

Combat militancy, ensure security

PM asks lawmakers, DCs

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked her party lawmakers to form active anti-militancy committees in their respective constituencies to fight extremism and militancy.

"We will have to ensure people's security for the sake of continuation of the country's overall development," she told an emergency meeting of the Awami League Parliamentary Party (ALPP) at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan.

Earlier in the day, the PM asked all concerned, including the deputy commissioners of districts, to combat terrorism and militancy with their utmost efficiency, strength, merit and talent.

Hasina was addressing the inaugural session of the four-day Deputy Commissioners Conference 2016 at her office, reports UNB.

At the ALPP meeting, the premier directed MPs to form social resistance against terrorism and militancy so that the extremist forces cannot create any volatile situation in the country.

During the hour-long meeting, she asked the legislators to oversee whether the Khutba of Juma prayers were being recited in mosques across the country in line with suggestions made by Islamic

Foundation to create anti-militant sentiment among people.

She directed MPs to hold anti-militancy rallies, processions and carry out other activities in their constituencies to create awareness against militancy.

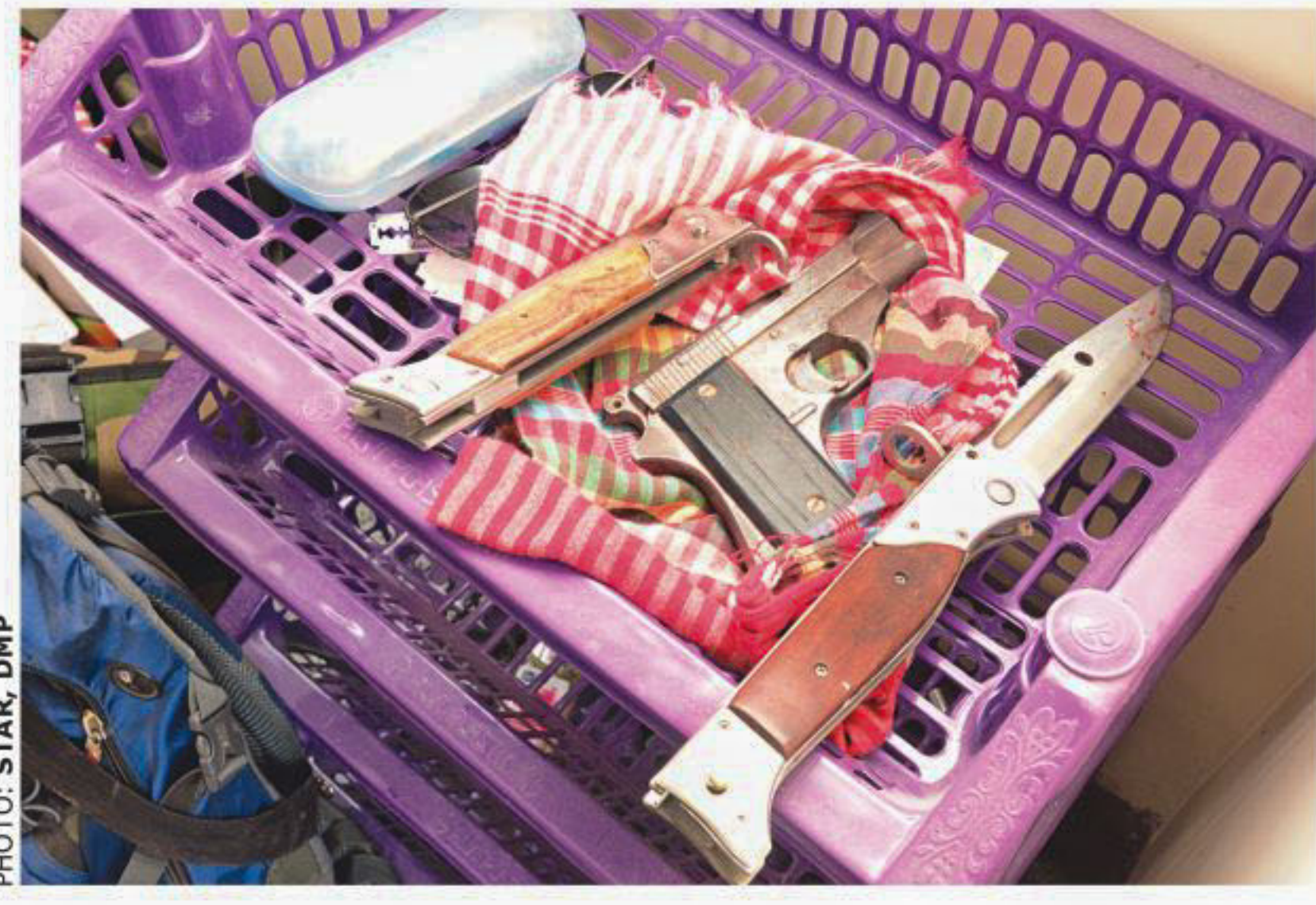
Lauding the law enforcement and intelligence agencies for their actions during the recent militant attacks, she said her government tackled all the law and order situations successfully.

