

GULSHAN CAFÉ ATTACK Detained kitchen staff dies of injuries

Bodies of attackers
still in CMH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An injured kitchen staff of the Holey Artisan Bakery, who had been detained on suspicion of being involved in the Gulshan café attack, died of his wounds at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Friday.

Zakir Hossain Shaon, 19, was taken to DMCH by police two days after the attack, sources in the hospital's police outpost said.

He was admitted to the intensive care unit of the hospital at 12:30pm on Friday. But his condition deteriorated and he died in the evening, said Prof Abdur Rahman, chief of the ICU.

Bloody and battered, he was recovered by law enforcers from near the café during the siege, well before the commandoes stormed the café, according to photos and footage seen in the media.

Monirul Islam, additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police

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Relatives wail after the body of Jharna Rani Bhowmik was taken to their home in Char Sholakia (Sabujbagh) of Kishoreganj Thursday night. She died after a stray bullet from the gunfight between police and militants came through her window and hit her.

PHOTO: STAR

Security beefed up around TV channels

DMP says militants may
capture TV stations

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

In the wake of the latest militant attacks on a Gulshan restaurant and Sholakia Eidgah, security has been beefed up around different private television channels last night fearing terrorist attacks.

Sources at three channels said police had been deployed in front of their offices in the capital and strict checking had been carried out before entry.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia visited Independent Television Channel at Tejgaon while officer-in-charges of different police stations visited several other channels last night as part of the security alert.

The DMP commissioner will continue visiting the TV houses today and tomorrow and will brief the channel authorities on how to tighten their security.

"There are threats that militants may capture any electronic media

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It was no small plan by militants

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floor of an under-construction building on Neelganj Road posing as a local college student. He told the house owner that he and three of his friends would stay there.

"They rented the apartment temporarily -- only to carry out their mission," said an official of Kishoreganj Police Station, who is involved in Sholakia terror probe, on condition of anonymity.

Sholakia Eidgah is about one kilometre from the apartment. There are many alternative ways to reach the congregation ground from the house.

Many locals believe the group might have taken the nearby rail track and walked up to the Azim Uddin High School to attack a police team.

Two police constables were killed while a dozen others including six cops were injured as the gang, comprised of seven to eight and armed with explosives, machetes and firearms, battled with law enforcers for more than an hour.

A woman and a suspected attacker also died during the fight which

ensued when the attackers tried to cross the police checkpoint near the school in an attempt to reach the Eidgah.

The Daily Star correspondents visited the Neelganj house on Friday afternoon.

"They hardly came out of the flat," the daughter of the house owner told this newspaper as she described how the youth convinced them to rent out the apartment to him without showing any documents.

The youth introduced him as Joynal Abedin and said he was from a village in Phulbari upazila of Mymensingh. He also claimed that he was a first-year student of economics of Gurudayal Government College in Kishoreganj.

A local college teacher, the daughter said she and her parents had discussion with Joynal on house rent and other conditions on June 30.

"The youth accepted every condition and promised us to provide his and his friends' identity cards after the Eid," she said, adding, "We agreed as Joynal told us that they stayed at a students' mess where they couldn't study well."

"They said they came here after

noticing the 'To-Let' sign."

The youth told them that they all were from the same institution -- two from Economics and two from English department.

The youth paid Tk 2,000 in advance out of Tk 6,000 monthly rent. He and his friends started living here from the daytime of July 1. "But I didn't see anyone except for the youth [Joynal]," she said.

When her father asked them whether they will go home to celebrate Eid, they said they will go home after offering Eid prayers at the historic Sholakia Eidgah.

"Actually, no suspicion crossed our mind," she said. They first came to know that something was very wrong when a Rab team came to their home on Friday evening.

Rab personnel said they learnt from a suspected attacker, now detained, about the rented house, she added.

Rab searched the house and took her father and brother to police station for interrogation. Both were released after around five hours of interrogation as they found nothing wrong with them, she told these correspondents.

Police too searched the flat and found some books, utensils and three blankets. When these correspondents wanted to see the room, she said the key was with his father and he was away from home at the time.

"Both the suspected attackers in custody admitted that four attackers were staying at the apartment," a police official of Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the Gulshan attack, according to US-based SITE Intelligence Group. But none claimed credit for the Sholakia attack yet.

