

VILLAGE POLICE MURDER

14 'JMB' men indicted

OUR CORRESPONDENT, from Dinajpur

A Joypurhat court has framed charges against 14 alleged members of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in a case over the killing of three village police members in 2006.

One of the 14, Montezar Rahman, 50, is serving a life term for his involvement in the countryside near simultaneous bomb blasts on August 17, 2005.

He is also accused in a case over an attack on police and looting of firearms in Uttar Moheshpur village of Joypurhat's Khetlal upazila in 2003.

Whereabouts of the rest could not be ascertained.

The court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Abdul Mojid framed the charges on Tuesday.

Recording of witnesses' testimonies will begin on March 14, Public Prosecutor advocate Nripendra Nath Mondal told The Daily Star.

The prosecution says Abdul Jalil, 45, Rois Uddin, 46, and Bachchu Mondal, 46, started off from their

residences on the evening of December 13 for a night shift on a road in Mahmudpur union connecting Khetlal and Akkelpur upazilas.

Locals found the bodies with their throats slit at Dewgram area in Khetlal the next day, added the prosecution.

Jalil's wife Sazeda Begum filed the murder case with Khetlal Police Station accusing unidentified persons.

The case was shifted to the Detective Branch (DB) of Joypurhat police in 2008 and then to Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in 2010. CID Inspector Nazrul Islam submitted the charge sheet in July 2011.

The remaining 13 are Kamruzzaman, Shahdat Hossain, Anisur Rahman, Mokshed Fakir, Abdus Samzad alias Samsuddin, Jewel Rana, Mosaraf Hossain, Abdul Mojid alias Bhutto, Nur Mohammad Mandal, Delbar Hossain, Shukor Ali alias Shakun, Abdul Latif and Shamser Ali.



Workers weighing logs on a scale before loading them onto a truck on the Barisal-Khulna road in Bagri area of Jhalakathi's Rajapur upazila on Tuesday. Traders buy logs in the nearby villages and put them onto trucks at some 20 spots on the road, ignoring the risks of accidents. The logs are later cut into smaller pieces to be used as firewood.

PHOTO: M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL

Dhaka-Syria-Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

He also asked Sohan to collect some money and give it to him when in Turkey.

Sohan said he managed Tk 37,000 from Shamim, a former student of a cadet college in the north (2007 batch); Sayeed, former student of a cadet college in the south (2007 batch); and a man named Zaki. Interestingly, Sohan is also 2007 batch.

On the night of December 9, Aminul dropped Sohan at Shahjalal International Airport by his car and gave him Tk 1.5 lakh.

Reaching Turkey, Sohan stayed at a hotel. Ozaki landed in Istanbul the next day and called Sohan on Skype.

Sohan and Ozaki flew to Hatay, a province in southern Turkey bordering Syria, on a domestic flight.

Ozaki phoned a person named Abubara, a translator working for IS, reaching there. Abubara, born in Syria but raised in Australia, took them to this house where the duo stayed overnight.

Sohan gave Ozaki all the money he took from Bangladesh.

The next afternoon, Abubara gave Sohan six Turkish phone numbers and a bus ticket to go to Gaziantep, a city in the western part of Turkey's southeastern Anatolia region, some 97km north of Aleppo.

Around 3:30pm, Ozaki and Abubara saw Sohan off as he boarded a bus.

Four hours later, he reached a Gaziantep bus stand. He dialled the first number but nobody picked it up. On the second number, he reached a man who responded in broken English.

"As I introduced myself as Abdullah [a name given by Ozaki], he asked me to stay in a hotel nearby for that night," Sohan said.

Around 11:00am the next day, the same person, a Turk, phoned Sohan and 30 minutes later, came by a car. Taking Sohan on board, the man drove through a highway.

The next step was boarding a taxi-cab.

"As I got into the cab, I saw a family -- a husband, a wife and four children -- in the rear seat. They said they came from Turkistan," he said, adding that the taxi stopped after driving through the highway for nearly an hour.

After a while, Sohan and 15 to 16 others boarded a microbus which had no seats. A person was sitting towards the front. It left the highway and took a muddy road.

