

JHENIDAH MILITANT DEN

Suicide vests, bombs found; 2 arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

Law enforcers claimed to have recovered two suicide vests, four crude bombs and bomb-making materials near two houses of suspected Neo JMB operatives in Jhenidah Sadar upazila yesterday.

The houses in Chuadanga village belong to suspects Selim Hossain, 35, and Pranto Hossain, 17, who were arrested by a team of Rapid Action Battalion at their homes around 1:00am yesterday, said Rab-6 Commanding Officer Maj Monir Ahmed.

After gleaning information from them, Rab with the help of a four-member bomb disposal team from Khulna returned to the scene and recovered the suicide vests, bombs, 186 circuit boards, one anti-personnel mine like object and four containers filled with bomb-making materials from around the houses, the Rab official said.

Law enforcers cordoned off the houses and were supposed to go in but later

called it off around 6:00pm yesterday. Maj Monir said they would go in early today.

Arrested Selim is the elder brother of suspected Neo JMB operative Tuhin Hossain, who was killed during a police raid in Jhenidah's Maheshpur on May 8. Pranto is Tuhin's cousin.

Khandakar Rafikul Islam, commanding officer of Rab-6 in Khulna, told journalists that on information they cordoned off the houses early yesterday and arrested them.

Locals said Selim has six siblings -- four brothers and two sisters. Two of his brothers live abroad. He worked at Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation before, but left the job and stayed at home.

Pranto, eldest among four siblings, is a student of Jhenidah Government KC College.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Abul Kalam Azad of Rab said police recovered the suicide vests from a bamboo cluster near one of the houses.



A house of a suspected Neo JMB militant in Chuadanga village of Jhenidah. A suicide vest, inset, found in a nearby bamboo cluster. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AZIBOR RAHMAN

Cops' negligence

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hour and then left in a car.

Talking to reporters on May 6, Abdul Matin, inspector (investigation) of Banani Police Station, admitted that they did not quiz any of the accused during their primary investigation.

Taking the advantage of police negligence, four of the five accused, including Shafat, fled Dhaka, said a police official, who is dealing with the case.

Shafat's driver Billal in the meantime deleted the video clips from his mobile phone, Rab said, quoting him.

On Monday, Rapid Action Battalion arrested Billal in Nawabpur area of the capital's Wari. They also recovered a mobile phone from his possession. Now, the law enforcers were trying to recover the deleted data.

Investigators suspect some of the accused had already destroyed their mobile phones used for filming the "rape". They, however, recovered some devices and were trying to recover data.

Besides, there is also an allegation from the girls against Officer-in-Charge of Banani Police Station BM Farman Ali of taking bribe from the family of the accused.

Farman, however, denied the allegation.

Abdul Matin, the first investigation officer of the case, and his team failed to seize the CCTV server of The Raintree Dhaka hotel where the girls were "raped", said a police officer.

The hotel authorities said the server wrote over data older than a month.

Another police officer, preferring anonymity, said it was the prime responsibility of an investigation officer to gather evidence and seize relevant items from the scene.

The Women Support and Investigation Division, which took over the charge of the case on May 9, seized the server nearly a week after the case was filed. It was trying to recover data that had been over written.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police had formed a three-member committee to investigate the negligence of the top officials of Banani Police Station.

On Monday, Additional Commissioner (crime) of the DMP Mizanur Rahman, who is leading the committee, told The Daily Star that they had already interrogated several police officials, including the OC. The probe team would also talk to the girls.

"Following investigation, we will prepare a report and submit it with our recommendations," he said.

The fact-finding committee of the National Human Rights Commission is also probing whether Banani police helped the accused by delaying to record the case, committee convener Nazrul

Islam told The Daily Star.

Invited to Shafat's birthday party on March 28, the two girls went to the hotel around 9:00pm. After the party ended around midnight, Shafat and Nayem Ashraf alias Halim raped them in two rooms, alleged one of the two girls who filed the case.