'PREPARE FOR POLLS' Hasina, also the AL president, advised party lawmakers to make preparation for the next general election.

"Over two years of our government's tenure have already passed. The next election will be held after around two-and-a-half years. You [lawmakers] will frequently visit your areas and oversee the government's ongoing development activities. You will also publicise the development and the government's successes among people," she said.

ZILA PARISHAD POLLS The premier informed lawmakers that her government would soon hold the long overdue zila parishad polls as part of its plan to strengthen local government. She, however, did not mention

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Clockwise from top right, Weapons and other items, seized from the "militant hideout", are on display at the Media Centre of Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday afternoon. Curious local residents look at the "Jahaz building" in Kalyanpur. Weapons in the militants' flat. DMP officials brief newsmen at its Media Centre.



Went missing from Bogra a year ago

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He is Rakibul Hasan Reagan of Bogra Sadar who, police claim, is a militant.

He sustained bullet injuries during the police operation in the early hours yesterday. Before being hit by bullets, he jumped from the building and broke his legs.

Police took him into their custody and he is now under treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The 19-year-old claimed himself to be a member of Islamic State, the terror group that controls a large territory in Iraq and Syria, police and DMCH sources said.

The terror group took credit for many of the targeted attacks, including the July 1 Gulshan siege, in the country over the past three years, but the government insists IS has no organisational presence in Bangladesh.

Son of late businessman Rezaul Karim and Rokeya Akhter of Jamalinagar area of Bogra town, Rakibul left home on July 26 last year to attend classes at Retina Coaching Centre in the town, said police and his mother.

Retina is a medical coaching centre known to be run by Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami.

However, when he did not return home, his mother, a senior medical assistant at Bijrul Union Health Complex under Nandigram upazila of the district, filed a general diary the next day, seeking law enforcers' help to

find him.

According to the GD, Rakibul passed SSC from Karotoa Multimedia School and College in 2013 and HSC from Government Shah Sultan College in 2015.

The family looked for him in various places, finding his phone switched off, she said in the GD.

After his detention, when Rakibul said he was from Bogra, police took his mother and the father-in-law of his sister to the local police station to confirm his identity, which they did.

They were later released, Abul Bashar, officer-in-charge of Bogra Sadar Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Talking to the BBC Bangla yesterday, his mother said: "My son can't take the path willingly unless he was brainwashed. My son can't take a wrong path willingly."

When he was taken to the DMCH around 3:00am yesterday, Rakibul initially said he cooked for the alleged militants, who were later killed in the raid, police and DMCH sources said.

When police questioned him further, he said they all belonged to IS, added the sources.

Police then asked him to "spell" IS. He then elaborated it, saying: "Islamic State."

