



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASTIR

Police close off a road leading to a suspected militant hideout in Sylhet city's Shibbari area around 11:00pm yesterday. Law enforcers surrounded the building around 1:30am and the standoff continued late into the night.

Police raid Sylhet den

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to reporters around 8:00pm, Sylhet Metropolitan Police Commissioner Golam Kibria said, "We called in an observation team of the army to assess how much explosives are inside the apartment... Those explosives could be powerful."

He said they would conduct the drive with extreme caution, keeping in mind the safety of the residents trapped inside the building.

In reply to a query, he claimed the situation was "under control", and hoped they would be able to convince the suspected militants to surrender.

Lt Col Mohammad Rashidul Hasan, director of Inter Services Public Relation Directorate (ISPR), told The Daily Star that an observation team from the army went to the scene to assess the situation.

The team would decide whether a Para Commando team was needed for carrying out a drive, he said.

Talking to this newspaper over the phone, Nazrul Islam, one of the residents trapped on the building's second floor, said he heard gunshots around 5:30am and later learnt that suspected militants were hiding on the ground floor.

Nazrul said he and his three family members were passing time in fear.

Muhibur Rahman, sub-inspector of Jakiganj Police Station, said his family was also trapped inside the building.

Police tracked down the Sylhet hideout barely a week after they busted two militant dens in Chittagong.

Seeking anonymity, a high-up of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP), said

they increased surveillance in the city following information from counterterrorism officials, and found the hideout early yesterday.

Rokonuddin, additional police commissioner of the SMP, told reporters that they detected an anomaly in the tenant's information and finally tracked down the hideout.

Mohibul Islam, deputy commissioner of CTC Unit of the DMP, told this correspondent that they got information on the militant hideout in Sylhet while investigating the cases over the busting of the two "Neo JMB" dens in Chittagong's Sitakunda on March 15.

Basudeb Banik, deputy commissioner (south) of the SMP, said police cordoned off "Atia Villa" around 1:30am and disconnected the building's electricity connection around 5:30am.

About half-an-hour later, police, through a hand-mike, asked the militant suspects to surrender.

Around 6:30am, the suspected militants threw a grenade at police from the apartment on the ground floor. Police then fired blanks, said Basudeb.

Later, the male militant suspect shouted, "Send forces."

Akhtar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Jalalabad Police Station, said, "Around 1:30pm, the female militant suspect yelled from a window of the apartment 'bring SWAT quickly because you [police] won't be able to do anything to us... We don't have much time.'"

A Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team and a bomb disposal unit from the DMP arrived at the scene

from the capital around 4:20pm.

On March 2, 2006, militant kingpin Abdur Rahman, his wife Nurjahan Begum Rupa, daughter Afifa Rahman, three sons and a grandson were arrested from a house in Shaplabagh area of Sylhet city.

HOUSE RENTED 3 MONTHS AGO Ustar Ali, the owner of "Atia Villa", said a couple identifying themselves as Kawsar Ahmed and Marzina Begum rented the apartment three months back.

The couple provided all necessary documents, including copies of their national identity cards, said Ali, also proprietor of Atia Travels.

Ali's son Kawsar Rahman Ripon said Ahmed identified himself as an auditor of a private company.

Rahman also mentioned that he didn't notice anything suspicious in the couple's behaviour.

Earlier on March 8, police busted a "Neo JMB" hideout in Chittagong's Mirsharai and arrested two suspected militants. Twenty-nine grenades and huge quantity of bomb-making materials were also recovered.

Just a week later, two more "Neo JMB" hideouts were found in Chittagong's Sitakunda. Four militant suspects and a child were killed in a 10-hour drive at one den, while two suspected militants were arrested from the other.

At least 46 "Neo JMB militants" were killed in different drives by law enforcers across the country since the Gulshan café terror attack on July 1 last year.

[Our Correspondents in Sylhet and Moulvibazar contributed to this report.]

Expat workers

FROM PAGE 16

exploitation and abuse of the men and the ways how the Bangladesh government fails to comply with its obligations.

