

BACKTRACKING ON NEW VAT LAW

Big businesses appeased

REAZ AHMAD and REJAUL KARIM BYRON

It was mainly the pressure from big businesses that led to the government's backtracking on its decision to implement the new VAT law. Appeasing the people in general was not much of a reason, which the government has been touting.

The late u-turn of the government last month has left the National Board of Revenue (NBR) in a spot of bother, as it now has to fill a gaping hole in its revenue collection target.

The NBR was working in full swing to implement the unified VAT law two weeks after Finance Minister AMA Muhith had proposed the 2016-17 budget.

It even convened a stocktaking meeting for June 19 to discuss implementation of the new law.

But around the same time, five top businessmen close to the government had parleys with government high-ups. Business

and political considerations were all on the agenda, finance ministry officials said.

Then signals were sent to the NBR to back off.

On its Facebook page, the NBR mentioned yesterday that had the board not been so engrossed in the now-deferred implementation plan of new VAT law, its revenue earning would have been greater in the last fiscal year (2016-17).

In fact, a chunk of the expected Tk 22,579 crore extra VAT revenue was supposed to come from big businesses.

Right after the placement of the budget, the business lobby stepped up its activities in favour of deferral of the VAT law implementation.

As a result, parliament witnessed ministers and MPs coming down heavily on the finance minister for proposing 15 percent VAT across the board. The ruling Awami League, however, termed this a "lively debate".

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Police better equipped since Gulshan attack
Officials say about their anti-terror fight

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The country's policing system has been witnessing significant changes in the aftermath of the grisly Holey Artisan attack.

The capacity of police has been strengthened to counter religious extremism. Workshops are being organised for police members to make them aware of militancy and how to deal with the menace.

Counterterrorism teams have been formed in all 64 districts in the last four months to tackle the terrorism issue. These teams will work in coordination with the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

"Police officials are receiving training in some friendly countries to improve their efficiency and capacity in dealing with the terrorism issue."

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'Safe haven' for top 'Neo JMB' leaders busted

Cops arrest 3 female 'militants', recover bombs, arms in Kushtia raid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Counterterrorism officials claimed to have arrested three suspected female militants, including the wife of "Neo JMB" chief Ayub Bachchu, raiding a hideout in Kushtia's Bheramara yesterday.

The hideout busted in the drive, codenamed "Tepid Punch", was a safe haven for the top leaders, including ameer and Shura members of the banned militant outfit, claimed police.

The arrestees are Tithi Khatun, 32, wife of Ayub Bachchu alias Sajib, Sumaiya Akter, 26, wife of the outfit's second-in-command Abzar alias Rashed, and Toly Khatun, wife of Arman Ali of Thakurpur in Bheramara.

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police also claimed to have recovered a bomb weighing around 3kg, two suicide vests with 10 small bombs, a pistol, 12 bullets and 10 kilograms of bomb-making materials in the raid.

Two children -- five-month-old Akia Hasan and six-year-old Nova -- were rescued from the hideout at a one-storey tin-shed building in Bamanpara area, said SM Mehedi Hasan, superintendent of police (SP) in Kushtia.

Akia is Bachchu's daughter and Nova is Arman's daughter, he said.

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A member of an Italian delegation trying to hold back tears at the Holey Artisan Bakery while paying tribute to the victims of last year's militant attack there. Inset, wreaths of flowers in front of the restaurant yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



Remembered with love, tears

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

She is not related to them. Yet tears were streaming down Saleha Begum's face as she stood at the site of the deadliest terror attack in the country's history.

She was among the hundreds who gathered on the old premises of the Holey Artisan Bakery yesterday to pay respect to the memory of those whose lives were cut short by militants at the restaurant a year back.

"I have no blood relations among the victims, but I feel all of them are my near and dear ones. I came here to pay tributes," Saleha said.



Mourners, including foreigners, placed flowers there as the once upscale restaurant was open to public for four hours from around 9:30am to mark the first anniversary of the attack that left a deep scar on the nation's psyche.

Japanese Ambassador Masato Watanabe, along with some representatives of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), paid homage to the victims at 7:30am.

Italian delegations paid respects bowing heads, read out a commemorative letter in Italian and observed a quiet moment of remembrance.

On the night of July 1 last year, five armed militants stormed the café in the Gulshan diplomatic zone and held diners hostage at gunpoint. They then brutally murdered nine Italians, seven Japanese, one Indian and three Bangladeshis.

Two police officers also lost their lives as law enforcers in groups tried to close in on the place. The five terrorists and a chef of the café were killed in the commando operation. Another staffer died of his injuries in hospital.

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Café attackers died of bullet, bomb injuries Says autopsy report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five militants and a chef, who were killed during the army-led joint forces operation codenamed "Operation Thunderbolt" at Holey Artisan Bakery in the capital's Gulshan last year, were hit by bullets and bomb splinters, according to doctors.

The forensic medicine department of Dhaka Medical College (DMC) handed over an autopsy report to Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, the investigating agency for the café attack, yesterday, a year after the gruesome terror attack.

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ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS Malaysia detains 329 Bangladeshis

STAR REPORT

Malaysian immigration department detained 329 Bangladeshis from different states of the country during a drive against illegal immigrants, says a local newspaper.

The department began the drive after the deadline to apply for the temporary Enforcement Card (E-Card) expired at midnight on Friday, The Malay Mail Online reported yesterday.

In the drive, 175 Bangladeshis were detained at Johor Bahru, five at Alor Setar, 132 at Kota Bharu, 11 at Melaka, one at IPOH, four at Kuantan and one at Seremban, it said.

The immigration department also detained illegal immigrants from Nepal, Myanmar, India, Indonesia and Pakistan.

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