

Hajis' flight trouble on

RASHIDUL HASAN

Over 800 hajis suffered delays of up to around five hours as two Biman flights touched down behind schedule at Shahjalal International Airport yesterday, the third day of return hajj flights.

And that was not all. Some hajis had to stay at the airport for hours for their luggage.

Sources at Biman Bangladesh Airlines said the two flights were scheduled to arrive in Dhaka from Jeddah at 8:30am and 1:10pm. But they landed at 11:30am and 6:00pm respectively.

Talking to The Daily Star about his plight, college teacher Akil Ali Mir said his hajj guide didn't bother to pick him up from the hotel to take him to Jeddah airport on time.

"Some of us had to wait at Jeddah airport for over 10 hours as many other Bangladeshis were late," added Akil Ali of Patuakhali.

Nazrul Islam of Barisal said after changing the check out time at the hotel, his guide informed him that he would send a vehicle to the hotel at 9:00am on Sunday to take him to

Jeddah airport.

"The vehicle finally came seven hours later. But we couldn't contact the guide during this period," he added.

Nazrul complained that many hajis were stranded at the airport for hours without any food, leaving pilgrims, particularly the elderly ones, suffer.

Wishing anonymity, a hajah said she waited at Dhaka airport for more than three hours for her luggage.

"I didn't find any staff at the airport who would tell me how long I need to wait to have my luggage," she said.

A top Biman official said the flight schedules were messed up in the first two days as many hajj agents failed to bring pilgrims to Jeddah airport on time.

He, however, claimed the situation improved yesterday. A delay of two to three hours at Jeddah airport is normal considering the huge rush of pilgrims, the official added.

The return flights of Bangladeshi hajis started on September 17 and would continue till October 17. The national flag carrier has so far flown home over 2,500 pilgrims.



In an effort to raise awareness among motorcyclists about wearing helmets, traffic police in Chapainawabganj sell helmets to bikers at a temporary checkpoint in the town's Court area. They say many riders are not keen on using helmets which is one of the major reasons for fatalities on roads. At least 50 helmets were sold yesterday.

PHOTO: RABIUL HASAN DOLLAR

Investigation sees

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Investigators also said they would soon seek court's permission for matching DNA samples with the suspects.

They are yet to make an appeal to the court.

Jalal Uddin, assistant superintendent of the CID tasked with the probe recently, said they had not appealed for the court's permission as they were yet to identify any suspect.

"Whenever we will be able to identify suspects, we will submit a prayer to the court to cross-match the DNA samples," he told a correspondent in Comilla.

But on May 16, Nazmul Karim Khan, the then special superintendent of the CID, Noakhali-Comilla division, said the probe team had shortened the list of suspects and "now we will see if the samples match with the DNA of any suspect."

The CID official was transferred on July 25.

CID officials said Tonu's family members had named some people as suspects but could not give any specific reason as to why they suspected them.

Tonu, a second-year history student

of Comilla Victoria College and a theatre activist, was found murdered inside the Comilla Cantonment on March 20.

Two autopsies could not determine the cause of her death though her father Yaar Hossain, who first spotted the body in a bush, saw the back of his daughter's head smashed and injury marks on her nose.

The police inquest report did not cite any sign of injury.

The delay of arresting the killers frustrated the family.

Talking to The Daily Star by phone, Tonu's mother Anwara Begum said, "As one more month passed, we became more concerned about getting justice. The investigators only say that they have been looking into it [the murder]."

"My daughter was killed. They [murderers] took away my daughter If we get justice, we get some solace."

She sought the prime minister's intervention in the matter to ensure justice for the girl.

India weighs response to Kashmir attack

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Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday called Pakistan "a terrorist state" and army Lieutenant General Ranbir Singh said troops were "ready to give a befitting response", without elaborating.

Pakistan accused India of apportioning blame before it had properly investigated.

"Pakistan categorically rejects the baseless and irresponsible accusations being levelled by senior officials in Prime Minister Modi's government," the foreign affairs adviser to Pakistan's prime minister said in a statement late on Sunday.