After five minutes' drive, everyone got down and started following the man. "We walked for 15 minutes and then crossed the border by running on the dilapidated muddy road."

Entering Syria, they found four to five Hilux pickups. Ten to 12 men, mostly in army uniforms, stood with arms in their hands. They started calling the names of different groups. There were people from four groups -- Jabhat Al Nusra, IS, Islamic Front, and Ahrar-Al Sham.

"One of them asked me which group I belonged to. I told them that I wasn't aware of any group.... I showed him a piece of paper. He checked it and got me onto a jeep," said Sohan.

"Four to five of us were taken inside a village and kept in a two-storey house where nine to 10 people from other countries had already been staying.

"We were frisked. They kept our passports and all electronic devices including cameras, mobile phones and tabs.

"Asked, they said many have returned home with their passports while some others worked as spies using electronic devices. Therefore,

using such devices is prohibited." FINALLY IN RAQQA

The next morning, Sohan and eight to nine others boarded a microbus for Raqqa, the stronghold of IS.

In Raqqa, Sohan was sent to a 10-storey building under the supervision of the engineering division head, an Egyptian whose pseudonym was Yeazid.

Yeazid said the forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad destroyed the power stations of the city by airstrikes and, therefore, the electricity supply was poor. They got power for only three to four hours a day.

The man added that the stations will have to be repaired and sent Sohan to a mess. Six other engineers -- two Pakistanis, two Saudis, one Egyptian and one Tunisian -- were there.

Yeazid asked him not to roam around the area. In the house, Sohan was interviewed twice -- first by a Syrian diploma engineer and second by an Egyptian engaged in electronics-related work.

In his first month in Raqqa, Sohan bought a mobile phone from a nearby market with permission from Yeazid. The town had no mobile network but there were some shops where Wi-Fi could be used. From one shop, Sohan contacted Ozaki through Skype.

A month later, Sohan was called up to Yeazid's office and told that he needed to acquire Islamic knowledge prior to starting his job. And for this, he would be sent to Manbij, a city in the Aleppo Governorate.

During his stay in Raqqa in January, Sohan contacted his friend Nazibullah Ansari, also an ex-cadet, through Wickr messaging app.

Nazibullah said he went to Ozaki's place in Japan and would go to Turkey from there. At the end of January, he

told Sohan that he reached Turkey and Ozaki would arrange his passage to Syria.

But Sohan could not contact him for the next one and a half months. He also couldn't get in touch with Ozaki.

SENT TO MANBIJ

At the end of January, Sohan and six to seven others were sent to Manbij, a 30-minute ride from Raqqa. They were taken to a house where 60 to 70 Turkistani had been staying.

They told him that they had been attending course on Islamic knowledge for 20 days and it would take 15 more days. Then Sohan's course would begin.

They were not allowed to go out of the home.

Fifteen days later, Abu Maria, a Syrian who was supervisor of Sohan and six others, wanted to know who knew Arabic.

Everyone except for Sohan and two Pakistanis knew Arabic. "We're asked to wait for a few days as we needed a translator," Sohan said. They waited 12 to 13 more days.

"Abu Maria told us that there was no English translator in Manbij. There was one in Raqqa. Therefore, we were sent back to Raqqa again 10 days later." AGAIN IN RAQQA

The course finally began in March under a Tunisian teacher named Abu Hazar. The syllabus included different Islamic topics like Tawhid, Shirk, Kufr, Iman, etc, and location of all groups in Syrian war. The course ended in April.

During one class, Sohan asked the teacher: "What is the relationship between IS and other groups involved in the war in Syria?"

The teacher replied: "There is no similarity between the ideologies of IS and other groups. IS wants to retain the areas they have captured and expand

their international territories. For that to happen, if a Muslim has to be killed, he will be killed."

Sohan said, "I was shocked to hear this. I went there to fight for repressed Sunni Muslims but found that IS kills Muslims."

Meanwhile, an airstrike took place in Raqqa. A Jordanian pilot parachuted after being hit with a bullet and got caught by IS. Three days later, he was burned to death.

Sohan said he then realised that the activities of IS were not Islamic at all. "By this time, I talked to different people and their miseries disheartened me."

