

Have faith in you

Tulip shares her experience to inspire female students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A hall room of Scholastica was abuzz with excitement as students were waiting yesterday to meet Bangladesh-origin British lawmaker Tulip Siddiq, a former student of the school.

More than 200 female students from nine schools gathered there to hear from her.

Then with a big smile on her face, Tulip, granddaughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, walked in. She shared with them her thoughts and advised them on how they should pursue the career of their choice.

The event titled "Inspiring Women", first of its kind in Bangladesh, was hosted by the private school in Dhaka, and supported by Tulip and her husband Christian Percy.

Modelled on a long-running campaign in the UK, the programme brought together some successful women from different sectors to talk to the female students to broaden their horizons and inspire them.

"I knew it from my childhood that I would join politics, become an MP. But you need not do politics.

"Do whatever you like to do. Be focused on your career and study the subject you like," Tulip said.

In the UK, Inspiring Women campaign is part of the broader "Inspiring the Future" service that aims to empower schools to coordinate volunteering opportunities for boys and girls of all ages and backgrounds.

The campaign reaches out to students of different countries and holds discussions with young girls about career, aspirations and choice, Tulip said.

In Bangladesh, the prime minister, Speaker of the parliament, and opposition leader of the House are all women, but Britain has men in all those positions, she said, telling the female students that they too could become one of them in Bangladesh.

"For that you have to have faith in you," said Tulip, a niece of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

After the brief speech, she attended a press conference accompanied by her husband and Madiha Murshed, managing director of Scholastica.

Asked if she wants to do politics in Bangladesh, she said, "It is not possible to say what will happen in future and whether I'll return. I have become



a lawmaker a few months ago and let's see what I'll do."

Then she added, "If you want to help, you can do that from anywhere in the world. I can help Bangladesh from Britain."

Regarding child marriage in Bangladesh, the British MP said enforcement of relevant laws was necessary to stop it. "Our country will not develop much unless we educate our girls."

Asked about her doing politics, Tulip said she had grown up hearing stories of her maternal grandfather, his work and the 1971 Liberation War.

Besides, she heard her mother and aunt talking about welfare of the people of Bangladesh.

"I do politics to help people," she said.

Dubbing her aunt Sheikh Hasina as her role model, she said the Speaker of the parliament and Wasfia Nazreen, the first Bangladeshi to climb seven summits in the world, were also inspiring women for her.

Tulip also shared the challenges she had faced during the elections in the UK in May.

Even some Bangalis in the UK had campaigned that if she won she would speak about the Awami League only, she said.

About the female leadership in Bangladesh, she said it did not matter to her whether a man was ruling the country or a woman.

"What is more important to me is whether the person loves the country, works for the poor and takes the country forward."

She said she envisaged a prosperous Bangladesh in future.

Bangladesh has already been known as an emerging economy, she said, adding, "I want Bangladesh to do better."



Female students of Scholastica school at the 'Inspiring Women' programme on the school's Uttara campus yesterday. Scholastica alumna Tulip Siddiq, a British MP and niece of Bangladesh prime minister, spoke as the chief guest there.

PHOTO: STAR

BNP shares its concern with envoys

FROM PAGE 1

cuttings in support of their statements. It sought cooperation from the diplomats in ensuring that the local body elections are held without any political influence.

Representatives from the embassies and high commissions of the USA, the UK, Germany, Japan, Australia, India, Pakistan, Canada, Turkey, Sweden, Singapore and Nepal were present at the hour-long meeting at the party chief's Gulshan office.

About the alleged repression on party candidates, BNP leaders cited the example of the municipal polls in Feni, home district of Chairperson Khaleda Zia, where two AL mayor candidates and 44 councillors are set to be elected uncontested.

Of the three municipalities going to polls in Feni, nominations of BNP mayor hopefuls in two municipalities were declared illegal. The party's mayor aspirant in the other municipality cannot join electioneering for fear of arrest, BNP leaders told the meeting.

They also alleged that the BNP men were forced to withdraw their nominations in many municipalities. The government officials and the law enforcement agencies involved in the

electoral process were also biased towards the ruling party nominees, claimed the BNP leaders.

Enquired by the British high commission representative about why the BNP was demanding army deployment, Moyeen said this is the first time the municipalities are going to mayoral polls under the banners of political parties.

"As people have confidence in the army, the BNP thinks voters' concern and fear over holding the polls in a free and fair manner would be eased if army were deployed," a BNP leader quoted Moyeen as saying.

