

Police arrest four militant suspects

STAR REPORT

In separate anti-militancy drives early yesterday, police in Rajshahi arrested four militants including two Hizb ut-Tahrir men, who were involved in clashes with the law enforcers in the capital.

Law enforcers arrested Ariful Islam Sodoy, 28, at Notunpara and Mansur Rahman, 27, at Sahapara in Nowhata municipality around 2:00am, said Porimol Kumar Chakrawarty, officer-in-charge (OC) of Poba police.

In another drive in Bagmara upazila, the police arrested Abdur Razzak, 38, a member of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), at his house in Guniapara village of Jhikra union.

Razzak was accused in a bomb explosion case filed with Bagmara police on June 13 last year.

In another drive, the police arrested alleged JMB militant Abdul Awal, 40, who was wanted in connection with an anti-terrorism case, at Bagha upazila in Rajshahi.

In Poba, the duo were caught during a block raid in the area, said the OC, adding, the police were looking for

them for long.

They were accused in three cases. Two cases were filed with Paltan police in Dhaka for a clash with police at Segunbagicha on December 27, 2013. Another case was filed with Poba police for a bomb explosion near a mosque in Borgachhi area on September 23 last year.

The police have recently found them engaged in militant activities, he added.

Moazzem Hossain Bhuiyan, superintendent of police in Rajshahi, said they started the drive on Thursday and would continue it until further instruction.

In another drive in Chittagong, the police arrested 17 people at a meeting of banned organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir in the city's Double Mooring area.

The law enforcers suspect they were holding the meeting to conduct subversive activities.

"We conducted a raid on a salon in Jhornapara area after midnight, detained the 17 people at a meeting and recovered many jihadi books," said Assistant Commissioner (Double mooring zone) of Chittagong

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Boys and girls celebrate "Dol Purnima" in front of Dhakeswari Temple in the capital yesterday. The festival of colours is intended to break social barriers between rich and poor, boys and girls, young and old.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'No bad deal with India'

AL general secretary assures that PM will put Bangladesh's interest first

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the government would not seal any deal with India if that goes against Bangladesh's interest.

"We maintain a positive relationship with India. But if we sign any deal with them, it will be for our national interest," he told a rally of Sramik League in the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue.

"I am telling you [people] clearly that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cannot sign any deal with India [which goes] against Bangladesh's national interests," he said.

On March 5, Indian daily Hindustan Times reported that India and Bangladesh are in discussion to ink a comprehensive defence pact during the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India in April.

Since then, BNP leaders almost every day have been claiming that the deals lined up for Hasina's signature "under the lure of the Teesta water

agreement" would go against Bangladesh's sovereignty.

There is much talk over the visit which was rescheduled last year.

Obaidul, also the minister for road, transport and bridges, said, "BNP is speaking in favour of India to come to power...When BNP is not in power, they fear India. We neither favour India nor fear it."

Describing India as "a friend in need", he said the friendship between the two countries would remain for the sake of Bangladesh. "If the people do not want relations with India, it will not exist," he added.

Obaidul said BNP leaders were claiming that they would not participate in the national polls while Sheikh Hasina was in power, but the party was secretly preparing for the polls.

The AL spokesperson also came down heavily on the recent transport strike saying that those who keep people hostage can never be friends of people.

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Another saffron wave in India

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pan-India embrace and strengthen Narendra Modi's position in the national political landscape, perk up the political narrative in the run-up to national elections in 2019.

Only three times in UP's history has a party crossed 300 seats -- in UP's first post-independent election in 1951, the 1977 election when the Janata Party swept to power and the 1980 election in which a resurgent Indira Gandhi propelled the party back to power.

A big slice of the credit for BJP's success in UP is due to its chief Amit Shah who crafted the election strategy of building a broad coalition of castes in UP. Interestingly, the party did not field a single Muslim candidate in the just-concluded elections in UP which has a sizable Muslim population.