SKYPE WEDDING

In April, Sohan contacted his friend Mustafizur Rahman Sifat, his classmate at the cadet college, and Sifat's wife (name withheld). The couple later divorced. Sohan married the woman via Skype on April 26.

Meanwhile, Yeazid told him that the physical training would start soon.

On May 8, Sohan sought his passport for two days from the border admin office in Raqqa but the officials turned down his request.

Three days later, he sought his passport for three hours. The next day, they gave it to him and took a signature on a paper which had his details written.

THE RETURN

With the passport in hand, he took a taxi and went to the edge of Raqqa, from where he got on a truck.

"Since I worked in the engineering division, I was provided an ID card," he said.

Four hours later, the truck reached Tell Abyad, a town close to Turkey border, around 9:30pm. On his way, IS men checked him thrice.

He waited in a restaurant till 12:30am.

"As I went out, the city looked

empty. Suddenly, a patrol team of IS border guard turned up and checked my ID. They asked me why I was staying outside so late at night," he said.

"I said I had lost my way back but found it now."

Abandoning the road, Sohan crawled towards the border hiding behind the bushes. He saw a three-layer barbed wire with the armed Turkish soldiers standing guard on the other side.

After searching for two hours, he found a suitable point to trespass. He crossed two layers but got entangled in the third.

Three Turkish soldiers saw him and took him to their office. The next day, they handed him over to the police who sent him to jail.

After three days, he was asked to sign a paper that said he was banned in Turkey for life. Three days later, he was put on a Turkish Airlines flight and he reached Dhaka around 4:00am on May 16.

"Since there was no deportation seal on my passport, I faced no problem. I went home directly," he said.

On May 26, he went to his old workplace Desco to rejoin it.

"As I was returning [home] from my office in the evening that day, two men in civil dress called me from behind. They shook hands with me and took me onto a vehicle.

"They tied my eyes and handcuffed me pointing a pistol at my head," he said, adding that they kept him confined to a room for about one year and a half. During that period, he was quizzed blindfolded.

He was produced before the media at the Rab media centre along with four other people in November last year.

[The writer is Editor, DBC News and a militancy expert.]

Vendor held for 'insulting Islam'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A roadside vendor in Joypurhat was arrested on Wednesday night for allegedly posting a photo "insulting Islam" on Facebook.

Sujan Mohanta, 37, of Panchbibi municipality was arrested around 11:30pm. Panchbibi Police Station's Sub-inspector Zafar filed a case against him under the ICT Act.

Police produced him before a local court yesterday.

The incident sparked tension in the area with some 50 people demonstrating in the municipality headquarters yesterday afternoon. Additional police were deployed at Sujan's home, Hindu temples and mosques in the area, police said.

Sujan's family believed he is innocent. They also said they were living in fear of attacks.

"Somebody took Sujan's phone and posted something on Facebook. My husband can't post such a thing on Facebook as he knows its consequences. Besides, he was too busy with celebrating Saraswati Puja," said Sujan's wife Bobby Mohanta.

Rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra in two letters urged the deputy commissioner and the superintendent of police in Joypurhat to take effective measures for the safety of Sujan's family.

Bangladesh backs 2-state solution

FROM PAGE 1

She earlier received the visiting president at the office around 3:30pm. She had a one-to-one discussion with the president for around 15 minutes before joining the talks.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said the bilateral talks were held in a cordial atmosphere.

The two countries later signed a Memorandum of Understanding on forming an intergovernmental joint committee to hold foreign office consultations on a regular basis, he added.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali and his Palestinian counterpart Riad NA Maliki signed the deal on behalf of their respective sides in presence of the Palestine president and the Bangladesh PM.

Addressing the press briefing, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque said the two countries earlier signed an MoU on energy cooperation.

"Through this visit [of the Palestine president], Bangladesh has reiterated its support for Palestinian nationhood as the Palestine movement had inspired the people of Bangladesh during the Liberation War," he added.

The PM remembered with deep gratitude late Palestine president Yasser Arafat for his unflinching support towards Bangladesh's Liberation War and his deep friendship with Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Shahidul told journalists.