Visiting Sholakia yesterday, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque said homegrown militant outfit Jama'at ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) was involved in both Gulshan and Sholakia attacks, reports BSS.

"The detainees in the Sholakia incident admitted that Gulshan and Sholakia attacks were interlinked," he told journalists.

"The attackers admitted that they tried to launch bomb attack on the Muslims at the Eid congregation. They

unleashed a sudden attack on police personnel as the cops were searching them."

The attacks came following a string of murders of secular activists, progressive writers, bloggers and religious minorities.

Both the groups included youths from private universities and madrasas.

THE SHOLAKIA ATTACK

Around 8:45am on Eid day, seven to eight youths -- all in Panjabi and aged around 20 -- approached the police checkpoint set up near Azim Uddin High School.

"It seemed they were hesitant to cross the point and suddenly there was an explosion," Md Shamsuddin, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Pakundia Police Station, told this newspaper.

Some members of the police team fell to the ground. Seconds later, there was another explosion that left one constable critically injured, he said. "Some of us started shooting while the attackers swooped on others, firing and welding machetes."

Two police constables -- Jahirul Haque Tapu from Mymensingh and

Ansarul Haque from Netrakona -- were killed in the attack.

Jharna Rani Bhowmik, a resident of the area, died as a bullet flew through a window of her house as law enforcers and attackers were exchanging fire.

Police have identified the assailant shot dead during the gun fight as Abir Rahman, a private university student in Dhaka. He was missing since March.

The suspected attacker, who survived bullet wound and was detained, has been identified as Saiful Islam, alias Abu Mukhtadim alias Sohan, a madrasa student from Dakkhin Debipur village in Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur.

Another suspected attacker detained by law enforcers has been identified as Jahidul Haque Tanim, son of Abdus Sattar Chand Mia of Paschim Tarapasha in Kishoreganj Sadar upazila, police said, adding he was detained from under a bed at a house during the fight.

Talking to The Daily Star, Tanim's father Chand Mia claimed his son was not involved in militancy.

Identities of the rest of the attackers could not be known.

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ATTACKERS WERE AMONG A DOZEN MISSING YOUTHS

Dr Naik claims

FROM PAGE 1

quoting Peace TV's preacher Zakir Naik urging all Muslims to be "terrorists". In his video speech, Dr Naik himself said he has millions of followers in Bangladesh. Our report was an attempt to show how young minds were interpreting Dr Naik's views in ways that were perhaps not intended for.

The Daily Star stands corrected on its report that he was banned in Malaysia.

He also talked about his own ban in different countries.

Naik in his speech said that three years ago he received one of the most prestigious awards in Malaysia. He added that he was in Malaysia hardly three months back and met several ministers there.

However, about his case in the UK, Naik himself said: "The only country that I am officially aware of ban, once from entering, was UK. I don't have any proof that any country has banned me officially."

About the Canada issue, according to the top Canadian newspaper Toronto Star, Zakir Naik in June 2010 was phoned by a Canadian embassy official in New Delhi to say that he would be refused entry if he decided to come. Naik was set to attend a conference in Canada at that time.

The report adds that "At the same time, nothing was put in writing."

The Daily Star's reporting was a mere presentation of facts and we regret any misunderstanding between Dr Zakir Naik and this newspaper.

Diplomats want security revisit

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situation in Bangladesh and the US support in an investigation into the July-1 attack, security for US embassy officials and US facilities in Bangladesh.

Arriving this morning on a two-day visit, Biswal is expected to have meetings with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali and government high officials.

Biswal is likely to push for allowing Bangladeshi private security personnel, protecting American officials, to carry firearms.

Like in most diplomatic missions and thousands of other establishments in Dhaka, the personnel employed by security companies are unarmed in compliance with Bangladeshi laws.

The US government informed the Bangladesh government that the embassy was interested in exploring the

option of some of the Bangladeshi private security personnel carrying firearms.

Talking to The Daily Star, a high official at the foreign ministry said the existing laws do not allow private security personnel to carry arms, but the law could be amended considering the security situation.

But a thorough analysis of its effectiveness and implications is needed, the official added.

The US and other mostly western countries have said Bangladesh has the entire international community beside it in its fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

Foreign ministry officials said a good number of countries offered counterterrorism and tech-intelligence cooperation to prevent future attacks in Bangladesh.