MASUD AND SHIHAB IN JAIL The three friends were students of Govt Shah Sultan College in Bogra,

said Rokeya, Rakibul's mother.

For about one year, Shihab and his mother and sister lived in the house of Rakibul as tenants.

Masud used to live in a mess in Puran Bogra area.

Shihab and his family left the house some six months before Rakibul went missing. Later, they learnt that both Shihab and Masud had also gone missing on the same day, Rokeya said.

Md Monnaf, a sub-inspector at Bogra Sadar Police Station and also investigation officer of the GD filed by Rakibul's mother, told The Daily Star yesterday that during investigation, he came to know that the three had gone missing on the same day.

Later, they learnt that Masud Rana, of Keshalata village under Adamdighi upazila in Bogra, was arrested from Dhaka in connection with the killing of Ibrahim Mollah.

Ibrahim was stabbed to death in the capital's Gabtoli on October 22 last year. Masud had accompanied the alleged killer, Kamal, and was caught red-handed from the spot.

Law enforcers then told The Daily Star that Masud was a Shibir activist of Bogra's Adamdighi upazila.

Selimumzaman, OCO of Darussalam Police Station in the capital, said the case was filed with their station but detectives investigated the case and already submitted

the charge sheet. "As far as I know, Masud Rana is an accused in the charge sheet and is now in jail."

Monnaf said Moyminal, of Swajankuri village of Bogra's Dupchanchia Upazila, was arrested in connection with an explosives case filed under Sherpur Police Station of the district.

Contacted, Mizanur Rahman, an inspector of the station and investigation officer of Shihab's case, said they arrested him about two months ago in a case filed on April 4 for possessing explosives and was in jail.

Like the three friends, most of those who carried out two recent attacks -- July 1 Gulshan café siege and the Sholakia attack on the Eid day -- had remained missing for several months before the attacks.

[Our Bogra correspondent contributed to this report.]

Swift action

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militants were killed early yesterday during a special drive by the joint forces in Kalyanpur, ending an overnight standoff that ensued with a raid on the "militant den".

The SWAT, Rapid Action Battalion, Detective Branch of police and Dhaka Metropolitan Police jointly carried out the one-hour operation "Storm 26" from 5:51am.

9 militants killed

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"Storm 26" was launched at 5:51am.

The dead were in black outfits and red-white chequered scarves similar to the ones five Gulshan attackers were wearing in the IS photos posted by SITE Intelligence Group.

The black outfit and the scarf are often seen in pictures of IS militants in the media.

Islamic State's another recognisable symbol is its black and white flag adorned with Arabic lettering. Black cloths resembling the IS flag were also found at the flat.

Following the operation, an official of the DB's bomb disposal unit said the bodies were lying on the floor in pools of blood with some of them holding knives. Others had grenades in their pockets.

DMP boss Asaduzzaman Mia at the briefing said that after the gunfight, the joint force recovered 13 locally made grenades, around five kg gel, 19 detonators, four 7.62mm pistols, seven magazines of 7.62mm pistols, 22 bullets, three commando knives and 12 guerrilla knives and two black flags with Arabic letters.

The operation came days after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina warned of more deadly attacks like the ones at Gulshan bakery on July 1 and Sholakia on July 7.

Some of the Gulshan and Sholakia attackers studied at reputed institutions and remained missing.

Rakibul, who was detained, too went missing a year ago.

the dead in its Facebook page, saying if anyone can identify them, he/she is being requested to leave a message in the inbox.

The DMP boss told the media that the militants, aged between 20 and 25, wore black panjabis and jeans. All except one were wearing sneakers.

Their appearance, dresses, attitude and their conversation with police when they were asked to surrender suggested that they were smart, well educated and from elite class.

It is possible that these militants and the Holey Artisan gunmen belonged to the same group, added the DMP chief.

A DB official said possibly the black dresses were their combat uniform.

