also injured in the shooting.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Gunmen storm Shia mosque

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without a break.

Moazzem Hossain was hit in the head. He was taken to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital where he died, said Dr SM Zahidul Islam of the hospital.

The injured are Shahinur Islam, 35, imam of the mosque; Abu Taher, 60, a mason; and Aftab Hossain, 42, said locals.

All the four were first taken to Shibganj Upazila Health Complex. But as the condition of Moazzem and two others deteriorated, they were shifted to the Medical College Hospital.

The shooting came hours after detectives in Dhaka claimed to have identified five people over the attack on Hossaini Dalan on the night of October 24.

The bomb attack on Ashura gathering happened when people were gathering at the building, about half an hour before the traditional Tajia procession was to be brought out from there to mark the holy Ashura.

The day marks the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), and the Shia community has been observing the day for centuries. But it was the first

time that they came under such an attack in Bangladesh. Shias are minority in the country.

Two people died in that attack and more than 100 others were injured.

During yesterday's shooting, Moazzem's nephew Mohammad Ukil Mia was inside the mosque, praying. He said the windows were closed and the gunmen attacked through the doors.

"We heard four gunshots and everyone started screaming. I saw four people lying on the floor," he said.

Ukil, a rickshaw-van puller, said the attackers fled immediately after the shooting.

In Haripur, there are some 135 Shia families and they have no feud with anyone, Abu Zafar, a member of the mosque committee, told the BBC Bangla Service last night. The Shia mosque was built there in 1992.

Zafar suspect those who oppose the Shia faith had a hand in this.

"We are surprised and stunned. But we will continue to say our prayers [in the mosque], but will remain alert."

Quoting the injured imam, Ariful Rahman Mandal, additional superintendent of Bogra police, said three gunmen took part in the shooting. Two

of them were dressed in shirts and trousers and the other was wearing Panjabi.

The attackers jumped over the wall of the mosque and fled, Ariful said, quoting the imam.

MM Firoz Hossain, superintendent of Hossaini Dalan, said they were extremely shocked and panicked by the shooting. "We are feeling insecure now."

Firoz also said the government should ensure security of their establishments.

18 'Bangladeshis' held in Burundi for trespassing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 18 Bangladeshi nationals have been detained in Burundi on charges of trespassing, BBC Bangla reported yesterday.

Local police of the African country arrested them at a house where they had been staying together. Thirty-one forged passports were also recovered from them, the report said.

A reporter of BBC's Africa service said the arrest of illegal migrants in Burundi was common. But such migrants mainly go there from the neighbouring countries.

The arrest of so many "Bangladeshis" has surprised the Burundi police, he said, adding that they were being interrogated.

Contacted, Lutfor Rahman, director general (consular service) at the Bangladesh foreign ministry, told The Daily Star that the detainees could be victims of human trafficking.

"As there is no [Bangladeshi] mission [in Burundi], we have to deal with the matter after talking to our mission in any of its neighbouring countries," he said.

Burundi is bordered by Tanzania to the east and south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west, and Rwanda to the north.

Burundi, one of the world's poorest nations, is struggling to emerge from a 12-year, ethnic-based civil war. Recently, the country has been facing clashes by different groups.



Chen Fengxian, vice minister of Chinese Communist Party's International Department, talks to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the latter's office yesterday.

PHOTO: PMO

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

EC won't permit Jamaat to contest

PANKAG KARMAKAR

The Election Commission has decided not to allow Jamaat-e-Islami to participate in the December 30 municipality polls as the party's registration with the EC was declared illegal by the High Court.

For the first time in the country's history, municipality polls will be held on partisan lines under the provisions of the newly enacted Local Government (Municipality) Amendment Act-2015.

The EC on Wednesday sent letters to all 40 registered political parties asking them to send returning officers the names of their authorised persons who would pick mayoral candidates.

But no letter was sent to Jamaat as the EC considered that the party was no longer registered with it.

"As the High Court declared Jamaat's registration illegal, we don't consider it to be a registered political party," Sirazul Islam, secretary of the EC Secretariat, told The Daily Star last evening.

The EC on November 14, 2008 had listed Jamaat as a registered political party. The HC on August 1, 2013 had declared the registration illegal as the party's charter contained provisions that contradicted the country's constitution and the

Representation of the People's Order.

Sources at the EC said the commission didn't issue any circular or statement in this regard because an appeal against the HC verdict was pending with the Supreme Court.

Against this backdrop, the Jamaat's grassroots leaders are preparing to contest the December 30 polls as independent candidates.

Several district correspondents of this newspaper reported that Jamaat men in over two dozens of municipalities were making preparations for joining the electoral race.

"Our leaders might participate in the polls on BNP's electoral symbol if the party fights the elections as a component of the BNP-led 20-party alliance," a Jamaat leader told this correspondent yesterday wishing anonymity.

Out of 323 municipalities in the country, 236 will go to polls on December 30.

The new law stipulated that only the mayoral hopefuls will be able to contest the polls on political parties' ticket. Besides, eligible candidates can also run for mayor independently.

The councillor aspirants will participate in the elections as independent candidates.

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