"Some of you [diplomats] had said we should have contested the January 5 national polls last year. But now you see what's going on centring the municipal polls. Seven mayoral and 150 councillor aspirants are going to be elected uncontested as our party men were not allowed to file nominations in many of those municipalities," added Moyeen.

BNP leaders further claimed that there was no level playing field as many BNP men were put behind bars in politically motivated cases.

Some 1,000 BNP men were rounded up across the country in the last two

weeks, said a BNP leader. "Is it an example of a fair election?" he questioned.

The Japanese envoy wanted to know if the BNP was determined to stay in the polls race till the end or it would quit like it did in the last city corporation elections in Dhaka and Chittagong.

Moyeen assured the diplomats that his party was prepared to fight the battle of ballots although the party candidates were facing huge obstacles from the ruling party men during electioneering.

BNP chairperson's advisers Reaz Rahman, Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, Sabih Uddin Ahmed, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury and the party's International Affairs Secretary Asaduzzaman Ripon were present, among others.

Later, talking to reporters, Moyeen said they discussed with the diplomats municipality polls and the country's overall situation.

Meanwhile, Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif at a press conference at the party chief's Dhanmondi office yesterday said it was "shameful for the nation that the BNP lodged complaints with foreigners

AUTO DRIVER KILLING

Driver Majid on two-day remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

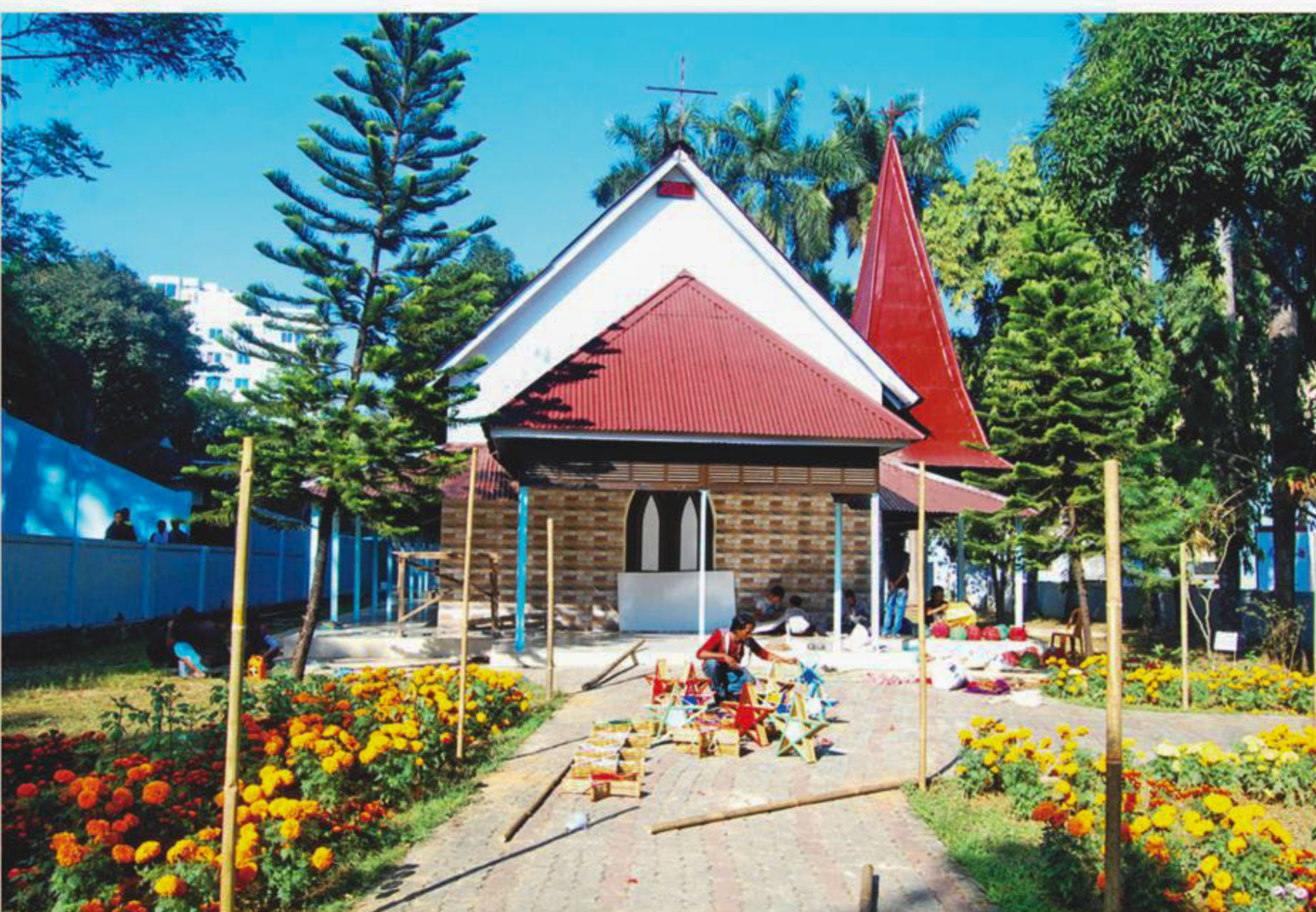
A Dhaka court yesterday granted a two-day police remand for bus driver Abdul Majid, who ran over a man and killed him at Uttara in the capital on Tuesday.

