

48 'militants'

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 police also rounded up 2,084 persons across the country between 6:00am on Saturday and 6:00am yesterday. Many of them are petty criminals, wanted accused in different cases and suspects in arms cases.

The three days' total arrests stood at about 5,300 till yesterday morning, according to police.

Most of yesterday's arrests were made in Tangail, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Pabna, Sirajganj, Bogra, Khulna, Narail and Sathkhira.

Of them, 1,496 had arrest orders for them in various cases. Another 391 are accused in narcotics cases, 41 in illegal arms cases and 156 in other cases, according to a statement of the police HQ.

Police also recovered two shooter guns from militants, one bullet, 500 grams of gunpowder, 17 crude bombs, two cartridges, nine machetes and a large number of jihadi books.

On the first day of the drive, some 3,192 people, including 37 suspected militants, were arrested.

Of the 48 militants arrested yesterday, 47 are members of the banned outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). The other is from Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), another banned militant group, police said.

BNP leaders in Dhaka and elsewhere say police are rounding up their men in the name of arresting militants.

Police sources in different districts admit that a handful of the arrestees are BNP-Jamaat leaders and activists.

Since 2013, suspected militants have attacked and killed university professors, writers, publishers, secular bloggers, gay rights activists, foreigners, policemen and members of religious minorities, including Shia and Sufi Muslims, Christians and Hindus. Reportedly, terror group Islamic State claimed responsibilities for many of these attacks. Ansar Al Islam, which claims to be the local chapter of al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), took credit for some.

But the government maintains IS has no presence in the country, and squarely blames the opposition parties such as the BNP and Jamaat for those.

Talking to the BBC last week, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal suggested an Israeli link to the recent killings of secular bloggers and minorities.

He said an opposition MP had met an Israeli intelligence agent and there was evidence of an "international conspiracy" against Bangladesh.

He, however, gave no evidence. Israel says the claim is nonsense.

The special drive came in the wake of a string of targeted killings, particularly after the gruesome murder of SP Babul Akter's wife Mahmuda Khanam Mitu.

Top police officials said suspected militants were behind her murder as Babul led several successful anti-militancy drives that might have enraged various terror outfits.

Extremists are suspects in other targeted killings as well.

'HARASSMENT'

Farhad Iqbal, organising secretary of Tangail District BNP, said about a dozen BNP supporters were arrested in the last three days in the district.

The party leaders and activists were panicked because of the drive and many of them left their homes, he added.

Similar claims were made by BNP leaders in other districts.

"Our men cannot sleep in their homes at night in the month of Ramadan as police are raiding those," said Ahsan Kabir, president of Kawkhali upazila unit BNP in Pirojpur.

Pirojpur police Superintendent Walid Hossain dismissed the allegation, saying, "We are arresting listed criminals and suspected militants."

He claimed cops were not harassing any innocent people of any party.

Police sources said suspected militants arrested in Rajshahi are listed by the district Special Branch of police since the JMB's rise in Bagmara of Rajshahi in 2004.

Locals alleged of police harassment in the district's Bagha upazila as well.

Some local Awami League leaders stormed the Bagha Police Station on Saturday, alleging that police arrested two of their party men.

Police later released the two after local AL leaders had heated arguments with the cops inside the police station.

Mamunur Rashid, an AL leader there, himself alleged that police were indeed harassing many innocent people.

[Our district correspondents contributed to this report.]

Inu gets

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 other eminent personalities received death threats from the banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team.

The JSD and its different associate bodies strongly condemned the incident and demanded an action against the culprits involved in it.

ASHRAM SEBAK MURDER

Shibir man held in Pabna

STAR REPORT

Police detained an Islami Chhatra Shibir leader in connection with the killing of Nityaranjan Pande, volunteer of a Hindu Ashram, early yesterday.

The detained, Md Ariful Islam, 23, son of Abdus Sattar of Char Ghoshpur village, is undergoing treatment at Pabna General Hospital. He is the general secretary of Pabna district west unit of Shibir, student front of Jamaat-e-Islami.

A team of BNP central leaders have meanwhile visited Anukul Chandra Shatshangha Ashramon behalf of the party chief, reports Our Correspondent from Pabna.

Nityaranjan, 60, was hacked to death around 5:00am on Friday when he was taking his regular morning walk about half a kilometre away from the ashram, the latest in a spate of such killings in the country.

Acting on a tip off, Pabna Sadar police detained the Shibir leader from a house in Bazitpur area, said Abdullah Al Hasan, officer-in-charge of Sadar police.

When Ariful was being taken to the police station, the vehicle carrying him careered into a roadside ditch, leaving him injured.

"We have got a link between Ariful and the murder in our investigation," the OC said but did not elaborate on the matter.