The report says Bangladeshi workers in Singapore are susceptible to most of these indicators of forced labour as defined by the International Labour Organization.

The 11 indicators include abuse of vulnerability, deception, restriction of movement, isolation, retention of identity documents, physical and sexual violence, withholding of wages, intimidation and threats, debt bondage, excessive overtime, abusive living and working conditions and excessive overtime.

It says vulnerability of the migrants springs from the high fees demanded by recruiters and intermediaries in Bangladesh.

A survey by TWC2 published last month found that in 2015, first-time Bangladeshi construction workers paid an average of 15,555 Singapore dollars or Tk 8.7 lakh to work in Singapore, home to 160,000 Bangladeshis.

However, their basic monthly salaries are low, which mostly range from \$5300 to \$600, which means, their recruitment fees could be equivalent to between 26-51 months of their wages.

"The Bangladeshi construction workers are therefore 'migrant-debtors' for a significant period," it observes.

The report says such a situation enables employers to wield coercive power over the workers, who are under immense financial pressure and in a poor position to resist their employers' demands and exploitative practices that resemble debt bondage.

However, TWC2 and HOME do not see sufficient action by the Bangladesh government in controlling these fees and charges.

The common problems migrants reported include long hours of work in excess of legal limits, arbitrary wage deductions, erroneous calculation and the withholding of wages, poor living conditions, retention of workers' passports by employers, hazardous working environment, and denial or premature termination of medical treatment.

The report further says complaints of intimidation and threats by employers -- of blacklisting, dismissal and deporta-

tion -- are prevalent. Employers are also known to hire repatriation companies to confine workers and/or send them home and even forcibly confine them against their will.

"That the Bangladeshi migrant workers are exposed to such extreme forms of exploitation, many of which are indicators of forced labour, is an issue of grave concern," it adds.

However, Bangladesh has made no significant attempt to intervene with the Singapore authorities to stop these practices that constitute "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment", it alleges.

The HOME or TWC2, however, has not heard about such services or inspections by the Bangladesh foreign mission in Singapore. The work of the embassy is usually limited to visits to the prisons and assisting workers to write referral letters to Singapore's Ministry of Manpower in the event of a labour dispute.

"As much as we would like the Singapore government to do its part, TWC2 wishes also to impress upon the Bangladesh government that it too has a responsibility to its own citizens," TWC2 Treasurer Alex Au told a Singapore newspaper, The Straits Times, which ran a report on the issue yesterday.

The Bangladesh High Commission in Singapore said the mission intensively monitored hiring of workers by the government-approved 14 recruiters and checked on their living condition.

"The high commission is actively engaged in ensuring maximum welfare of the expatriate workers," its spokesman told The Straits Times, adding that its officials make regular visits to dormitories to check on the workers' welfare and living conditions.

The workers also got legal and financial aid and counselling when they faced problems such as salary disputes and work injury compensation, the spokesman added.

Singapore's manpower ministry said it had a "comprehensive set of legislative, administrative and promotional measures" to protect the rights of all foreign workers.

"Singapore reviews its regulatory framework periodically to ensure the well-being and rights of foreign workers are safeguarded," it added.

Jubo League leader hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A union-level Jubo League leader was hacked to death and two others were injured as their "rivals" attacked them at Pakshey of Ishwardi upazila on Thursday night.

Police suspected that enmity over establishing dominance in the area was the reason behind the attack.

The dead, Shajahan Ali, 42, was the vice-president of Pakshey union unit of Jubo League, youth wing of the ruling Awami League. He was the son of late Mohammad Ali of Rooppur village.

Abdul Hai, officer-in-charge of Ishwardi Police Station, said the criminals attacked Shajahan when he was returning home around 11:00pm. When his party colleagues -- Ashraf Islam and Abul Hossain -- tried to save him, the attackers also hacked them.

The injured were taken to Ishwardi Upazila Health Complex. But Shajahan's condition worsened. He died on his way to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, the OC said.