The army said that India was promoting a "hostile narrative".

LIMITED OPTIONS

India's options to hit back at Pakistan appeared limited, as they carry the risk of escalation. India held back from military retaliation when a Pakistan-based group killed 166 people in a 2008 rampage through Mumbai for fear of igniting a broader

conflict and opted instead for a diplomatic offensive to isolate Islamabad.

An attack on another Indian base near the border in January also drew a measured response, but the casualty toll was lower than in Sunday's raid.

The concern is that Modi's government has several times signalled a lower threshold for retaliating against attacks from Pakistan than the previous Congress government, which adopted a policy of "strategic restraint".

Among the military options that India could consider are artillery strikes on Pakistani army positions it alleges are used for helping militants cross over into its part of Kashmir, military experts say. But that would imperil a 2003 ceasefire along the frontier, although it has frayed in recent years.

A second option on the table would be sending special forces inside Pakistan to attack guerrilla training camps, but that was a high-risk gamble that could easily go

wrong, they said.

Modi yesterday held talks with leaders of his Bharatiya Janata Party at a cabinet meeting on how to respond.

Informed sources indicated that Modi has sought a concerted global effort to diplomatically isolate Pakistan as an immediate step, reports IANS.

Modi wants clear evidence of Pakistan's complicity to be presented to all major global fora, including the upcoming UN General Assembly, the sources indicated.

"Our first priority is to fortify every defence base and it is shocking that one of our strategic locations was hit," a senior aide told Reuters. "It has exposed the flaws and the weakness of our security infrastructure and an immediate overhaul is the first job on hand."

EYEBALL TO EYEBALL

Indian troops searched three ravines that cut across the border in mountainous terrain near Uri, which a senior army official said they believe

the militants sneaked across.

Reinforcements were also sent to patrol one of the world's most heavily militarised frontiers, where Indian and Pakistani forces in places stand eyeball to eyeball and sometimes exchange fire, the army official said.

A weekly bus service between Srinagar in Indian-administered Kashmir and Muzaffarabad, the capital on the Pakistani side, operated as normal yesterday however. The bus passed through Uri and passengers waited at the de facto border ready to cross.

The United States, United Kingdom and France have all condemned the attack and said they stand with India in its fight against "terrorism".

India was ranked fifth in the world in terms of military strength, according to a 2015 assessment by Credit Suisse based on data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Global Firepower, compared to 11th for Pakistan.

Customs seizes gadgets brought in illegally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs Intelligence has seized a shipment of electronics gadgets, including a healthcare robot, a number of miniature cameras, smartwatches, and networking equipment as they were imported under "false declaration".

The shipment of 24 packages from China was initially withheld on September 8 while those were being passed through airfreight gate-1 of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Prior permission from Directorate General of Drug Administration is required to import any medical equipment, as in the case of the robot that the importer had claimed as a "healthcare robot", said customs officials.

Import of the other items as well as the networking equipment would require similar authorisation from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, they said, adding that all the items confiscated had falsely been categorised as "toys and computer equipment" by the importer.

Moinul Khan, director general of Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate, said the customs intelligence following a tip-off withheld the packages, weighing about 325kgs, on September 8.

On September 18 (Sunday) their investigators in presence of officials concerned examined all the items and decided to confiscate the entire shipment as it was imported under false pretence, he added.

The robot weighs 15kgs and has a camera and a sound system built in. The other confiscated items include 120 smartwatches with SIM card slots, 10 mini digital cameras, 25 pen cameras, 63 Ethernet switches, 25 antennas, 19 "base stations" and various other networking devices, Moinul said.

According to the import document (Bill of Entry), Global Communications of Shah Amanat City Corporation Market in Chittagong was the importer of the items while Kum Traders was the clearing and forwarding agent, he said, adding that necessary punitive and legal actions under the customs law would be taken against people responsible after investigation.



A healthcare robot, miniature surveillance devices and smartwatches seized by customs officials at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The equipment was imported without permission from the authorities concerned.

PHOTO: STAR

Return \$15m

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The recovered money is now in the BSP vault.