BNP LEADERS VISIT ASHRAM

Six central leaders of BNP led by former minister Nitai Chandra Roy visited the ashram yesterday morning and held talks with the devotees.

In a press briefing, BNP demanded a proper investigation into the incident.

"The killings of minority people raise concern for their security. It should stop. The government should also stop the blame game and investigate all the killings properly," Nitai Roy told reporters.

Such killings are going on as a result of local and foreign "conspiracy". The government should trace the real culprits and bring them to book, he added.

ANOTHER ARRESTED IN GOMEZ MURDER CASE

Police arrested another tenant in connection with the murder of Christian trader Sunil Gomez, reports Our Correspondent from Natore

Abdul Hai, officer-in-charge of Detective Branch and also the investigation officer in the case, said they arrested Monowara Begum alias Moni, 28, in Badda area of Dhaka on Saturday night.

Moni was sent to a Natore court yesterday afternoon, said the OC, adding that they prayed to the court seeking her remand for five days.

The Christians in Baraigram upazila of Natore yesterday staged demonstrations protesting against the killing of grocer Sunil Gomez.

More than 2,000 Christians brought out a procession from Bonpara Christian Palli around 10:30am and marched to the bypass intersection at Bonpara where they formed a human chain.

During the demonstration they also blockaded the Bonpara road, halting traffic movement on the Dhaka-Natore and Natore-Pabna highways.

Earlier on June 5, unknown assailants hacked 60-year-old Sunil to death at his shop at Bonpara Christian Palli.

Law enforcers arrested Sabujat from his rented house around 5:00pm the same day suspecting his involvement in the murder.

Hours after Sunil's death, global terror outfit Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the killing, according to SITE Intelligence Group that monitors terrorist activities.

Cause of death

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 DNA tests, however, had confirmed that the 19-year-old college student was raped before being killed.

"We found evidence of sexual intercourse before her death," Kamoda Prosad Saha, head of the three-member board that conducted the second autopsy at Comilla Medical College, said yesterday.

He, however, did not reply when asked if the "sexual intercourse" was forceful.

Regarding the cause of death, Kamoda, also chair of the forensic medicine department at the college, told this reporter they did not find any injury marks, as the body was highly decomposed.

He, however, said, "The cause of death could be determined by analysing circumstantial evidence and further investigation [by investigators]."

So, the responsibility of finding the cause of death now appears to lie with investigators, even though experts say it is mainly the forensic doctors' task.

The report of the second autopsy was handed over to CID investigators yesterday.

Following a court order, Tonu's body was exhumed on March 30 and the three-member board conducted the second autopsy the same day.

On May 16, CID officials said the DNA tests revealed that Tonu was raped before being murdered.

The tests found presence of spermatozoa of three males on her clothing, exposing the flaws of first autopsy that did not find evidence of rape and determine the cause of death.

"In DNA tests, we have found evidence of rape," Abdul Kahar Akand, special superintendent of CID, told The Daily Star on May 16.

The three-member board then decided it would not submit the second autopsy findings until it got DNA test report.

Following a court order, the CID handed the DNA test report to the board on June 7.

"We took help of the DNA test results in preparing the [second] autopsy report," said Kamoda.

Asked if evidence of "sexual intercourse" means "rape", Kamoda said, "Rape is a legal term, not the scientific one."

He added, "We can scientifically only determine whether there was any sexual intercourse or not."

But Kamoda used the word "rape" while making public the first autopsy report.

"The doctor who conducted the first autopsy at Comilla Medical College didn't find any evidence of rape and mention the specific reason for Tonu's death in the report," said Kamoda on April 4.

Several forensic doctors told this correspondent that presence of spermatozoa of three males suggested "forceful intercourse".

Tonu's family came to know about the second autopsy findings from TV. Like the first autopsy, this too frustrated them.

UN removes

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 concluding that it was responsible for 60 percent of the 785 children killed in Yemen last year.

On June 9, Ban Ki-moon had strongly criticised Saudi Arabia and its allies for putting "undue pressure" on the UN in order to seek their removal from the blacklist.

Later, Ban said he decided to temporarily take Saudi and some Arab monarchies off from the blacklist after they threatened to cut off funding to UN humanitarian programs.

Currently, Saudi Arabia hosts over 2 million Bangladeshi workers. It also has a strong influence over the Muslim world.

"Bangladesh and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been friends for long. We have strong engagement with the Kingdom at different levels," said former ambassador Humayun Kabir.

"We have extended our support to Saudi Arabia considering our national interest and without compromising any international human rights standard."

Former permanent representative to the UN AK Abdul Momen echoed Kabir. He said Bangladesh has stood beside its friend in its difficult time.