In primary investigation, police came to know that Shajahan had a longstanding conflict with Nabin of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

3 Bangladeshis killed in Saudi road crash

UNB, Dhaka

Three Bangladeshis were killed in a road accident in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia yesterday.

They are Muslim Mollah, 35, of Char Boita village, and Selim, 49, of Joypara village, in Dohar upazila of Dhaka, and Rashid of Manikganj.

The accident took place when a vehicle carrying the Bangladesh expatriates overturned, killing the three on the spot, Golam Mosh, Bangladesh ambassador in Saudi Arabia, told UNB.

When ballots

FROM PAGE 1

brutally murdered and buried by Pakistan army with the help of collaborators in 1971, according to newspapers reports.

The above two incidents are just the tip of the iceberg but they testify of the brutality of the Pakistan army. The magnitude of the horrific massacre was so great that mass graves keep turning up even after so many years.

The Pakistan army turned the entire Bangladesh into a killing field with its indiscriminate killing, torture of innocent people and unprecedented scale of rapes for nine months.

After independence, mass graves were identified in the capital and other major cities and small towns.

Still, many mass graves in district and upazila levels remain unidentified, said freedom fighters and researchers.

Habibur Rahman Habib, commander of Pabna district Muktiyoddha Sangsad, say they identified around 300 mass graves in the district.

Even a few years ago when a team of the investigation agency visited Pabna to collect evidences against war criminal Matiur Rahman Nizami of Pabna who led the infamous Al-Badr force, some more mass graves were identified in the district, he said.

"There may be many more small mass graves that remain unidentified yet," he said.

In view of freedom fighter Mir Abdul Hannan, unit commander of Feni district Muktiyoddha Sangsad, many mass graves in his district still remain unidentified.

According to War Crimes Findings Committee there are about 5000 large scale mass graves resulting from atrocities and indiscriminate killing of Pakistani military force.

"We have identified around 1000 mass graves," said Dr. M A Hasan, convener of the committee.

Hasan himself joined a team to excavate some genocide spots in 1999, 37 years after the barbaric massacre. They examined about 196 sites of mass graves and genocide remains.

He said about 30 percent of the victims were buried while rest of the bodies had been dumped into rivers, ponds, wells, and marshlands. So, numerous bodies had been washed away or remained undiscovered, he said.

Turned into killing machine, the Pakistani army continued the genocide for nine months for the total annihilation of Bangalis, causing the biggest ever humanitarian catastrophe after World War-II. They killed 30 lakh people and violated two lakh women and children.

"The Pakistan Army's brutal actions, which began on the midnight of March 25, 1971, can never be condoned or justified in any way. The army's murderous campaign in which many thousands of innocent people including women, the old and sick, and even children, were brutally murdered... constituted a measureless tragedy... The results in human suffering were beyond description," says an excerpt from the book "The Last Days of United Pakistan" written by G W Choudhury, a minister of Gen Yahya Khan.

Why did the Pakistan army commit the genocide? In the first general election held in December 1970, twenty four years after the creation of Pakistan, Bangalis used ballots against the oppression of the Pakistani rulers since 1947 and won a majority in the polls.

But the Pakistani military junta was hell bent not to handover power to the Bangalis. They made a secret plan accordingly to accomplish their mission to hold on to power.

Thus, Operation Searchlight was conceived in a meeting between two generals on March 18 when Gen Yahya Khan was holding a deceptive talk with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In the evening of March 25, Yahya, as planned, secretly flew out of Dhaka for Karachi via Colombo on a Pakistan International Airlines flight, ordering his marauding army to write a dark episode of world history.

A DARK NIGHT IN FLAMES

Major General Khadim Hussain Raja was brooding over the possible outcome of political talks on March 25, 1971 in Dhaka when his green telephone rang at about 11am. Lt. Gen Tikka Khan was on the line.

Tikka said, "Khadim, it is tonight," wrote Brigadier General Siddik Salik who was the public relations officer, then a major in the Pakistan army, in his book "Witness to Surrender."

