

## Two 'foreign fighters' charged in Australia

AFP, Sydney

Two men were charged in Australia yesterday over breaches of the country's foreign fighter laws, with one accused of joining the Al-Nusra Front in Syria.

It followed a series of morning raids across Sydney by the New South Wales Joint Counter Terrorism team, with the other person detained after allegedly trying to travel to Syria to fight with the Islamic State group.

Australian Federal Police assistant commissioner for counter terrorism Neil Gaughan said it had been a protracted investigation as gathering evidence from Syria was "extremely difficult".

"We have arrested these gentlemen as quickly as we possibly could," he said, adding that those returning from either Syria or Iraq could carry out violent acts once back in Australia.

"The challenge for our members is to gather evidence to an appropriate standard to enable a prosecution."

Mehmet Biber, 24, was charged with "incursions into foreign states with the intention of engaging in hostile activities" and if convicted faces up to 20 years in jail.

Police claim he left for Syria in July 2013 to join Al-Nusra -- the former name of ex-Al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front -- before returning to Australia six months later.

A 17-year-old boy, who cannot be named because he's a juvenile, was charged with attempting to travel to a conflict zone and encouraging others to do the same, for which he could face a maximum penalty of life in prison.

## No rally

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authorities concerned to hold a rally in Suhrawardy Udyan on November 8 to mark the National Revolution and Solidarity Day."

Speaking at a press briefing at the BNP's Nayapalton office, he yesterday urged the authorities concerned to give them the permission as soon as possible so that they could take proper preparations for it.

## Dhaka, Delhi

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elevated their ties from a "closer comprehensive partnership of cooperation" to a "strategic partnership of cooperation."

On May 12, 2014, Bangladesh and China signed four agreements on military cooperation, aimed at improving professionalism and other capacities of the Bangladesh armed forces officials.

Bangladesh is also purchasing a submarine from China for strengthening its operational capabilities to protect Bangladesh's maritime territory and resources.

This will be Hasina's second official visit to India since January 2010.

Diplomatic sources said they were working on fixing a date when she would fly to India.

Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque will make a two-day visit to Delhi from November 9 for high-level consultations to prepare the ground for Sheikh Hasina's visit to India.

Shahidul will meet Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar to finalise the details of various programmes of Hasina. The duration of her stay in India is yet to be finalised, sources told The Daily Star.

Teesta river water-sharing, counter-terrorism, defence cooperation, trade and the future of the eight-nation grouping Saarc are among the issues that are expected to dominate the talks between Hasina and Modi, they said.

Hasina's visit may coincide with Modi's planned international conference in New Delhi where countries and experts could share their experiences as to how to guard against radicalisation of youths which has become a major problem in South Asia, said the sources.

Hasina's detailed presentation of her government's steps to combat radicalisation of youths had her Indian counterpart Modi "highly impressed" during their meeting in Goa on October 16 on the sidelines of BRICS-BIMSTEC Leader's Outreach Summit.

Hasina is understood to have expressed her desire to visit the dargah in Ajmer, which is revered equally by Hindus and Muslims, and the Bangladesh Bhavan in Viswabharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal, during her visit, the sources said.

Officials said there may be another round of visits from Indian foreign secretary or national security adviser, and Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali of Bangladesh before Hasina visits India.

## New software

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at more than 100 times the speed of current systems.

Launched on Monday on the eve of a two-day NEC trade show in Tokyo, the NeoFace Image data mining system taps artificial intelligence to scan video footage for specific individuals.

NEC said its latest software can scan through one million faces captured in closed-circuit television footage within 10 seconds, and that this could come in handy in criminal forensic investigations and in finding missing persons.

"For example, you may have 40 videos of a crime scene to find a suspicious person, and you need to look through all these videos, which will take a lot of time and effort to prove that the same person keeps appearing in all of them," a spokesman said on Monday at a media preview of the trade show.

"But the new approach matches people with similar facial features and groups them together," she said, adding that the system works regardless of the quality of the video.

Other data that can be gleaned from this information includes a person's movements, the number of times one might have visited a specific location as well as the people one might have met.

