

BOMBS IN PALTAN, KHAMAR BARI

Act of 'Neo-JMB' followers: police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A small group of followers of the militant outfit 'Neo-JMB' planted the improvised explosive devices that were recovered from the capital's Paltan and Khamar Bari last month, suspect counterterrorism officials.

The group members got radicalised by watching online contents of different militant outfits and maintained communication with each other through a "secured mobile application", Saiful Islam, deputy commissioner of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, told The Daily Star.

They acted like a "wolf pack" which doesn't have any spiritual leader or organisational structure. They choose their leader by themselves, he said.

"The group was plotting to carry out attacks on police," claimed Saiful.

The CTTC unit learnt about the group after the arrest of five terror suspects from the capital's Bashundhara Residential Area on Thursday.

The arrestees were identified as Md Shiblee Shahjad alias Sadi, Shah M Asadullah Mortuza Kabir alias Ababil, Masrik Ahmed, Md Ashraf Al Amin alias Tarek and SM Tasnim Rifat.

Of the arrestees, Sadi and Ababil are students of North South University, Monirul Islam, chief of the CTTC unit said at a press briefing at the DMP Media Centre.

Masrik graduated from the Government MM College in Jashore while Al Amin and Rifat passed HSC examinations recently.

Yesterday, they were produced before the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, which placed them on a five-day remand.

The CTTC unit officials said they recovered 10 detonators and four gas bottles from the arrestees.

"We have recovered some explosives that are similar to the IEDs planted in Paltan and Khamar Bari areas last month. We have collected some pieces of evidence regarding their involvement in it," Monirul said.

The explosives, recovered from Paltan and Khamar Bari on July 24, were powerful enough to kill people and destroy properties in the surrounding areas, said investigators.

Monirul said the arrestees were plotting to carry out "Istihadi" (suicide) attack. They were trying to collect funds from cryptocurrency and other illegal websites.

Investigators said Ababil met Sadi while studying at the NSU, and both of them are "expert" in information technology.

Sadi was supposed to lead an attack on police while Masrik, who is from a border village in Jashore, was given the task of collecting arms from the border areas, said the CTTC unit chief.

Seeking anonymity, a counterterrorism official said all five arrestees were radicalised by watching online contents of militant groups. Of them, Sadi got in touch with "Neo-JMB" leader Basharuazzaman Chocolate in 2014.

Basharuazzaman, an accused in the Gulshan café attack case, was killed in an anti-militancy drive in May 2017.

In reply to a query on why the group chose police as a target, Monirul said the group members wanted to take revenge on police as most of the key militants were killed in different police drives.

Contacted, Towhidul Islam, additional deputy commissioner of the CTTC unit, said, "We have information on some other accomplices of the arrestees and are now conducting drives to arrest them."

UN urges rival Libya forces to agree truce

AFP, Tripoli

The United Nations has called on forces loyal to Libya's internationally recognised government and a rival administration to commit to a humanitarian truce by midnight yesterday.

The UN mission in Libya "calls on all parties to accept a humanitarian truce for Eid Al-Adha", it said in a statement on Twitter late Thursday, referring to the Muslim festival of sacrifice that begins on Saturday.

"The mission hopes to receive written agreement from the parties no later than midnight (2200 GMT) on Friday", the statement said.

Strongman Khalifa Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army launched an offensive against Tripoli -- seat of the Government of National Accord -- in early April.

Over the past four months, 1,093 people have been killed in fighting, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), with forces loyal to the GNA keeping Haftar's troops at bay on the southern outskirts of the city.

UN envoy Ghassan Salame has already called several times for humanitarian truces, without success.

India to fence entire border

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with his Indian counterpart Amit Shah at the 7th home minister-level meeting between the two sides in New Delhi on Wednesday evening.

During the one-hour meeting, Shah raised the issue of illegal movement of people across the border and urged Bangladesh to take action in this regard, Asaduzzaman said.

"I told him [Shah] that no Bangladeshi goes to India illegally. Our economy is in very good shape and people from different countries come here for employment. Why will Bangladeshis cross the border illegally?"

According to an Indian home ministry statement issued on Wednesday, "Both sides also reviewed the pending issues related to security and infrastructure at the borders, and agreed to take steps towards the expedited resolution of these matters."

and infrastructure at the borders, and agreed to take steps towards the expedited resolution of these matters.

"Home Minister Shri Amit Shah also raised India's concern regarding the illicit movement of undocumented persons across the border, with a view to find solutions to this problem especially in North East India."