"It has been proved now that Bangladesh is the legal owner of the stolen funds. The judgment will help us recover the rest of the money," Debaprosad Debnath, general manager of the BB's Financial Intelligence Unit, told reporters at the Bank yesterday.

Hackers had originally tried to steal nearly \$1 billion by placing 35 unauthorised payment orders from the BB's account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in February. They were able to transfer \$81 million to four accounts at Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation in Manila.

During a Senate hearing on the cyber heist that ended in May, a casino junket operator claimed to have received \$35 million of the funds but returned only \$15 million, which is now with the BSP. The casino operator did not clarify what happened to the rest of the money.

Later, Bangladesh Bank had to file a petition to claim to the money, which has been established through the court order.

"We will bring back the recovered funds, after converting it in US dollar from the Philippine peso," said BB Spokesperson Anwarul Islam.

The court order has to reach the Philippines central bank for releasing the sum.

BB officials said they were trying to recover another \$2.7 million frozen by the Philippines' casino regulator in a similar way.

Money came from Dubai thru' hundi

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Officials are investigating whether a Bangladeshi expatriate in the Middle East sent the money to militants, or the money went to militants from anyone in Bangladesh via the Middle East.

On the weapons, Monirul said police were yet to ascertain the source but it is confirmed that the arms in both the attacks came through India.

A senior official dealing with militancy told this newspaper that donations from expatriates are the major source of money for "Neo JMB". Non-resident Bangladeshis contribute to its fund sometimes without knowing the exact purpose.

The radical group used to manage funds through bank heist, robbery and mugging before Bangladeshi-

Canadian Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury became its leader. As the chief coordinator, he started bringing in money from foreign countries using his connections.

With the killing of Tamim in the August 27 raid in Narayanganj, the group's network for collecting funds from abroad suffered a huge setback.

A number of investigators said funds for militants in Bangladesh often come in the name of charities and NGOs from different Middle Eastern countries.

HUNT FOR KEY MILITANTS

The "Neo JMB", as law enforcers call it, follows the ideology of Islamic State. It was formed by leaders and operatives of mainstream JMB who did not accept the leadership of

Saidur Rahman.

Monirul said the group has lost 60 to 70 percent of its strength following recent raids in Kalyanpur, Azimpur and others areas.

But, he said, some key militants like Nurul Islam Marzan, Rajib Gandhi alias Subhas Gandhi alias Shanto and Basharuzzaman who is known in the organisation as Chocolate are still on the run.

Besides, two top leaders -- Mamunur Rashid Ripon alias Jahangir and Shariful Islam Khaled -- left for India in April, days after the murder of Rajshahi University professor Rezaul Karim Siddiquee.

Marzan, a close aide to Tamim, was the "operation commander" of the café attack.

Rajib, 35, from Gaibandha district, was involved in over 30 secret killings and terrorist attacks in northern and south-western regions.

He was quite young when he joined the mainstream JMB which carried out synchronised bomb attacks across the country in 2005. He was never arrested, Monirul said.

Once a college student, Rajib is a second-tier leader of "Neo JMB" and had close connection with slain coordinator Tamim.

He is thought to be one of the planners and organisers of the Gulshan and Sholakia attacks. He sent two militants from Bogra to take part in the Gulshan attack while another from Dinajpur for Sholakia attack.

Woman torches

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and a plate of mutton biryani by "friends" to join the protests. Bhagya stays with her parents in Giringar, close to the KPN garage, and is a daily wage.

"Bhagya had just returned home around noon (on September 12) when some men knock to her came over and asked her to join the protests. They promised to give her biryani and Rs 100 at the end of the day," Yellamma said.

Police sources said the footage from the arson site also shows other women, but it is not clear if they played an active role in the vandalism. Bhagya is the only woman among the 400-odd people arrested in connection with the September 12 violence in Bengaluru. She is currently in police custody for further questioning.

A senior police officer said it was not yet clear if Bhagya was leading the mob. "As of now, we can say she was one of the arsonists," the officer added.