

# KUSHTIA 'NEO JMB' DEN 'Militants trained their wives to be suicide bombers'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

The three female suspects arrested during the raid in a “Neo JMB” hideout in Kushtia on Saturday were trained up by militant leaders on using suicide vests, a high official of the district police, told The Daily Star.

Police identified the suspects as Tithi Khatun, 32, wife of the outfit's chief Ayub Bachchu, 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.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees said that the outfit was now looking to survive safely rather than expanding their activities. Bachchu and Abzar, before shifting their family to the hideout eight days back, visited their “safe haven” at least twice in the last four months, police said.

In fact, Bachchu was present in the hideout a day before the operation was conducted.

A team from the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit along with local police conducted the anti-militancy drive in Kushtia's Bheramara upazila.

Police also claimed to have recovered a bomb weighing around 3kg, two suicide vests with 10 small bombs attached, a pistol, 12 bullets and 10 kilograms of bomb-making materials in the raid.

Two cases were filed with Bheramara police station yesterday against the three suspects and their husbands for keeping explosives and attempting to attack the police, Nur Hossain Khondokar, officer-in-charge of Bheramara Police Station, told The Daily Star.

Police would produce the three female suspects before the court on Monday seeking remand, he said.

During the operation, Sumaiya, who reportedly received training on

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# AL allies annoyed over price hikes, poor govt services

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Some partners of the ruling Awami League-led 14-party alliance yesterday expressed their annoyance over price hike of daily essentials and poor government services, said sources present in the alliance's meeting yesterday.

They specially raised their voice over price hike of rice, which they claimed had tarnished the image of the government.

The partners were critical of the government in the meeting held at AL president's Dhanmondi office with Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) General Secretary Shirin Akter in the chair.

Insiders said in the meeting, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, also the civil aviation and tourism minister, Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua and Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) presidium member Ejaj Ahmed Mukta

criticised the government for the increase of rice prices.

Dilip Barua said price hike of rice tarnished the image of the government as it failed to contain the spiralling prices. He also said hike of rice price would impact on votes in the next general election.

Ejaj Ahmed said the government should immediately identify the people and the syndicates behind the price hike.

Meanwhile, on June 28 in parliament, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina blamed dishonest business people and sudden flashfloods in the haor regions for the recent hike in rice prices.

National Awami Party (NAP) Joint General Secretary Ismail Hossain criticised the poor services the government was delivering and said nobody

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# Floods worsen in Sylhet

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Most of the schools have already postponed half-early exams scheduled for the first week of this month.

At least 3,000 hectares of farmland has been flooded. This could be detrimental to this season's paddy production, according to the Agricultural Extension Department in Sylhet.

The Water Development Board (WDB) in Sylhet said the Kushiara was flowing 20 to 30 points above the danger level at different points.

Divisional Commissioner Nazmanara Khanom said the administration was considering it a natural disaster and had put plans for relief and rehabilitation in motion.

In Moulvibazar, the government has distributed rice and cash to the affected families, but the recipients alleged that the amount of the relief materials was inadequate.

More than one lakh flood-hit people in Juri, Kulaura and Barlekha upazilas are in need of relief, sources in the Moulvibazar administration said.

Bijoy Indra Sankar Chowdhury, executive engineer of the WDB in Moulvibazar, said the flood situation was worsening as the Kushiara continued to flow above the danger level.

District Primary Education Officer Abdul Alim told The Daily Star that 142 schools remained closed due to the floods.

Masudur Rahman, upazila education officer of Kulaura, said 35 schools were under water and more institutions were being affected.

Besides, 27 primary schools in Juri and 46 primary schools in Barlekha had been closed due to floods, Alim said.

Flood shelters have been set up in several education institutions that had not been affected by the floods, suspending their academic activities as well.

Bhukshimul Union Parishad Chairman Azizur Rahman Monir said around 45,000 people had been marooned in his union and were in need of immediate relief.

At least 30,000 people were trapped in floodwater in Joychandi union of Kulaura and were facing acute shortage of food and drinking water, said Joychandi Union Parishad Chairman Kamar Uddin Ahmed.

Joblu Haider, Kulaura agricultural officer, said 1,200 hectares of farmland had been flooded.

“My vegetables on four bighas of land have gone under water,” said Afsar Ali, a farmer of Bhukshimul village in Kulaura.

Joblu added that farmers were facing acute crisis of fodder for their cattle.

Deputy Commissioner in Moulvibazar Tofail Islam said they had already allocated 294 tonnes of rice and issued 49,200 VGF cards for the affected people.

working on creating mass awareness to prevent young people from joining militancy after coming across misinterpretations of Islam on social media.

He also dismissed the likelihood of any attack carried out by absconding militant suspects including the “Neo-JMB” leader Ayub Bachchu and several others accused in the case filed over the Holey Artisan Attack.

“We do not think the militants have the strength. Those who are on the run will be captured, no matter how big a leader they are,” he stressed, “We are expecting the top absconding Neo JMB leader to be arrested soon.”