There was no written order, only a phone call to start the annihilation of a nation.

Tanks rolled out of the cantonment firing cannons and machine gunning the sleeping civilians of Dhaka.

"The city wrapped in starlight, was in deep slumber. The night was

as pleasant as a spring night in Dacca could be. The setting was perfect for anything but a bloody holocaust," wrote Salik.

The action started with the arrest of Bangabandhu. The message came on the wireless: "BIG BIRD IN THE CAGE -- OTHERS NOT IN THEIR NESTS -- OVER..."

Salik writes: "... the city of Dacca was in the throes of a civil war. I watched the harrowing sight from the verandah for four hours. The prominent feature of this gory night was the flames shooting to the sky. At times, mournful clouds of smoke accompanied the blaze but soon they were overwhelmed by the flaming fire trying to lick at the stars. The light of the moon and the glow of the stars paled before this man-made furnace. The tallest columns of smoke and fire emerged from the university campus..."

An army captain reported on the wireless that he was facing resistance from Iqbal Hall and Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University.

"A senior staff officer snatched the hand-set from me and shouted into the mouth piece: 'How long will you take to neutralize the target? -- Four hours! -- Nonsense -- What weapons have you got? -- Rocket launcher, recoilless rifles, mortars and -- O. K., use all of them and ensure complete capture of the area in two hours'," Salik wrote.

GENOCIDE IN THEIR OWN ACCOUNTS

General Tikka Khan, known as the Butcher of Baluchistan, was made the chief of Eastern Command in East Pakistan with the assignment to execute the ruthless annihilation of a people.

He delivered on the expectations of his boss and was later made governor of East Pakistan.

"I want the land and not the people, Tikka has issued orders to his troops," General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi who later took over the war from Tikka wrote in his book "The Betrayal of East Pakistan".

"Tikka resorted to the killing of civilians and scorched-earth policy," Niazi wrote. "These orders were carried out in letter and spirit by Major General Farman and Brigadier Jahanzeb Arbab in Dhaka."

Niazi in his book mentions how Major Gen Rao Farman, who was responsible to carry out killings in Dhaka city, had envisioned his plan.

Niazi writes: "Major Gen Rao Farman had written in his table diary, 'Green land of East Pakistan will be painted red'. It was painted red by Bengali blood."

General Niazi, who took over command from Tikka Khan in April and continued the killings, himself described the March 25 genocide as follows: "General Tikka Khan struck. Peaceful night was turned into a time of wailing, crying and burning. General Tikka let loose everything at his disposal as if raiding an enemy, not dealing with his own misguided and misled people. The military action was a display of stark cruelty more merciless than the massacres at Bukhara and Baghdad by Changis Khan and Halaku Khan or at Jallianwala Bagh by the British General Dyer."

While describing the use of excessive force on the night of 25 March, one Brigadier Shah Abdul Qasim told the Hamoodur Rahman Commission that "no pitched battle was fought on the 25th of March in Dacca. Excessive force was used on that night. Army personnel acted under the influence of revenge and anger during the military operation."

Set up by the Pakistan government after its defeat in 1971, the commission noted that mortars were used to blast two residential dormitories of the Dhaka University, thus causing excessive casualties.

Gen Niazi who blamed Gen Tikka Khan for the massacre in the night of March 25, however, continued the genocide until the surrender of the Pakistan army on December 16, 1971.

Lt Col Aziz Ahmed Khan, a Pakistan army officer, who fought the 1971 war in Bangladesh, what was then East Pakistan until 26 March, 1971, went to the Hamoodur Rahman Commission and testified how the commander of the Pakistan army Lt Gen Niazi had ordered genocide.

"General Niazi visited my unit at Thakurgaon and Bogra," Aziz said in his deposition. "He asked us how many Hindus we had killed. In May, there was an order in writing to kill Hindus. This order was from Brigadier Abdullah Malik of 23 Brigade."

Looting also became the order of the day for the morally bankrupt Pakistan army.