"In recent years, there is growing demand for advanced analysis of camera footage for use in security and marketing applications," said Noritaka Taguma, the general manager of NEC's transport and city infrastructure division.

The new program "meets this demand

by providing high-speed, high-precision searches for persons who appear in specific patterns, which could not be achieved through manual searches or conventional technology", he said.

NEC, which runs a research laboratory and a cyber security outfit in Singapore, is a world leader in biometric technology.

Its biometric systems are being used in more than 40 territories, including in Singapore's passport and Macau's border control systems. A deal was announced in May for NEC to provide its facial recognition technology to New York's John F. Kennedy Airport.

In Japan, the technology is also being used in visitor passes to Universal Studios as well as to prevent ticket scalping at concerts.

The facial recognition technology market is worth \$200 billion and growing by about 20 per cent annually, said NEC principal research fellow Hitoshi Imaoka, who does research in facial recognition technology.

He said on Monday that some new areas that NEC is working on developing include the use of facial recognition in cashless payment and, in hospitals, the identification of patients without the need to register each time.

On the NeoFace Image system, he acknowledged that it is not always foolproof but said: "In the United States, it is common understanding that the biometric approach combines multiple methods, such as fingerprints or passwords, to have more accuracy."

## Stalker kills RMG

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girl was allegedly raped by a local youth at Nittipota village under Dhunat upazila of Bogra on Tuesday.

The victim's mother Sultana Razia lodged a rape case yesterday against Rezaul Karim, 36, a day labourer, of the same village.

According to the case statement, Sultana went to a neighbour's house and by the time she returned her 17-year-old daughter had been raped. The alleged rapist fled the scene.

The girl was sent to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College and Hospital yesterday noon for a medical report concerning the matter, said Farul Islam, inspector (inquiry) of Dhunat Police Station.

Police have been conducting drives to arrest the accused in the case, he said.

Meanwhile, alleged stalkers killed father of a schoolgirl in Manikganj for protest against stalking of his daughter on Wednesday night.

The victim, Billal Hossain, 40, of Kakkol village in Shivalaya upazila of Manikganj, did not return home from his tailoring shop that night, his wife said. Locals yesterday found his body floating on the water under the Machain bridge.

Billal's wife said college student Sumon, son of Eklas Madbar of the village, and his associates, had been stalking her daughter, a student of class-X at Rupsha Wahed Ali High school. Sumon proposed to the girl several times but she rejected.

As Billal protested the stalking, Sumon along with some of his associates killed him and dumped the body into the canal, his wife alleged.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body, said Nazrul Islam, Officer-in-charge of Harirampur police.

Meanwhile, a case was filed in Sonaimuri upazila of Noakhali accusing five stalkers who threatened to kill teachers for protesting sexual harassment of students.

## Iraqi forces close

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IS has fallen back when massively outnumbered in recent battles, giving up some of its emblematic bastions -- such as Fallujah in Iraq and Dabiq in Syria -- without following its own apocalyptic ideology of fighting to the bitter end.

In his latest message, which is undated but makes reference to events that are at most a few weeks old, Baghdadi also calls for attacks against Saudi Arabia -- a favourite target -- and Turkey.

Ankara has troops stationed at a base just outside Mosul and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's escalating rhetoric has raised fears of an expanded Turkish military intervention in Iraq.

Baghdadi also said that his followers who could not travel to Syria or Iraq should aim for Libya and urged all IS fighters to remain united in adversity.

He attempted to stir up sectarian resentment by referring to religious flags and slogans of Shia fighters among Iraqi forces and by accusing other Sunni groups and politicians of treason.

The recapture of Mosul by Iraqi forces could spell the end of the group's days as a land-holding force in Iraq and deal a death blow to the "caliphate".

The US-led coalition supporting the Iraqi offensive estimates the number of IS fighters holed up in Mosul at 3,000 to 5,000 and has warned the battle for the city could be long and

Joyag College Principle Ayub Ali filed the case with Sonaimuri police on Wednesday night against five. Of them, four were identified as Emdadul Huq Sukorno, 19, Shakil, 20, Tushar, 18, and Faruk, 22. The other accused was unnamed.