Uttara [west] police had sought seven days of remand in connection with a murder case filed against Majid by victim Mohammad Faruk's family, said Muhammad Abdur Razzak, inspector (investigation) of Uttara West Police Station.

He said Majid had failed to produce any driving licence, which he claimed he had.

Majid's father Moksed Miah owns the bus he was driving. He had hit the CNG-run auto-rickshaw of Faruk on Mymensingh Road near Jasim Uddin intersection around 11:40am and had run.

When auto-rickshaw driver Faruk caught up with the bus and stopped it by standing in front of the vehicle, Majid ran Faruk over and dragged him about 30 yards killing him.



With the Christmas just a night away, the churches across the country are taking a festive look. In the photo, some Christian youths are seen busy decorating the Naya Street Church in Sylhet city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

SMS threats continue

FROM PAGE 1

While Nirmal Rozario said, "These incidents are very unfortunate, and go against the spirit of equal rights and freedom of thoughts."

He strongly believes people of Bangladesh will fight such evil forces together.

The leaders further say they want the government to arrest and punish the culprits, ensuring long-term security to them.

On Tuesday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal in a briefing said apart from regular intelligence surveillance, "visible" security measures will be in place to ensure a peaceful Christmas celebration.

All the churches across the country, including around 60 in the capital, will be brought under CCTV coverage, he said after a meeting with top officials of law enforcement agencies at his ministry.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Bishop Bejoy said a person identifying himself as Zaman Mozumder and coordinator of IGMB sent him a message from mobile phone No 01873-149580.

"Fulfil your last dream because your life is in last stage. Very soon you are going to be killed by us," it read.

This was the first time such a top Catholic leader received a death threat.

Nirmal Rozario of the BCA got similar threat from the same number using the same name and same identity. However, there has been no clue yet as to what is IGMB.

Earlier at 4:54 and 4:56pm the same day, Nirmal received two more messages from mobile No 01714-737507. One read: "There will be arrangements for you during Christmas" and the other: "Let us know whether we will arrange your funeral or allow your family to do so."

According to the BCA, others who received threats on Tuesday are Father Subrata Boniface Tolentino of Sreemangal, Father Ujjal Rozario of Dinajpur, Brother Binoy of Dhaka, Aldrick Biswas, executive editor of Samabarta, a community magazine; and an Uttara-based pastor Jagadish Edward.

Jagadish Edward also received death threat on November 11.

On October 5, unidentified youths attacked and tried to slit open the throat of Bangladeshi pastor Luke Sarkar, 52, at his house in Pabna. Then on November 18, unknown gunmen shot Italian priest Piero Parolari in

Dinajpur.

Between November 11 and 25, at least 24 pastors and priests in Dhaka, Savar, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Satkhira have been threatened with life.

Police arrested some leaders of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in connection with the attacks on Italian priest Piero Parolari and pastor Luke Sarkar. However, none was arrested for issuing the death threats.

Christian leaders say as a religious minority, they sometimes face problems like land grabbing by influential groups, but death threats or targeted attacks on them are unprecedented.

According to the 2011 Census report, there are some 4.5 lakh (0.3 percent of the total population) Christians in Bangladesh.

Bishop Sebastian Tudu of Dinajpur said the government deployed police at important Christian institutions there. He added they planned to complete all Christmas programme by evening due to security concerns.

Archbishop Patrick D'Rozario, head of the Catholic Church in Bangladesh, met Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal on November 23, seeking security for all the minority communities.

The minister said plainclothes police were working to ensure security of the Christian community. "If anyone feels insecure and informs us, we will deploy police force for them," he told The Daily Star recently.