Shah appointed BJP veteran Kesav Prasad Maurya as the head of the party's state unit and inducted Swami Prasad Maurya who defected from Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to not as part of efforts to changing the caste arithmetic which, along with Muslim votes, has traditionally played a key role in shaping the electoral outcome in the state. BJP's attempts were to rework the caste and religious fault lines. It took care not to irk any particular caste. In fact, the UP election was projected by Shah as a battle among Samajwadi Party's (SP) Muslim-Yadav (backward caste)

support base and BSP's Jatavs (lowest rung in caste hierarchy) versus other Dalits which were supposed to vote for the saffron party.

Accordingly, BJP allocated around 150 seats to non-Yadav Other Backward Caste (OBCs) candidates in UP. This, along with its tie-ups with sub-regional parties like Apna Dal and Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP) helped it consolidate non-Yadav backward caste groups like Patels, Kurmis and Rajbharas.

All political parties in UP resorted in some degree to attempts to polarise voters: SP and BSP sought to woo Muslim voters by asking them to vote "en bloc" for them. BSP gave nomination to nearly 100 Muslim candidates and a key reason behind SP's alliance with Congress was keeping an eye on votes from the minority community. Responding to rivals' strong push to win over Muslim votes, BJP too played Hindutva card during campaign through Modi's reference to "Kabristan" (graveyard) versus "Shamshan" (crematorium) remarks and Amit Shah's "Kasab" (Aamir Ajmal Kasab, the key man behind the November 2008 deadly terror attack in Mumbai).

Secondly, an important component of Shah's strategy for UP was that while BJP depended heavily on Modi's charisma, it was careful to ensure that local leaders are given due weight during campaigning keeping in view ground

realities. This was a lesson that the party seemed to have learnt from its electoral debacle in assembly poll in Bihar a few years ago.

At the same time, Shah and BJP's other poll managers did not fall back just on local leaders and made full use of Modi. The prime minister was initially supposed to address around 10 rallies but ultimately spoke at around 30 rallies. Modi stayed put in his parliamentary constituency of Varanasi in UP overnight stay, something he didn't do even during the Lok Sabha polls. Both showed the high stakes Modi and BJP had in UP assembly elections, especially in eastern part of the state (including Varanasi) which has a total of 133 assembly seats.

Thirdly, in choosing candidates for UP poll, BJP appeared to believe that "at the end of the day it is the winnability of a candidate that matters." The party welcomed candidates from other parties and it is estimated that about 100 seats were allocated to candidates who switched over from other parties because they were supposed to have better chances of winning than BJP's own candidates.

The elections in UP and the other states were the first major test of Modi's popularity in the wake of banning of high-denomination currency notes in November-December last year in a bid to cleanse the country's finance from

the menace of black money. And Modi has passed the test with flying colours.

The demonetisation saw serpentine queues in front of banks and post offices as people rushed to return or exchange their old notes for several weeks. There was a perception that ordinary people were angered for having to stand for long hours in queues in banks and post offices. The opposition parties campaigned aggressively against demonetisation, saying it was bad for the economy and an inconvenience for the people and hoped it would create a backlash against BJP.

However, actually, as the election results show, demonetisation got a ringing endorsement. That this was on the cards in UP was evident in civic polls which took place a few weeks ago in Chandigarh and in states like Gujarat and Maharashtra and panchayat polls in Odisha state where BJP emerged as hands-down winner. In fact, Modi repeatedly hit back at opposition criticism of note ban by painting them black on the issue of black money. Even during the demonetisation drive, many Indians in both urban and rural areas were often heard saying that the intention behind the move was laudable but implementation left much to be desired. Clearly, the dynamics of politics in India has changed over the last two and a half years.

IS present in Bangladesh

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militants."

The home minister and the inspector general of police on numerous occasions denied suggestions that IS had presence in the country. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina described any such claims as local and foreign conspiracies.

Gunaratna, who teaches security studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, praised the PM for her "zero tolerance" policy on militancy and terrorism.

But unfortunately, the Bangladeshi political leadership did not tell the truth that the group that is operating is the IS, he said.