Billal filmed the rape, Shafat's bodyguard Rahmat Ali intimidated the "victims" while Shadman Sakif, who introduced the girls to the "rapists", refrained from informing the hotel authorities about the incident, she alleged, adding that all the five accused were "drunk".

According to the case statement, the girls were forced to take alcohol before being raped at gunpoint.

A joint team of police arrested Shafat, son of one of the owners of Apan Jewellers, and Sakif in Sylhet on May 11. Billal and Rahmat were arrested in two places of the capital on Monday evening.

Nayem, the other accused, is on the run.

BILLAL AND RAHMAT ON REMAND

A Dhaka court yesterday placed Billal on a four-day remand and Rahmat on a three-day remand after Victim Support Centre Inspector Ismot Ara Ame, also the investigation officer of the case, produced them before it and sought a 10-day remand for each.

A police official dealing with the investigation said they interrogated the two accused separately, and then quizzed them again along with Shafat and Sakif. "The interrogation is going on and we are verifying their information," he said.

Meanwhile, the Raintree Dhaka authorities yesterday once again said they did not notice anything unusual that night.

At a press conference, they demanded punishment of the rapists, if the girls were raped.

They organised the conference in the hotel amid allegations that they had tried to cover up the "rape". Hotel Managing Director Shah Adnan Harun, who is the son of a Jhalakathi lawmaker BH Harun, was present.

Reza Golam Mostafa, general manager of Raintree hotel's financier company Humaira Group, made a statement. He answered only a handful of questions from journalists.

During the press conference, Raintree authorities maintained that there were no complaints of rape on the night of the incident.

"We never said that no one was raped in the hotel in the night of March 28," Reza said. He claimed that the 10 bottles of alcohol recovered from the hotel was not theirs.

Meanwhile, the owners of Apan Jewellers and the hotel are scheduled to appear in the office of customs intelligence this morning with all their valid business documents.

REFUGEE BOATS CAPSIZE

1 Bangladeshi among 7 dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One of the seven persons who died after four inflatable crafts sank in the Mediterranean on Sunday has been identified by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a Bangladeshi man.

"We confirm 7 corpses belonging to 5 men, of which one was identified as a Senegalese man and a Bangladeshi man and 2 Nigerian women," IOM Senior Press Officer Joel A Millman stated in an email to this correspondent.

Joel, however, could not give details of the Bangladeshi man. He said about 15 to 20 migrants were

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Good news for heart patients

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The move comes as the brokers and a section of hospital staff are found making money taking advantage of the helplessness of patients.

They supply the injection to the relatives of patients, charging far more than the market price. Sometimes they sell expired ampoules, said hospital insiders.

According to the director, around 500 patients need the injection at the hospital every month.

Professor AHM Enayet Hussain, additional director general at the Directorate General of Health Services, said the initiative by the NICVD is even more laudable because it has expanded services with its own funds.

"Public hospitals get block allocations of money every year. It is the hospital's decision how the fund will be spent. We had a suggestion that the allocation be

used mostly for patients," he told this correspondent.

"It is a great achievement for the health sector as the NICVD is utilising the allocation for saving lives."

In February, the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) has approved a Tk 82 crore project for building new wards.

Currently there is a severe bed crisis at the state-run hospital where around 500 patients are treated lying on floors every day.

"The building expansion is set to start from July and once the project is completed, the bed crisis will be over," said Dr Afzalur.

The hospital currently has 414 beds in 18 wards.

"There is only one ward for women and children. The authority is now focusing on setting up more wards for them,"

the director added.

The hospital has three cath labs and another two will go into operation from the next month.

Besides, the NICVD authorities have introduced a practice to avoid misunderstanding between patients and the hospital.

A patient undergoing angioplasty or cardiac device implantation now has to fill in a form describing what sorts of medications and medical devices were being used.