The Rath Jatra in Dhamrai. The local mayor shut the traditional fair of the Hindu community after law enforcers asked the organisers to stop it for two days over security reasons. But organisers say a rift between local politicians was also to blame.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# Mayor shuts 400-yr-old Hindu fair

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forced the traders to dismantle their stalls. Some stall owners alleged that they were beaten up and told to steer clear of the venue.

“Our mayor was more active than police in shutting down the fair,” said Nanda Gopal Sen, a joint secretary of Shree Shree Joshomadhab Mandir Committee that organises the festival.

Locals said the mayor was offended as he was not formally inviting to the inaugural ceremony of the festival on June 25.

He became angry when the local MP was invited, according to the organisers.

Moreover, the mayor wanted to set up a cattle market in Jatrabari Math, the venue of the historic festival and location of Joshmadhab Temple. The Hindu community, backed by Lawmaker MA Maleque at the time, opposed the move.

“This also might be a reason for him to shut down the fair,” one of the organisers said.

“It is an attempt to destroy the traditional fair. It is the consequence of conflicts within a political party,” Nanda

Gopal Sen, joint secretary of Shree Shree Joshomadhab Mandir committee, told The Daily Star.

As a consequence, the festival organisers initially announced that they would not hold Ulto [reverse] Rath Jatra, a ritual of pulling idols on chariots, today.

But Superintendent of Police of Dhaka Shah Migan Shafiur Rahman, who met the organisers in presence of the lawmaker last night, told The Daily Star that the Ulto Rath Jatra and the fair would be held. If need be, the 21-day fair would be extended.

Shafiur said the organisers in the meeting demanded justice for the destruction of their shops.

Late in the night, Asit Goswami, another joint secretary of the committee, said the Hindu community would decide on holding the Ulto Rath Jatra at 11:00am today.

Tapash Kumar Pal, general secretary of Bangladesh Puja Uddhapan Parishad, demanded proper investigation into the incident.

Shutting down the fair aggrieved the people who consider it a tradition and

their heritage. Thousands of people, including scores of Muslims, join the fair every year.

Sukanta Banik, a local Hindu community leader, said, “We understand the security concern. But the way the fair got shut down was unacceptable.”

Talking to The Daily Star, Mayor Golam Kabir denied the existence of any rift between him and the lawmaker. He said it was the police that did everything.

He also said his men just assisted police in ensuring a “peaceful celebration” of the festival. He supported the closing of the fair.

Lawmaker Maleque, however, told The Daily Star that the Hindu community was agitated after the mayor had the shops destroyed and shop employees beaten up.

Mohammad Rezaul Haque, officer-in-charge of Dhamrai Police Station, said they requested the fair organisers to remove the makeshift stalls from Jatrabari-Rothkhola road to ensure smooth traffic flow during Ulto Rath Jatra and asked them to keep the stalls on fair premises closed during the Rath

Jatra over security concerns.

“I did not ask anyone to dismantle the shops. I told them that they could resume the fair after Ulto Rath Jatra was over,” he told The Daily Star.

Locals and police said top officials of Dhaka district police met the organisers on Friday and Saturday after they received intelligence of a possible bomb attack on the Ulto Rath Jatra.

With megaphones, police and municipal authorities on Saturday urged people to keep the permanent roadside shops closed from Sunday morning to Tuesday morning.

But some people loyal to the mayor went to the fair around 11:30pm on Saturday and asked the stall owners to remove their structure by next morning. A bulldozer of Dhamrai municipality was stationed there, witnesses and organisers said.

Visiting the spot, this correspondent found most of the stalls destroyed. Some shopkeepers were seen removing the structures.

The tent of the “New Tripty Circus”, the main attraction of the fair, was forcibly dismantled, organisers alleged.

# Nasa plans

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But the DART project -- a joint effort between Nasa and the John Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Maryland -- is for the asteroids that are too big to break up -- those that could have severe consequences for the Earth if they hit.

“DART would be Nasa's first mission to demonstrate what's known as the kinetic impactor technique -- striking the asteroid to shift its orbit -- to defend against a potential future asteroid impact,” said Lindley Johnson, Nasa's planetary defense officer in Washington, in the press release.

“This approval step advances the project toward an historic test with a non-threatening small asteroid.”

The target of the test is an asteroid system called Didymos, the release said. Didymos -- Greek for “twin” -- is a binary asteroid system, made up of one asteroid, Didymos A, and a smaller one, Didymos B, which orbits its larger neighbour.

In October 2022, as Didymos makes an approach near Earth, Nasa will launch a refrigerator-sized spacecraft towards the asteroids, aimed at Didymos B, the release said. When the DART spacecraft and the asteroid collide, the spacecraft will be travelling at a staggering 3.7 miles per second.

“The kinetic impact technique works by changing the speed of a threatening asteroid by a small fraction of its total velocity,” the release says, “but by doing it well before the predicted impact so that this small nudge will add up over time to a big shift of the asteroid's path away from Earth.”