Talking to The Daily Star, a current diplomat, wishing not to be named, said Saudi Arabia this time has felt how badly it needs Bangladesh by its side.

Diplomatic sources said that the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) would have been affected had the coalition not been removed from the UN blacklist.

Saudi Arabia was the 4th biggest donor to UNRWA after the United States, European Union and Britain, having supplied it nearly \$100m last year.

The Saudi coalition members Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are also key donors for UNRWA, together supplying nearly \$50m in 2015.

Saudi Arabia reacted angrily to the UN blacklist and demanded that the report be "corrected."

After Muslim allies of Saudi Arabia mount pressure on UN chief Ban Ki-moon, the UN on June 6 dropped Saudi Arabia from the blacklist.

Before that, Saudi Arabia and several Muslim countries had also threatened to cut Palestinian aid and funds to other UN programmes.

Spokesman for the UN secretary-general, Stéphane Dujarric, said Bangladesh, Jordan and United Arab Emirates contacted Ban's office to protest the listing of the coalition.

"There was a phone call, I believe, from the foreign minister of Bangladesh to the secretary-general expressing their concern at the placement of the Saudi-led coalition on the list," he said at a press briefing on June 10 in UN headquarters, New York.

A highly-placed source at the foreign ministry yesterday told The Daily Star that the foreign minister contacted the UN chief's office before the reversal of the UN decision while on an official visit to Saudi Arabia with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on June 3-7.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International blasted Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon over the decision, accusing him of caving in to Saudi pressure and damaging the world body's credibility, reported AFP.

The members of the Saudi-led coalition includes Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Senegal and Sudan.

Cameron warns of 'lost decade' after EU out vote

AFP, London

British Prime Minister David Cameron yesterday warned that Britain would face a "lost decade" if it voted to leave the European Union as Brexit negotiations gummied up the political system.

Cameron is facing a tough fight to keep Britain in the EU in a June 23 referendum. With under two weeks to go, recent opinion polls suggest growing momentum for the "Leave" camp.

In the latest of a string of TV appearances designed to persuade wavering voters to back "Remain", the premier told the BBC that there could be a "lost decade for Britain" if it votes to leave the European bloc.

"You've got to negotiate your exit," he said. "You've got to negotiate a trade deal with the EU."

"I think we'd be looking at a decade of uncertainty," he added. "It would suck the energy out of our government and our country."

A Sunday Times/YouGov online poll found that Cameron's "Remain" campaign is currently lagging the "Leave" side by 42 percent to 43 percent.

A further 11 percent of people surveyed said they did not know how they would vote and four percent said they would not take part in the ballot.

IS losing territory

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 Norwegian aid group said thousands of people had already used it to flee in the first day it was open.

The new exit route, known as al-Salam (Peace) Junction, was secured on Saturday, southwest of Falluja, Joint Operation Command spokesman Brigadier Gen Yahya Rasool told Reuters.

HUNDREDS ESCAPE MANBIJ
 Meanwhile, hundreds of civilians escaped Syria's Manbij yesterday helped by a US-backed Kurdish-Arab alliance surrounding the town, a monitor said.

Tens of thousands had been trapped inside Manbij after the alliance encircled the transit town on Friday.

"Around 600 civilians fled on foot towards areas held by the Syrian Democratic Forces alliance south of the town," said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The SDF "transported them to safer areas," said Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman. Those remaining inside the town were terrified by heavy air strikes in the area, Abdel Rahman said, with food becoming scarce as the alliance has blocked all roads in and out.

At least 223 IS fighters and 28 SDF troops had been killed -- as well as 41 civilians in coalition air raids -- since the alliance offensive against Manbij began on May 31, according to the Observatory.

To the west and northwest of the town, heavy fighting was ongoing as IS fighters launched a counteroffensive against the SDF in a bid to regain con-

trol of the road west out of town.

SIRTE BATTLE RAGES
 Forces allied with Libya's unity government yesterday battled to retake the Islamic State group's last redoubts in its stronghold of Sirte, facing fierce resistance including a series of suicide car bombings.

The pro-government forces entered Sirte on Wednesday and have been advancing more quickly than expected against IS, which seized control of the coastal city last year and turned it into its main base of operations in North Africa.

The loss of Sirte would be a major setback for IS, which has also been losing territory in Syria and Iraq where the jihadist group established its self-declared "caliphate" in 2014.

Jihadist forces -- surrounded in a densely populated area of around five square kilometres in the city centre -- have been putting up fierce resistance and yesterday carried out three suicide car bombings against pro-government fighters.

"Three explosions from cars driven by Islamic State suicide bombers targeted our forces in Sirte," Reda Issa, a spokesman for the unity government's forces, told AFP.