Abbas expressed gratitude to Hasina for providing training and

scholarship to Palestinian students in civil and military sectors. He also paid deep homage to Bangabandhu, describing him as a great world leader.

Replying to a query, the foreign secretary said although Palestine recognised Israel, Bangladesh was yet to do so. "The Palestine president thanked the Bangladesh prime minister for this."

He said the president wants Bangladesh to continue its support to the two-state solution so that the people of Palestine could peacefully resolve its problem with Israel through negotiations.

He informed reporters that a Palestine business delegation would soon visit Bangladesh to see in which areas of trade and commerce cooperation could be strengthened.

Shahidul hoped the foreign office consultations between the two countries would be held in the later part of this year.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Law Minister Anisul Huq, PM's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid and PM's Principal Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury were present during the official talks.

For the first time in about 20 years, Israel on Wednesday announced it would build a new settlement in the West Bank, according to media reports.

The announcement came within two weeks of US President Donald

Trump taking office.

ABBAS MEETS HAMID

President Abdul Hamid yesterday stressed the need for immediate removal of all the barriers that stand in the way of making Palestine an independent state.

"Bangladesh always expresses its condemnation over the illegal Israeli occupation and settlement in Palestine and Arab land. We want to see Palestine as an independent state," he said when Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas met him at the Bangabhaban in the evening.

President's Press Secretary Joynal Abedin briefed reporters after the meeting.

Welcoming his Palestinian counterpart to Bangladesh, Hamid said the two countries have deep and historical relations.

Bangladesh is proud of the fact that it is one of the countries who acknowledged Palestine as an independent state, added Hamid.

He remembered the lifelong struggle of Yasser Arafat for realising the rights of Palestinians and thanked the Palestine government for publishing the "Unfinished Memoirs of Bangabandhu" in Arabic.

Hamid also hoped the existing bilateral relations between the two countries will be strengthened further in future.

He said Bangladesh will continue offering scholarships to Palestinian students and armed forces officials for higher studies and different training courses.

Abbas thanked Bangladeshi people for giving support and coopera-

tion to the Palestinians.

He appreciated Bangladesh's stance against Israeli settlements in Palestine and expressed optimism that bilateral relations and mutual cooperation between Palestine and Bangladesh would make further progress in future.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque and senior officials of the Bangabhaban and the foreign ministry were present, among others.

Later, Hamid hosted a cultural event followed by a dinner at the Darbar Hall in honour of the visiting Palestine president.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Chief Justice SK Sinha, Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, former president HM Ershad, Palestine Foreign Minister Riad NA Maliki and Palestine Chief Justice Mahmoud SA Alhabbash, among others, attended the dinner.

ABBAS PAYS HOMAGE TO MARTYRS

President Mahmoud Abbas paid tributes to the martyrs of the Liberation War at the National Memorial in Savar yesterday.

He placed a wreath at the Memorial, signed the visitors' book and planted a sapling there.

He also visited the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi to pay respect to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who along with most of his family members was brutally assassinated on Aug 15, 1975.

Wife TV clip poses new problems for France's Fillon

AFP, Paris

French presidential candidate Francois Fillon was fighting to keep his campaign alive yesterday as a TV interview with his wife added fuel to fake job claims and some members of his party openly plotted to replace him.

One of France's main investigative news programmes, Envoye Special, is set to air previously unseen footage of Fillon's British-born wife Penelope talking to a journalist in 2007.

Envoye Special presenter Elise Lucet told AFP that "several interesting phrases" had been found in the long-forgotten interview, including that she had never been her husband's parliamentary assistant.

The British journalist who did the text version of the interview for the Sunday Telegraph newspaper, Kim Willsher, told AFP she did not recall the phrase in question and that she had never seen the complete video.

The interview was "not a political interview, it was a 'wife of piece,'" she said.

Fillon had been leading the presidential race until allegations emerged in the Canard Enchaîne newspaper that his wife earned a pre-tax income of 830,000 euros (\$900,000) as a parliamentary assistant over more than a decade -- despite no-one recalling her ever working at the National Assembly.

A poll on Wednesday showed Fillon would crash out in the first round on