As girls were doing physical exercises on Wednesday, Sukorno and Shakil were capturing photos with their mobile phones, witnesses said. The principal noticed it and warned them not to do so.

Later around 12:00noon, Sukorno, Shakil and some of their associates entered the principal's office and threatened to kill him. As two other teachers rushed in, they were also threatened with death.

Ayub Ali said, "We are feeling insecure after filing the case. They [stalkers] are asking us to withdraw the case, otherwise the situation will deteriorate."

## Monem Khan

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Annisul told this paper that the recovered land could be spared for widening the road and footpath or greenery or a recreational area for the public.

No family members of Monem Khan could be readily reached for verification of their claim and possession during the drive.

Annisul told journalists there that no government agency had ever taken the initiative to reclaim the land. "It should be investigated," he said.

The many wealthy people engaged in such malpractice should rectify the situation in public interest, he added.

He called upon the government to form a commission and a special court to reclaim illegally occupied public lands.

"Almost every industry and factory in Tejgaon occupies roadside public land...We fervently request all of them to free the lands or we will have no other option than to go for eviction," said Annisul.

difficult.

Iraqi forces advancing on Mosul from three main fronts have retaken dozens of villages and towns scattered over hundreds of square miles.

Earlier this week, federal forces reached the eastern edge of Mosul and on Wednesday were clearing the most recently reconquered areas to set up a breach of the city.

An AFP reporter in Gogjali, on the eastern front line, saw larger than usual numbers of civilians walking to safer areas with little or no belongings.

Some civilians were leaving Gogjali and others the eastern Mosul neighbourhood of Samah, in what may be a rare breach for civilians trapped inside the city.

People who escaped IS rule have recounted tales of jihadist brutality.

"We're coming from the world of the dead back to the world of the living," said Raed Ali, 40, who fled his home in the nearby village of Bazwaya. "It was raining bombs. One landed on our house. Fortunately my children are safe now," he said.

With an assault on Mosul looking imminent, aid groups said they were "bracing for the worst" and warned that the fate of a million-plus civilians still believed trapped inside the city was in the balance.

More than 21,000 people have fled to government-held areas since October 17, while thousands more may have been seized by IS for use as human shields, according to the United Nations.

## Syria rebels renew Aleppo attack

AFP, Aleppo

Syrian rebels renewed their bid to break a government siege on eastern Aleppo yesterday, shelling regime-held parts of the city, hours before a brief Russian-declared ceasefire was due to begin.

State media said at least 12 people had been killed in rebel rocket and gunfire on western neighbourhoods, after an assault that began with a double car bomb attack.

Meanwhile, the spokesman for a Syrian Kurdish-Arab alliance known as the Syrian Democratic Forces said the group would lead the fight to recapture the Islamic State group stronghold of Raqa.

But he stressed that they rejected any role for Turkey, which in August began a military operation inside northern Syria targeting both IS and Kurdish fighters.

In Aleppo, rebels were engaged in fierce fighting with government forces in several districts on the western outskirts, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said.

The Britain-based group said the "most intense fighting" was on the edges of the Halab al-Jadida neighbourhood.

"If they take Halab al-Jadida, they could advance towards the military complexes," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

The clashes on Aleppo's western outskirts could be heard in the city's eastern districts, an AFP correspondent there said.

Rebels including former Al-Qaeda affiliate the Fateh al-Sham Front began an assault on west Aleppo on Friday in a bid to break a three-month government siege.

No aid has reached eastern Aleppo city's more than 250,000 residents since early July, and there are reports of shortages and price hikes.

## US in 'strong decline'

Says Iran commander

AFP, Tehran

A senior Iranian military official yesterday welcomed what he said was the "strong decline" of the United States, during celebrations marking the start of the 1979 US embassy siege.

"America is no longer number one and the first power of the world," deputy Revolutionary Guards commander Hossein Salami told thousands gathered outside the former US mission in Tehran.

"America's political will can no longer manage political and military development in... the world of Islam. America's political power has strongly declined."