Talking to The Daily Star after the conference, he said if Bangladesh identified the enemy as IS because it was IS, it would certainly help the law enforcers, military and intelligence services to prepare themselves to fight IS.

Asked why he thinks IS is operating in Bangladesh, the expert said JMB had no organisational existence. And the old JMB ideology has changed as well. "Now the ideology is driven by the IS."

The group has emerged in Bangladesh through recruiting people who were once JMB members, but they do not call themselves JMB anymore, he said.

"You cannot call it JMB anymore because it has changed its constitution, its ideology, its targeting strategy," said the expert who authored 17 books, including "Inside al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror" published from the Columbia University Press.

The group is currently working with the IS central command. It has even sent messages and propagated its operations to IS, which claimed responsibility of the Gulshan attack in its propaganda magazine Dabiq, he said.

He also argued that JMB did not kill foreign nationals such as Italian and Japanese. Nor did it kill Christians, Buddhists and Hindus.

"So, I want to share with you that the enemy in its new form must be identified and the government agen-

cies and the public must understand the new face of terrorism so that they will be able mentally to respond to the new face of threat," Gunaratna, who was invited to testify on the structure of al Qaeda before the 9/11 Commission, told the conference.

Born in Sri Lanka, he interviewed terrorists and insurgents in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Saudi Arabia and other conflict zones, according to his brief biography presented at the conference.

Replying to a question, he told The Daily Star that the Bangladesh government continued to call the group JMB because it thought that recognising it as IS would create some problems.

"I personally believe that it is so important to identify the new characters and the transformation of this group ... identifying the problem and the enemy is 50 percent of the solution," Gunaratna noted.

He stressed on the need for proper rehabilitation of the terrorists and extremists now in custody and suggested that the Bangladesh government immediately start such programmes.

The biggest failure on the part of Bangladesh has been its inability to create a terrorist rehabilitation programme. "If terrorists are not rehabilitated when they are in prison they will pose a security threat, there will be regeneration of terrorists, and will go to community and infect and produce more terrorists."

Chief of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of DMP Monirul Islam also presented a paper highlighting the emergence of terrorist outfits in Bangladesh since its independence.

He reiterated country's strong stance against militancy.

The three-day conference titled "Regional Cooperation in Curbing Violent Extremism and Transnational Crime" began yesterday.

Organised by the Bangladesh Police and the Interpol, the conference seeks to build regional cooperation in curbing violent extremism and transnational crime.

SC clears way for trial of Khaleda

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Trial proceedings in 14 of the 25 cases are now going on at lower courts, while the HC stayed proceedings of one case. The remaining cases are still under investigation, according to court sources.

There have been worries within the BNP that if the party chairperson gets convicted in any of the cases, she would not be able to contest the next national elections scheduled to be held in 2019.

The party leaders have said they wouldn't participate in any polls without the party chief. The BNP and several other political parties boycotted the January 5 elections in 2014, as their demand for a polls-time non-partisan government was not met.

Late last month, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "The countrymen will not participate in any election if Khaleda Zia is convicted in any false case."

ZIA CHARITABLE TRUST CASE

A three-member SC bench headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha yesterday dismissed Khaleda's appeal challenging an HC order that on January 12 rejected her petition for staying trial proceedings in the case.

Khaleda's lawyer Barrister AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon told reporters that the BNP chief would move a petition before the SC, seeking review of its order.

Talking to The Daily Star, ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan said that now there is no legal bar for the lower court concerned to continue trial proceedings in the case.

On August 8, 2011, the ACC filed the case with Tejgaon Police Station, accusing four people, including Khaleda, of raising funds for the trust from unknown sources through abuse of power.

The BNP chairperson filed a petition with the HC on December 6 last year, saying 32 prosecution witnesses in the case didn't take oath as per the

law before their statements were recorded by Dhaka Special Judge's Court-3.

In the petition, she prayed to the HC for staying trial proceedings of the case against her and for ordering the lower court to cancel the statements given by the witnesses.