Two of the bombers hit gatherings of pro-government forces and another hit a field hospital, he said. At least one person was killed and four wounded in the blasts, Issa said.

The attacks came a day after pro-government forces said they had recaptured the port in Sirte, the hometown of Libya's ousted dictator Moamer Gaddafi, and residential areas in the city's east.

Batik village

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 Like his, 1,200 other families at Banti village in Araihaazar upazila have engaged in batik production in the expectation of some additional income in this peak season.

Businessmen first purchase grey fabrics from nearby mills. Workers then dye those and print patterns on those, mostly by hand.

Against the backdrop of immense work pressure and need for more workers, skilled people from other areas during this time every year come to the village in search of temporary jobs.

"We pass almost the whole night, printing patterns on fabrics. It's a good time for us as we are earning extra money, working overtime," said Zahirul Islam who came from Kishoreganj district.

Amir Hossain who washes cloths said he was earning Tk 2,600 a week as the payment for overtime had been increased amid a higher volume of work orders.

The batik production gathered momentum as wholesale customers mainly from Dhaka, Munshiganj, Barisal, Karatia in Tangail, Sirajganj, Sylhet, Gazipur and Mymensingh began purchasing the clothing material from Banti and nearby bazars, according to villagers.

With a festive mood, business owners, their family members and workers have been working together to keep up with the demand.

The whole area has become dotted with cloths of different colours as the villagers put them out to dry after dyeing, printing and washing.

The main markets where these batiks would be sold are Baburhaat at Narsingdi and Gausia at Narayanganj. Three other wholesale markets have recently opened at Banti.

The village is famous for the traditional cotton fabrics as people here have been in this business for genera-

tions. They produce mainly three pieces for women, pillow covers and bed sheets.

Witnessing good profits in the batik business, two nearby villages -- Panchrukhi and Palla -- took an interest in making the fabrics.

In a recent visit to Banti village, only a few machines were seen for printing fabrics. More than 95 percent batiks are made by hand.

Hossain Ahmed along with his family members was busy working on the ground floor of his under-construction building.

He said he had received many work orders from boutique houses in Dhaka.

"The renowned boutiques place orders much before the Eid sales begin in shopping malls in Dhaka and other divisional cities. Now we are busy completing the work orders," Ahmed said.

He earned Tk 50,000 from the sale in a month while some in Banti made profits of Tk 1lakh to 6 lakh.

"We will remain busy until three or four days before Eid," said Habibur Rahman, a worker who spreads fabrics on washing lines or fields to dry.

All cloths are dried under the sun, not mechanically, he said.

The batik business witnesses a boom before Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla calendar; Independence Day on March 26 and Victory Day on December 16 as well, said Atique Hassan, owner of Atique Dyeing.

For a couple of years, some people in Banti are making national flags of bigger sizes ahead of the national days' celebrations, he added.

Exporters also purchase batiks from wholesale shops at Banti as the demand for such clothing materials is high in the European countries and the US where Bangladeshi migrants live in large numbers, said Shamsul Haque, owner of one of the 1,000 wholesale shops at Banti Bazar.

MPs must

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 College and its government body chairman Rashed Khan Menon, who is the civil aviation and tourism minister.

Following two separate writ petitions, the HC on June 1 declared illegal the rules that were allowing MPs to become chiefs of the committees of the educational institutions without elections.

The petitions challenged the legality of Sections 5 and 50 of Non-government School College Governing Body Regulation-2009 which permitted formation of special governing bodies in educational institutions and the lawmakers to hold the posts of chairman.

The HC ruled that a lawmaker can be elected to the post at maximum four institutions.

The court also scrapped the special governing body of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College led by Menon.

The HC, however, said the members of existing governing bodies of other such institutions can retain their posts until their tenure expires, Deputy Attorney General Israt Jahan had said.

The authorities concerned of the government were also asked to form ad hoc committees for holding elections and forming regular governing bodies in such institutions in six months.

day, writ petitioner and SC lawyer Eunos Ali Akond told The Daily Star that the HC order would remain effective until the SC came up with a further order.

He, however, said the principal of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College and Menon could move leave to appeal petitions before the SC against the HC verdict after receiving a full text.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told reporters that the apex court would pass an order after a leave to appeal petition is moved before it.

HC asks

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 Zahidul Islam at the office of Upazila Nirbahi Officer, who was not present during the incident, for not appointing the MP's men as polling officials in the upazila parishad polls there.

Following the incident, the victim lodged a complaint with the Election Commission. A day later, the EC sent a letter to the officer-in-charge of Banshkhal Police Station, asking him to file a case against the lawmaker and his aides.

On June 3, a case was filed against Mustafizur and his two aides for allegedly assaulting the upazila election officer. The victim, Zahidul, has been shown as the complainant of the case.