Gen Niazi, as Maj Gen Farman Ali told the commission, on the very first day he took over command from Gen Tikka Khan said: "What have I been hearing about shortage of rations? Are not there any cows and goats in this country? This is enemy territory. Get what you want. This is what we used to do in Burma."

Fire safety

FROM PAGE 1

Brig Gen Ali Ahmed Khan, director general of Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star yesterday that firefighters found electric kettles and old electric wiring on the 13th floor of the 30-storey office of the central bank.

He, however, said the reason for the fire could not be known yet.

Although the bank had firefighting equipment, it had no trained firefighting staff, the DG said. "Such a large office complex should have its own firefighters."

The fire service directorate formed a five-member committee, led by its Deputy Director Samarendra Nath Biswas, to probe the incident.

"Two members of the committee visited the spot today [yesterday]," said Samarendra.

He hoped to submit the committee's report within two to three days.

Another probe committee formed by the bank also visited the scene yesterday.

BB Executive Director Ahmed Jamal, who is heading the committee, told reporters that all furniture, computers and documents in the rooms of the general manager and his personal assistant of Foreign Exchange Policy department were burnt.

The committee was investigating if there was any negligence in the maintenance of electric and electronic equipment, he said.

The fire did not spread in other chambers of the department and no major damage was detected yet, Jamal added.

Meanwhile, a Bangladesh Bank official yesterday filed a general diary (GD) with Motijheel Police Station over the incident.

Joint Director Nurul Islam, on behalf of the bank, filed the diary around 10:00am, Omar Faruque, officer-in-charge of the police station, told The Daily Star.

In the GD, the bank official mentioned that a fire broke out on the 13th floor of the bank's office around 9:20pm on Thursday and they informed the fire service department immediately, he said.

Firefighters doused the flames within 30 minutes, the OC said citing the GD.

Contacted, Shibli Noman, additional deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Motijheel zone), said a forensic team from the Criminal Investigation Department examined the spot from 11:00pm to 1:30pm and collected necessary evidence.

State Minister for Finance MA Mannan yesterday told journalists that the government high-ups were very much concerned about the incidents happening one after another in the central bank.

Hosni Mubarak

FROM PAGE 16

have been unthinkable several years ago, but revolutionary fervour gave way to exhaustion and even nostalgia in the uprising's chaotic aftermath.

Mubarak had been cleared for release earlier this month after a top court finally acquitted him of involvement in protester deaths during the 2011 revolt that ousted him.

"Yes," his lawyer Farid al-Deeb told AFP when asked if Mubarak had left the hospital on Friday.

He added the Mubarak had gone home to a villa in Cairo's Heliopolis district.

Mubarak was accused of inciting the deaths of protesters during the 18-day revolt, in which about 850 people were killed as police clashed with demonstrators.

He was sentenced to life in jail in 2012 in the case, but an appeals court ordered a retrial which dismissed the charges two years later.

Egypt's top appeals court on March 2 acquitted him of involvement in the killings.

Throughout his trial prosecutors had been unable to provide conclusive evidence of Mubarak's complicity -- a result, lawyers said, of having hastily put together the case against him in 2011 following demonstrations.

In January 2016, the appeals court upheld a three-year prison sentence for Mubarak and his two sons on corruption charges.

But the sentence took into account time served. Both of his sons, Alaa and Gamal, were freed.

On Thursday, a court ordered a renewed corruption investigation into Mubarak for allegedly receiving gifts from the state owned Al-Ahram newspaper.

He is also banned from travel.

Meanwhile several key activists in the 2011 uprising are now serving lengthy jail terms, and rights groups say hundreds of others have been forcibly disappeared.

The anti-Mubarak revolt ushered in instability that drove away tourists and investors, taking a heavy toll on the economy and leading to nostalgia for his rule.

His successor Mohamed Morsi, an Islamist, ruled for only a year after his 2012 election before the military overthrew him, prompted by massive protests against his Muslim Brotherhood group.