Without elaborating, Kamal claimed that most of those who attacked or threatened Christian priests or pastors have been arrested.

Rights groups rap India over harsher terms for minors

AFP, New Delhi

Rights groups yesterday denounced India's new legislation allowing tougher punishments for juveniles, which was sparked by a public outcry over the release of a young man involved in a deadly gang-rape.

Lawmakers Tuesday passed a bill allowing minors aged 16-18 to be sentenced to at least seven years if convicted of "heinous crimes" including rape, murder and acid attacks.

20.5kg gold

FROM PAGE 1

on Biman Bangladesh Airlines' Kuwait-Chittagong-Dhaka flight, customs officials said.

Moinul Khan, director general of customs intelligence, said on information they intercepted Anwar Begum and Nahida Farzana Moni at the domestic terminal.

The officials recovered 125 pieces of gold bars, worth around Tk 7 crore, frisking them, he said.

After knowing that the gold was handed over to them by two men inside the aircraft, the officials took them to identify the two men.

On their information, the officials detained Anwar Parvez and Osman Sohel from customs house area moments before their departure, he said, adding that the two men were frequent flyers.

Moinul said the two men smuggled the gold into the country from Kuwait while the females, who worked at a beauty parlour in Chittagong, carried those from Chittagong to Dhaka. They exchanged the gold bars inside the aircraft toilet.

In a separate incident, Malaysians Chankok Wai, 24, and Chen Sim Sapp, 58, of Chinese decent were detained with 6kgs of gold at the airport.

The two arrived in Dhaka on a Malaysian Airlines flight which landed at 9:30pm.

Shahiduzzaman Sarkar, assistant commissioner of customs, said they searched the bodies of the two and found six gold bars, worth around Tk 3 crore, in their waist belts.

Legal actions were being taken against the duo, said the official, adding that the two had visited Bangladesh before.

"Although there are instructions from the authorities to scan passengers and all baggage, there's always something lacking," said a security officer at the airport, wishing anonymity.

"We strengthened vigilance at the domestic terminal too," DG Moinul added.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines is the only airline that allows domestic passengers from Sylhet and Chittagong to fly to Dhaka on its international flights.

The domestic passengers get their exits through the domestic terminal. With the latest seizure, customs intelligence officials seized 209kgs of gold at different airports this year.

Pak diplomat 'withdrawn'

FROM PAGE 1

A senior foreign ministry official, however, said Pakistan High Commission informed them that Fareena surrendered her diplomatic identification card and left Dhaka by a Pakistan International Airlines flight at 1:35pm.

Wishing anonymity, a high commission official said, "We sent Fareena Arshad home today [Wednesday] after verbal communication with Bangladesh foreign ministry. She reached Islamabad."

This is the second instance of withdrawal of a Pakistani diplomat from Bangladesh. On January 31, Pakistan recalled its diplomatic official Mazhar Khan for his alleged links with terror financing and currency forgery racket. Mazhar was allegedly involved in producing and distributing fake Indian currency.

Following media reports on Fareena's alleged involvement in terror financing, the Pakistan High Commission in a rebuttal on December 16 protested the reports, saying the allegations against her

were "utterly baseless".

According to Bangladesh intelligence sources, the Pakistani diplomat was involved in setting up a terror financing network in Bangladesh.

A foreign ministry source said the ministry on December 20 communicated to the high commission that the government found Fareena's links with terror financing.

"It was an informal communication... there was no written communication with the Pakistan authorities," said the source.

Dhaka made the move against the Pakistani female diplomat after an arrested operative of banned militant outfit JMB told a Dhaka court on December 6 that he had links with her.

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh operative Idris Sheikh, arrested on November 29 in the capital, told the court that he got a ride from the Pakistani diplomat in her car from Baitul Mukarram to Fakirerpool, and received Tk 30,000 from her.

Referring to Idris' judicial statement, an official of the Detective Branch of police said Idris had conversations with the diplomat several times over mobile phones between June and July this year.

Asked, the DB official involved in the investigation said Idris did not disclose the details of his dealings with her and why she gave him the money.

At one point of their "dealings", the diplomat asked Idris to meet her at Uttara. But on Idris' request she met him in Motijheel area, the official said.

Quoting Idris' statement, the official said Idris got acquainted with Pakistani citizen Kamal, who identified himself as an ISI agent, through a person named Babul who settled in Pakistan.

When Kamal left Bangladesh in 2012, he gave Idris a mobile phone number saying the holder of the number would look after all his business dealings with Babul, said the official.