On January 12 this year, the HC rejected her petition, but asked the SC registrar general and the law secretary to ensure that the witnesses take oath before testifying at trial courts under the relevant rules.

NIKO CORRUPTION CASE
Chamber Judge Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday sent the ACC petition against the March 7 HC order to an SC full bench for holding hearing on March 16.

Earlier on March 7, the HC stayed trial proceeding of the case.

The ACC filed the case in December 2007 over charges that Khaleda and several others had abused powers to

award a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko when she was the prime minister between 2001 and 2006.

Former law minister Moudud Ahmed, ex-state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain, former acting energy secretary Khandaker Shahidul Islam, and the then vice president (South Asia) of Niko Resources Bangladesh Ltd Kashem Sharif were also sued in the case.

ZIA ORPHANAGE TRUST CASE
The ACC filed the case on July 3, 2008 with Ramna Police Station, accusing Khaleda, her elder son Tarique Rahman and four others for misappropriating over Tk 2.10 crore that was received as grants for orphans via a foreign bank.

Of the accused, Khaleda, former BNP lawmaker Salimul Haq Kamal and businessman Sharfuddin Ahmed are on bail, while the others, including Tarique, are absconding.

SC dismisses tanners' plea

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and people are being affected with serious diseases like cancer as the tanneries were not moved from Hazaribagh despite HC directives.

At one stage, the chief justice said, "we are sorry" and dismissed the petition.

Following a petition filed by Bela, the HC on March 6 directed the DG of DoE to immediately close the tanneries that are running in the capital's Hazaribagh.

The court also ordered the DG to disconnect the utility services, including gas, power and water, to the tanneries as they were damaging the environment violating the court's earlier directives.

Ministries of home, environment, industries, the inspector general of police (IGP) and the commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police have been asked to assist the DG in complying with the order.

The HC asked the DG to submit a report after complying with its direc-

tives by April 6 and fixed April 10 for further hearing on the issue.

Yesterday, it was seen that most of the factories were not complete and construction work of factories was slow at the estate in Savar.

Mostofa Mazumder, deputy manager of Bangladesh Institute of Small Industry and Cottage (BISIC), said, "We can say we are ready. Tannery owners will have to come. It seems it is better to come."

Asked about the CETP's present condition, Mostofa said, "The CETP is not fully complete but it is running and we hope the CETP would be complete soon."

About a question regarding what would happen if all the tanners moved to the estate tomorrow with the CETP still not fully operational, he said, "Let them come ... the government will monitor the situation."

Mostofa said almost all of the factories, who asked for power supply connections, have got those at the estate.

Following a writ petition, filed by Bela, the HC on June 23, 2009, directed the tannery owners to relocate to the estate by February 28, 2010. The HC on October 30, 2010, extended the deadline until April 30, 2011.

Even though the High Court directed to shut the tannery industries operating in Hazaribagh immediately, neither the government nor the tanners have finished their work at the estate in Savar.

Of the 154 industrial plots at the estate, only 46 are now being used by the tanners to process raw hides. The rest have seen little development.

Ismail Hossain, owner of Ismail Tannery, said, "We are trying our best to move our factory to Savar."

Last year, the tannery factories at Hazaribagh produced every day about 21,600 cubic metres of environmentally hazardous liquid containing chemicals such as chromium, sulphur, ammonium, salt and other chemicals.

No more

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complete fire fighting system.

During yesterday's drive, the DSCC authorities shut down a factory at West Shaheed Nagar in Lalbagh and fined its owner Tk 2 lakh for running the factory illegally.

"It has a licence for keeping plastic goods, but instead, it was operating a shoe polish factory there," said DSCC Estate Officer Kamrul Islam Chowdhury.

All the materials of the factory were seized, he said.

Later, a galvanising factory at West Shaheed Nagar was fined Tk 10,000 for not having a trade licence and running its operation in poor condition.

Maj AKM Shakil Newaz, director of fire service and civil defence, said three teams would conduct drives in three wards in Old Dhaka from today.