Deputy Commissioner of DMP (Mirpur division) Masud Ahmed said they were conducting the block raid in Kalyanpur area as part of the ongoing anti-militancy drives in the capital and other parts of the country.

"As our team cordoned off the area and began searching different messes, they came under grenade and gun attacks from the building," he told The Daily Star. The force retaliated with fire.

"I mobilised more forces to the area and informed my high-ups and SWAT, counterterrorism unit and DB," he said.

Later, when they entered the fourth-floor flat at the six-storey "Jahaz Building", they found the militants had burnt some documents.

Photos inside the building showed bundles of burnt currency notes and destroyed laptops and phones at the flat.

The flat has three rooms, a kitchen and a toilet.

ter attacks, several hundred members of DMP, SWAT, DB, counterterrorism unit and Rapid Action Battalion joined the law enforcers already deployed around "Jahaz Building".

They restricted the area for the media and public and evacuated residents from some other apartments and parts of some nearby buildings.

Whenever people were peeking out the windows or coming out on verandas, police shouted, "Go inside."

OPERATION STORM 26 At 5:51am, around 50 members of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) in combat gears launched the hour-long operation "Storm 26" assisted by members of other agencies and units.

One of the SWAT members said they faced strong resistance as one grenade after another was hurled at them. "We had a plan to catch the militants alive but could not as they kept throwing grenades at us."

He added that shells of bullets, grenades and firearms were scattered all over the floor.

As the operation started, staccato of fires rocked the area for 15 minutes. After that, gunshots were heard at several minutes' intervals.

A neighbour, on condition of anonymity, said he saw through his window that several young men in black clothes were firing pistols from the flat while law enforcers were shooting incessantly from the ground as well as through the windows of neighbouring buildings.

Police sources said about 400-500 shots were fired by law enforcers.

Around 7:15am, DMP Additional Commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Maruf Hassan along with some other officials told journalists, who gathered around 250 to 300 yards off the crime scene, that they completed the operation at 6:51am.

"We have completed the operation and killed nine militants who were inside the flat," Maruf said.

Police AKM Shahidul Hoque and DMP commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia visited the spot.

Asked whether they could ascertain the identities of the nine, the IGP said an injured militant who was being treated at the DMCH claimed to be an IS member, "but we believe they are JMB operatives".

An official said the flat's walls and the main door were riddled with bullet holes.

The bomb disposal unit was the first to enter the flat following "Storm 26". They neutralised the grenades found there.

The CID then went in and collected evidence till about 4:15pm after which the bodies were sent for autopsies.

Police took the bodies to Dhaka Medical College morgue around 5:00pm.

Morgue sources said there were multiple marks of bullets on each of the bodies and autopsies would be conducted today.

According to DMP Deputy Commissioner (Media) Masudur Rahman, the raid was carefully planned to avoid casualty of innocents.

BRIEFING DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia during the briefing at the DMP media centre in the afternoon said the group members rented the flat on June 20.

They had been planning to carry out an attack like the one at Holey Artisan, he added.

He also said that before starting the operation, law enforcers through hand mike asked the militants to surrender.

"But they shouted 'Allahu Akbar' and hurled grenades and opened fire targeting the law enforcers," he said. Police also opened fire in retaliation.

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members and left, telling her that they would come back.

Minutes later, she heard gunshots, sending chills down her spine. She was completely gripped by panic the moment the thought of her children's safety came to her mind.

In no time, she rushed to them, held them in her arms and lay on the floor together.

As they were in that position, the police and the militants continued to exchange fire at regular intervals. Rahima could not remember exactly how long they had been like that.

"I thought I would lose my children. I thought we would die," she told The Daily Star after coming out with her children around 4:45pm, passing over 16 hours of horror inside the building.

"It's like a new life," she said as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Rahima and the children had an emotional reunion with her husband Shaheb Ali, a cook, who had anxiously been waiting outside. He had repeatedly tried to get in but was not allowed to do so by the law enforcers.