"It has to be signed by cath lab sister-in-charge, cath lab technologist-in-charge and consultant cardiologist, and we provide one copy to the patient, one copy to the company authority and preserve one copy at the hospital. The measure has been taken so that the company can charge for only what it has delivered," he said.

Trump divulges secrets to Russia

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National Security Advisor HR McMaster denied the president revealed "intelligence sources or methods," but acknowledged that Trump and Lavrov "reviewed a range of common threats to our two countries, including threats to civil aviation."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov yesterday dubbed the news "nonsense," saying it was not worth confirming or denying.

The Post, citing unnamed officials, said Trump went off script during the meeting, describing details about an Islamic State terror threat related to the use of laptop computers on airplanes, revealing the city where the information was gathered.

The Trump administration recently barred the use of laptops in the passenger cabin from several countries in the Middle East and is mulling the expansion of that ban to cover jets originating in Europe.

"There's nothing that the president takes more seriously than the security of the American people. The story that came out tonight as reported is false," McMaster said without elaborating on which elements were wrong.

"Two other senior officials who were present, including the secretary of state, remember the meeting the same way and have said so. Their on-the-record accounts should outweigh those of anonymous sources. I was in the room. It didn't happen."

McMaster earlier refused to answer questions to a group of journalists gathered in the West Wing, saying "this is the last place I wanted to be" before leaving.

The revelations are the latest in a wave of crises to hit the White House, which late Monday was in a state of shock, with aides frantically trying to put out the fire and determine the source of such damaging leaks.

"I have been asking Director Comey

& others, from the beginning of my administration, to find the LEAKERS in the intelligence community," Trump tweeted yesterday.

Since coming to office in January, Trump has lurched from crisis to crisis, lampooning the intelligence services, law enforcement and the media along the way.

Last week, Trump threw his administration into turmoil by taking the rare step of firing his FBI director James Comey.

Comey had been overseeing investigations into possible Trump campaign collusion with Russia to skew the 2016 election.

Trump's meeting with top Russian diplomats came one day after Comey's firing.

But political and legal experts said this latest misstep is among the most egregious so far of Trump's presidency.

For Trump's already weary allies in Congress, the latest crisis brought more headaches and demanded yet

more explanation from an administration that is struggling to leave its legislative mark.

"The White House has got to do something soon to bring itself under control and in order. It's got to happen," said Republican Senator Bob Corker.

"Obviously, they're in a downward spiral right now, and they've got to figure out a way to come to grips (with) all that's happening," Corker said.

Meanwhile, top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer accused Trump of potentially putting American lives at risk.

"If the report is true, it is very disturbing. Revealing classified information at this level is extremely dangerous and puts at risk the lives of Americans and those who gather intelligence for our country," the New York senator said.

"The president owes the intelligence community, the American people and Congress a full explanation."

Chaos at BNP conference in Rajshahi

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hurling abuses at Mayor Bulbul, he added.

Milon refuted the allegations. "No arguments occurred," he said, adding chaos at the conference was "sad incidents".

Earlier, at the beginning of the district BNP conference at 11:00am, a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leader jumped on the stage and began arguing with the leaders as soon as the name of district unit President Tofazzal Hossain Topu was announced as the chair, eyewitnesses say.

JCD leader Faysal Sarker Diko however claimed he was not invited to the

programme and the new committee leaders started beating him up when he went to complain about it.

At one stage, the leaders and activists of the party locked in a brawl. They tore down the conference banner, damaged furniture and threw sandals and plastic chairs at each other.

On the stage, BNP standing committee member Goyeswar Chandra Roy, BNP chief Khaleeda Zia's adviser Mizanur Rahman Minu and Rajshahi division Organising Secretary Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu concluded the conference by delivering brief speeches.

Motiuur Rahman Montu alleged that

followers of Rajshahi division Assistant Organising Secretary Shahin Shawkat, supported by former district BNP president Nadim Mostafa, was responsible for the chaos.