However, Dhaka has been cautious

in accepting counter-terrorism cooperation from foreign countries.

Officials at the foreign and home ministries said Bangladesh was incorporating the suggestions of its friendly countries and was sharing information on the ground.

Highly placed diplomatic sources said Dhaka was against giving any "physical access" to any foreign security personnel.

Bangladesh now is not willing to argue over the presence of Islamic State, rather it focuses on doubling efforts to root out militancy from its land with an entirely overhauled strategy, they said.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of foreign diplomats living in Dhaka said the nature of the café attack showed that Bangladesh had a lot to learn and that it needs to beef up its capabilities, learn to gather intelligence better, train its law enforcement agencies and other

security personnel.

They said it was time for the government to go for a deeper analysis of the situation.

They also stressed the need for national unity since modern-day terrorism is a very complex and multifaceted problem and only security measures of law enforcers was not enough to combat terrorism and violent extremism.

Talking to The Daily Star, foreign diplomats said they think the attack would definitely have a negative impact on the image of the country, which was already in the spotlight following systematic attacks on foreigners, minorities, secular bloggers, and intellectuals in recent months. They believe foreign nationals in the country were under threat of these targeted attacks.

"The US government believes the threat of terrorism, especially attacks against foreigners, remains real and

credible in Bangladesh," an US state department spokesperson said.

Diplomatic sources said the incidents have caused greater international scrutiny of threats as well as Bangladesh's ability to rein it in. Foreign governments have issued revised advisories and warnings to its citizens, while the international business community watches with more astute vigilance out of concerns over personal safety, asset security, reputation and business continuity.

Foreign diplomatic missions have advised its citizens to exercise heightened vigilance and caution. They also asked Dhaka to tighten security across the country including expatriate enclaves in Gulshan.

A number of local, regional and international events scheduled for this month have been cancelled considering security threat.

'He cannot be my son'

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Sirajul's apartment in the capital's Bashundhara. But he refused to talk to them in person. Later, he replied to queries from them over the intercom at the apartment building.

Abir was an introvert boy in childhood. He hardly had any friends, said Sirajul who is from Comilla.

"I could not even imagine that I have to go through such agony..."

How Abir, the youngest among four brothers, got involved in militancy is still a mystery to Sirajul.

He said Abir, a BBA student at North South University, had been missing for the last four months.

The Daily Star tried to contact Belal Ahmed, spokesperson for the university, for comments in this regard but couldn't reach him.

Sirajul filed a general diary with the capital's Bhatara Police Station the day before the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Abir's family and relatives came to know about his death through social media and news reports on TV channels.

Abir's family has been living at Bashundhara for the last one and a half years. He grew up at Baridhara DOHS where the family lived for many years.

He used to offer prayers regularly since his childhood, Sirajul mentioned.

At the beginning of March, Abir

suddenly decided to go to Malaysia for studies. But the family members disagreed with him and tried to persuade him to change his mind.

They even proposed making arrangements for him to study in Australia or Canada, where two of his brothers live.

But Abir was adamant, and said that unlike Canada and Australia, Malaysia is a Muslim-dominated country, recalled Sirajul.

"We had an argument over the issue on February 29, and the following day he left home without saying anything to anyone."

Abir was alone at home that day, Sirajul said adding that the family was

quite sure he had left for Malaysia.

But following the Holey Artisan attack, fear and suspicion grew among the family members as some of the attackers were found to have been missing for months.

Sirajul then decided to file the GD about his missing son.

Asked why the family didn't do that earlier, Sirajul said they thought he had left home out of anger and that he would return.

"It was beyond my thoughts that he chose such a hateful path." Sirajul claimed that he found nothing suspicious in Abir's behaviour.

He called upon all parents to keep a

close watch on their children. "I wish no father would suffer like me," he said.

Md Suman, a caretaker of the 10-storey apartment building, said Abir used to ride a white bicycle, which has been lying idle at a corner of the garage since the beginning of March.

Nurul Muttakin, officer-in-charge of Bhatara Police Station, said Sirajul mentioned in the GD that his son had been missing since March this year.

Talking to BBC Bangla Service yesterday evening, Abir's elder brother Ashiqur Rahman said his family members had no idea about his younger brother's activities on Facebook or other social networking sites.