Shaheb hugged his wife and children and gave them food.

He said after the gun battle began, Rahima called him over phone and warned not to come home.

"You can't even imagine how I passed the entire night. Thanks to the Almighty for saving my family," he told this correspondent.

With a monthly rent of Tk 7,000, the family moved in to a flat on the third floor of the building around four months ago. They shifted to the new flat some two months later.

Police claimed that they had evacuated some people from the building before and during the standoff between the law enforcers and the alleged militants. However, Rahima and her children could not come out.

"JAHAZ BUILDING"

Some bachelors living in the upper floor flats had forbidden the residents from the lower floors to go to the rooftop, said Rahima.

"One day my kids went to the rooftop. But one of the youths asked them not to go there again," she said.

When the mother drew the house owner's attention to the matter, she too asked her not to let her children go there, claimed Rahima.

The family said they chose to stay in the building as the house rent was reasonable.

This building where nine suspected militants were killed during yesterday's standoff is known as "Jahaz [ship] Building" because of its appearance.

The six-storey building has four flats in each floor except for the ground floor which is used as a parking space.

A neighbour, who has been living in a nearby building for about 23 years, said the owner of the "Jahaz Building" used to rent out flats only to married people before.

Bachelor tenants started to move in to the flats some five to six years ago, added the neighbour.

The building, which had so many bachelors as tenants, was raided several times during the country-wide blockade enforced by the BNP-led alliance last year, said another local, wishing not to be named.

BUILDING OWNER ARRESTED Police have arrested Momtaz Parveen, owner of the building, and her son Mazharul Islam Jewel for not providing police with information about their tenants, said Deputy Commissioner (Mirpur division) Masud Ahmed.

However, before his arrest, Jewel told reporters that he had asked all his tenants to provide him with their information which they did not do.

Similar to Gulshan's

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inscribing "Allahu Akbar" in Arabic letters, black robes, and red and white chequered keffiyeh -- law enforcers seized from the "militant den" brought the IS issue to the fore soon after the drive ended.

Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque, however, said the nine killed in the raid had no connection with Islamic State jihadists although police found black dresses and red keffiyeh inside the rooms.

"We suspect them to be JMB members, but they claim themselves to be part of IS. We've found no IS links with them," he told reporters in front of the house yesterday morning.

Earlier, the IGP held militants of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) responsible for the terror attack at Holey Artisan Bakery. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan on several occasions shared similar views on the Gulshan café attack, which left 22 people dead.

Around noon, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia said that militants killed in Kalyanpur and the gunmen who attacked the Gulshan café might belong to the same group.

"The dresses and backpacks found in the raid are 'as it is' to the ones used by the Gulshan attackers," he said, adding that special handkerchiefs they found in the house were similar to those used in Gulshan

incident.

It primarily appeared that the nine in Kalyanpur and the Gulshan café attackers might be members of the same group, the DMP commissioner said at a press briefing at the DMP headquarters in the capital.

He said all nine militants are between the age of 20 and 25 and most of them are from well-off families. "Most of them were well educated. They wore black panjabis and jeans ... all except one wore a pair of sneakers."

"Their accents, attitude and dresses suggest that they are from elite class," he said.

Replying to a query, Asaduzzaman said they would be able to ascertain which organisation the nine militants belonged to after investigation.

The five Gulshan café attackers too had worn black robes and scarves and posed for photographs in front of an IS flag with guns. US-based Site Intelligence, which monitors jihadi activities, on July 2 posted the photos, saying the images were released by IS.

The five were also from well-off families and their ages were similar to Kalyanpur "militants".

In previous attacks, IS claimed responsibility for the attacks, according to the Site Intelligence. But the government and police maintained that there is no IS presence in the country and that the attacks were carried out by homegrown militants.

A night of horror

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