"They wanted to show the central leaders that the new committees were not able to control the partymen," said Montu. He claimed those who made the chaos showing muscles are outnumbered.

Contacted, Shahin Shawkat said the new committee leaders should have organised the conferences after settling grievances of the partymen. "Many dedicated leaders and activists were deprived in the new committees," he

observed.

The feud began when the new committees were announced in December last year. It intensified as the committees got approval on April 27 this year.

Topu was made the district BNP president replacing former lawmaker Nadim Mostafa, who had led the committee for more than a decade.

Milon was once again made the city unit secretary general, while Motiuur Rahman Montu got the post of district unit secretary general.

Bulbul was made city unit president replacing Mizanur Rahman Minu, who was at city BNP's helm for around three decades.

Gold, crime go hand in hand

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This is alarming since smuggled gold "is the oxygen for other crimes" like arms and drugs smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering and hundi, a customs intelligence official said.

Ahmed Shafat, son of one of the owners of Apan Jewellers, reportedly bragged about being a gold smuggler to the victims of Banani rape, according to the testimony of one of the two girls allegedly raped.

Shafat and others accused in the case also boasted about their wealth and claimed that police would not touch them when the two girls warned that they would go to police, a victim had said.

A gold shop owner and two others

involved in the business for a decade told The Daily Star yesterday that the jewellery business was entirely depended on smuggled gold.

The three small traders from Old Dhaka's Islampur, Tantibazar and Rajdhani Super Market areas unanimously said many other jewellery traders in the capital were dependent on smuggled gold just like them.

There are big, medium, and small gold smugglers, they said wishing anonymity. The trio receive the gold after it had changed hands six to seven times in the country.

One of them said there were people who maintain gold smuggling syndicates and they bring in gold in maunds.

To cover up the smuggling they keep

a fake record which says all the gold was either recycled gold or those were brought in by expatriates, said another trader.

"But, the amount brought in by expatriates is negligible," the trader added.

A traveller can bring in up to 232 grams of gold bullion, equivalent to 20 tolas, from abroad paying a tax of Tk 52,000 under baggage rules. For gold ornaments, one can bring in 100 grams without tax. Bangladesh imposes Tk 1,500 tax per gram for the next 200 grams, said Assistant Commissioner of Customs Ahsanul Kabir.

Asked whether they had any information about large jewellery shops selling smuggled gold, Moinul Khan,

director general of CIID, said they had intelligence information about several businesses, including Apan Jewellers.

He said smuggled gold "is the oxygen for other crimes".

Moinul, however, said gold smuggling had reduced significantly as the CIID now better coordinates with other agencies concerned to stop smuggling. Due to this, the smugglers were carrying gold bullions in their abdomen and rectum risking their lives, he said.

He said they alone seized around 1,100kg of gold and arrested 150 people in the last three years.

Deelip Kumar Agarwala, general secretary of Bangladesh Jewellers' Samity, claimed that the local demand was met by recycled gold and what

expatriates bring in under baggage rule.

About the government's rules on importing gold, he said since 1971 the import duty on per kg of gold was Tk 12,500. But three fiscal years ago the import duty on per kg of gold was raised to Tk 2,57,500 with five percent VAT (value added tax). He said the VAT in India was only 1 percent.

The association has 663 registered members. There are several thousand jewellery shops across the country.

SMUGGLERS

Of the around 30 syndicates involved, 23 operate inside Bangladesh and the rest from outside. The gold is smuggled through Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Shah Amanat International Airport and Osmani International

Airport, according to the intelligence agency report.

Eleven of the 23 operating in Bangladesh are directly involved in gold smuggling and the others smuggle gold with money exchange as their front business.

And of the 11, seven use Shahjalal International Airport, three Shah Amanat International Airport and one Osmani International Airport.

The syndicates are backed by some political leaders and top officials in the police and Border Guard Bangladesh, the report said.

"They are so powerful that they always remain beyond the reach of law enforcement agencies," said a detective who deals with gold smuggling cases.