Back home, scientists will study the impact and the effect has on Didymos B's orbit around Didymos A, to determine whether this technique is a feasible method for saving the planet from asteroids that could otherwise have devastating impacts.

The announcement coincided with International Asteroid Day, which commemorates the largest recorded asteroid impact in Earth's history, when in 1908 a meteorite hit Russia's Podkamennaya Tunguska River in a remote forest, levelling trees and knocking over people in a town 40 miles away.

# India shows

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law to tackle stashing of black money abroad, amendments in the anti-money laundering Act and compliance windows for people to declare their hidden assets,” said the Indian leading business newspaper.

Switzerland has already begun sharing foreign client details on evidence of wrongdoing. It has agreed to further expand its cooperation on India's fight against black money with a new pact for automatic information exchange from next year.

The Economic Times said there have been several rounds of discussions between Indian and Swiss government officials on the new framework and also for expediting the pending information requests about suspected illicit accounts of Indians in Swiss banks.

In June, Switzerland ratified automatic exchange of financial account information with India and 40 other countries to facilitate immediate sharing of details about suspected black money even as it sought strict adherence to confidentiality and data security.

India has also constituted a Special Investigation Team to probe cases of alleged black money of Indians, including funds deposited with banks in Switzerland and in other places abroad, said The Economic Times.

Pakistan also started negotiation with the Swiss authorities to fight money laundering. Its efforts seem to be working.

Pakistani nationals' deposits in Swiss banks declined to Rs 9,500 crore in 2016 from Rs 10,000 crore in 2015. For the last few years, the Pakistan government has negotiated with the Swiss authorities and signed an agreement with them to get information about the country's account-holders in Swiss banks.

In March, the Pakistan government signed a revised pact with Switzerland to improve bilateral exchange of information regarding Swiss bank accounts.

On the other hand, the continuous rise in deposits by Bangladeshis in Swiss banks questions the effectiveness of our mechanism to fight money laundering.

The latest disclosure that Bangladeshis deposited 20 percent more money with Swiss banks than the previous year could not draw much attention of the government policymakers.

This spike is despite an ongoing global clampdown on the secrecy of Swiss banking system.

Speaking at the Jatiya Sangsad on June 6, Finance Minister AMA Muhith also acknowledged that huge sums were flowing out of the country but in the same breath said it was not possible to stop the outflow fully.

“What we can do is lower the opportunity for siphoning off money. That means taking measures to stop generation of black money.”

The government is taking steps in this regard, which would be visible next month, the minister said.

His remarks raised questions about the government's seriousness to check stashing of money in Swiss banks. What did his ministry do in the last eight years under his leadership as he has been the finance minister since 2009?

Over the past few years, the Bangladesh Bank has repeatedly claimed to have taken initiatives to bring back money from the Swiss banks. But it did not come up with any news of actually bringing any money back. Rather the constant rise in the deposits with Swiss banks shows nothing has been done.

We have enacted the anti-money laundering law in 2012. But its effective implementation has not been possible. There is no record about our government's making a successful effort to negotiate with Swiss authorities to collect information about Bangladeshis' account holders in Swiss banks.

According to legal experts, our government can use international law to collect information about Bangladeshis who parked their illicit money in Swiss banks. If needed, it may sign agreements with the bank authorities in this regard.

Our policymakers should give a careful thought to ways and means the Indian government has been applying to check stashing money in Swiss banks.

It keeps collecting information about the country's account holders with Swiss banks. It has had hectic negotiation with the Swiss authorities to bring back the money from the country.

The Indian example may show us the way to strengthen the fight against money laundering. For this, the government must be serious. But the question is: Is the government at all serious?

# VIP's car on wrong way runs over biker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A motorbiker was critically injured after the SUV of a High Court judge travelling on the wrong side of the road ran him over near Ruposhi Bangla intersection in the capital yesterday, police said.

Injured Zabin Faisal, 28, an employee of a private firm, was rushed to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

Doctors at BSMMU told The Daily Star last night that Zabin's right leg was broken at three places and that he needed blood immediately.

Only the driver was in the vehicle at that time, Moshire Rahman, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station told The Daily Star last night.

“The SUV was going on the wrong way, heading towards Bangla Motor from Minto Road,” the OC said.

When asked if the police had arrested the driver or seized the vehicle, the OC just said, “They would pay damages to the victim.”

Hearing about the incident, the judge sent his staff to the hospital and

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# Woman sued for torturing house help

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A housewife was sued yesterday for allegedly torturing a minor domestic help in the capital's Pallabi.

Accused Ayesha Latif is married to an army officer, police said.

Victim Sabina Akhter, 11, is now being treated at One Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Dadon Fakir, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, told The Daily Star last night.

The OC said the accused is on the run.

“The wife of an army officer in Mirpur DOHS tortured Sabina on Friday. Locals rescued her today [yesterday] and brought her to us.”

Later, she was sent to the OCC for treatment and legal help.