Every year on November 3-4, Iran celebrates the 444-day siege of the embassy when more than 50 diplomats, staff and spies were taken hostage by Islamist students demanding the extradition of the shah, who had fled to America after being deposed a few months earlier in the Islamic revolution.

The crisis severed US-Iranian diplomatic ties for decades, but Tehran last year clinched a deal with world powers to curb its controversial nuclear programme in exchange for an easing of economic sanctions.

Protesters yesterday chanted the traditional rallying cries of "Death to America" and "Death to the House of Saud", in reference to Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia.

But the US remains Iran's main enemy, and Tehran and Washington back opposing sides in several regional conflicts, including Syria and Yemen.

## Solma's wait

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documents to Bangladesh for verification of Solma's identity.

However, there was no response from this side.

The Daily Star ran a report on Solma's plight yesterday, which prompted an immediate measure from the Bangladesh mission.

A delegation led by BM Jamal Hossain visited Solma at the shelter home in Hooghly.

Jamal Hossain said they already had some documents of Solma and contacted her relatives in Gaibandha.

The authority will arrange Solma's repatriation in a week, he told The Daily Star, adding that her travel document would be issued today.

Hearing the news, Solma became emotional.

"I came to India with Golapi Begum, but she left me. I have been in the shelter home for 19 months but my heart is in Shorbananda village," she said.

Her repatriation was uncertain, but now the issue is going to be solved due to the Bangladesh mission's prompt action, said Janasiksha Prochar Kendra Executive Director Abhishekh Mukherjee.

## Firearms came

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They are Md Abu Taher, 37, Mizanur Rahman, 34, Md Selim Mia, 45, and Toufiqul Islam alias Doctor Toufiq, 32.

Police also seized a 9mm pistol and 787 detonators, the main ingredient of homemade grenades, from the four.

Officers suspect that the arrestees brought the detonators and the firearms as per the directives of the "current leadership of Neo JMB" to carry out subversive activities in the capital again, the DMP portal said.

From Indian bordering area, the arrestees used to smuggle firearms and the ingredients of homemade grenades. "Neo JMB" in recent attacks used those firearms and improvised grenades, according to the post.

The portal further wrote that Mizanur Rahman alias Boro Mizan, who leads Chapainawabganj district unit of "Neo JMB", and Mizanur Rahman alias Chhoto Mizan alias Tara are the main recipients of the firearms and explosives from across the border.

In primary interrogation, investigators learnt that the arrestees are involved in smuggling arms and explosives through Bangladesh-India border in Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj.

A counterterrorism official said "Neo JMB" leadership in Bangladesh places demand for arms, ammunition and grenade-making materials to JMB men in India, who include some Bangladeshi militants hiding there.

The Indian group in league with some Indian criminals collects small arms and explosives and smuggles those to "Neo JMB" through Chapainawabganj border.

The arms and explosives then reach Dhaka, hidden in baskets of fruits.

"This was how the arms and grenade-making materials were supplied for the Gulshan attack," Additional Deputy Commissioner Sanwar Hossain of the counterterrorism unit told The Daily Star yesterday, replying to a query.

"We have already identified some Bangladeshi militants hiding in India. They were involved in collecting the arms and explosives," he said but refused to disclose the names for the sake of investigation.

Earlier, police said two top "Neo JMB" leaders, involved in the April 23 murder of Prof Rezaul Karim Siddiquee, went to India months before the Gulshan siege possibly to ensure supply of firearms for the terror attack.

The two -- Mamunur Rashid Ripon alias Jahangir and Shariful Islam Khaled -- are still hiding in India, officials say.

ADC Sanwar said investigation found that the firearms and grenade-making materials used in the Gulshan café attack were smuggled in April.

On the night of July 1, militants seized the café and killed 20 hostages, including nine Italian, seven Japanese and one Indian citizen.

Two police officers were also killed by the attackers.

The over-12-hour siege ended after the launch of a commando

operation in which five terrorists and a café were killed.

Another café staff arrested for his suspected link with the terrorists later died in a hospital. His family says he was in no way involved in militancy.

The authorities maintain that "Neo JMB", an offshoot of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), carried out the attack.

JMB operatives, who became inactive after Saidur Rahman took over as the chief following Abdur Rahman's execution in 2007, formed the new group, inspired by the ideology of Islamic State. Law enforcers call it "Neo JMB".

In the Gulshan siege case, police have arrested former North South University teacher Hasnat Karim, a survivor of the July 1 attack.

Officials at the counterterrorism unit said apart from the four arrested on Wednesday, three more "Neo JMB" operatives, including a key leader, were involved in the smuggling of the firearms and the explosive-making materials.

Investigators earlier said the AK-22s used in the Gulshan attack were first smuggled to Nepal from where those were carried to India before being sent to Dhaka through Chapainawabganj border.

Besides, the pistols were smuggled from Munger district of Bihar in India through the same border.

"Different explosive materials, including gel and detonators, were also smuggled through the Chapainawabganj border," a top investigator had told The Daily Star earlier.

## Back to studies

FROM PAGE 1

more than 30 former RMG workers as students. Before they launched the programme, AUW started off with going to the garment factories and pitching this idea.

In most cases, the women were the sole earners of their families and driving them away from work meant more sufferings for their families. They initially asked the factories to keep paying salaries of the selected students, which most of the factories agreed to do.

Before going into the curriculum of the Bachelors programme, the selected students go through a few extra classes which focus on English and other basic subjects. In August of this year, the first batch of students passed a stringent test which allowed them to continue their AUW academic journey.

Fency Akhter, a former RMG worker, is one of the students who was recently enrolled into this programme. "I never thought an opportunity like this would come. I never thought I would ever get to even see the inside of a university campus and now I am actually studying in one," says Fency.

After her HSC exams, she had to work to maintain her poor family.

Fency now dreams of becoming a journalist.

Asian University for Women, since its establishment in 2008, has always come forward to empower women.

This time their initiative might be a revolution in the whole RMG sector itself. To know more about this wonderful initiative, make sure to grab

## UN funding on decline

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Mohammad Mejbahuddin and UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, Robert Watkins, signed the agreement.

"We are going to get a little less from the UN this time," Mejbahuddin said at the NEC auditorium of the Planning Commission yesterday.

The government will take up and scale up projects now funded by the UN that are making solid contributions to the national development.

The grants committed for the period of 2017 to 2020 under the UNDAF are aligned to Bangladesh government's policies of seventh five-year plan, Vision 2021 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN official Carlos Acosta said in his presentation on the UNDAF.

The agreement is generally prepared for five years but this time has been designed for four years to align with Bangladesh's development policies, he said.

Bangladesh, which joined the rank of low middle income country in 2014, is set to become a middle income country by 2021 through accelerated growth, while the UN's basic principle in the SDGs seeks to leave no one behind.

Carlos said the funding for 2017-20 would be used based on the UN core programme principles - human rights approach, gender equality, environmental sustainability, capacity development and result-based management.

Mejbahuddin appreciated the UN's continued contribution in Bangladesh through technical and programmatic support.

A UN official told The Daily Star appreciation of US dollars, refugee crisis in Europe and Bangladesh's economic development could all be reasons why many donor countries have reduced their grants.

Professor Dr Shamsul Alam, member of General Economics Division of the Planning Commission, however, said that the reduced funding would not have any negative impact on development works.

The bigger infrastructural projects are not funded through the UN but development banks like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, he pointed out.

UN Population Fund Representative Argentina Matavel Piccin told this correspondent that the UN mainly focuses on human rights, gender equality, health, education and environment and such areas in which a country is lagging behind.

Bangladesh can invest in social sectors from other sources, she said.

UN Resident Coordinator Robert Watkins said the UN has some comparative advantages to help the country in a nimble way by adopting to changes.

"We have a very wide international network of experts and people that we can bring in to help respond to your changing needs," he said.

Watkins also said transparency and accountability are two areas that need to be focused on during project implementation. People in the urban slums and remote parts of the country are lagging behind and need extra attention from the authorities.