The Indian authorities also requested Bangladesh to keep watch on the border during the West Bengal Assembly Polls scheduled for 2021.

Asaduzzaman said, "I told them that the West Bengal election is completely their internal political affair, and we have full control over our side of the border."

The home minister is expected to brief the media today after meeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Hajj today

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pilgrimage for the first time.

"It's a golden opportunity and moment," said his female companion. Built in a desert valley, Makkah is home to the Kaaba, a cube structure that is the focal point of Islam and draped in a gold-embroidered black cloth.

Muslims around the world pray towards the Kaaba, which is located in the Grand Mosque, and pilgrims walk around it seven times.

"The whole world is here... being here in Makkah is the best feeling," said Mohamed Barry, a pilgrim from Britain.

During the pilgrimage, separate streams of men and women, grouped by nationality, will travel to Mina on foot or in buses provided by the authorities.

A district of Makkah, Mina sits in a narrow valley surrounded by rocky mountains and is transformed each year into a vast encampment for pilgrims.

A total of "350,000 air-conditioned tents have been pitched," a Saudi official said.

Worshippers will climb Mount Arafat, also known as the "Mount of Mercy", for hours of prayers and Koran recitals.

After descending, they will gather pebbles and perform the symbolic "stoning of the devil".

That marks the beginning of Eid al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice, marked tomorrow.

Pilgrims then return to the Grand Mosque to perform a final "tawaf" or walk around the Kaaba.

POLITICISING THE HAJJ

This year's hajj takes place to a backdrop of attacks on tankers, the downing of drones and the seizure of ships.

Riyadh blames regional foe Tehran for the attacks on commercial shipping, accusations Iran vehemently denies.

Despite the absence of diplomatic ties between the two countries, some 88,550 Iranian pilgrims are due to take part in the hajj this year according to Iran's Tasnim news agency.

As in previous years, Saudi authorities have been at pains to stress that the hajj is a religious event and have sought to prevent its politicisation.

Riyadh insisted its two-year embargo on Doha -- which includes restrictions on Qataris travelling to the kingdom -- would not affect the pilgrimage.

But hajj official Hassan Qadi acknowledged "very few Qataris have come to Makkah for the pilgrimage".

Saudi Arabia's hajj ministry accused Qatar of "politicising the hajj and creating obstacles for Qatari pilgrims," the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

The scale of the pilgrimage presents vast security and logistical challenges, with tens of thousands of safety officers deployed.

Riyadh faced strong criticism in 2015 when some 2,300 worshippers were killed in the worst stampede in the gathering's history.



Two men pulls a girl onto the roof of a train as its coaches are crammed with passengers. With the Eid-ul-Azha only two days away, thousands of people are leaving the capital to celebrate the festival with their families. The photo was taken at the Airport Railway Station in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Nightmare for homegoers

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This was the case for thousands of people who travelled by train as the schedule on north-western and southern train routes collapsed.

Homegoers, travelling on road towards the destinations, also suffered badly. They remained stuck for hours in jam while waiting to board ferries and on some major highways, including Dhaka-Tangail highway.

Earlier in the morning, tens of thousands of people thronged different railway stations as well as launch and bus terminals in the capital.

All the intercity trains running on the routes were behind schedule, from one-and-a-half to more than six hours.

Passengers' suffering worsened after Khulna-bound Sundarban Express derailed on Bangabandhu Bridge around 1:20pm, suspending rail communication between Dhaka and several other districts, including Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur, for around three hours.

A coach of the train derailed near the East corner of the bridge, Mizanur Rahman, divisional railway manager (Pakshey) of Bangladesh Railway.

A rescue team salvaged the coach and railway communication resumed on the route around 4:30pm, he said.

Many passengers at the Kamalapur station said they already knew about further delay following the derailment.

Even before the derailment, Chilahati-bound Nilsagar Express, Panchagarh-bound Ekata Express, Rajshahi-bound Dhumketu Express, Rajshahi-bound Banalata Express and Khulna-bound Sundarbans Express left the Kamalapur station one-and-a-half to five hours behind the schedule, according to the Train Tracking Monitoring System.

Besides, Rajshahi-bound trains Silk City Express and Padma Express and Khulna-bound Chitra Express were running late by one to three- and-half hours.

The derailment caused further delays.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan visited the railway station yesterday when many passengers asked him why the trains did not

maintain schedule.

In reply, he said he hoped that the situation would improve once another bridge on the Jamuna would be built by 2023.

About risky journey on train roof, the minister said that they could not often prevent passengers from travelling that way.

A total of 57 trains, including three Eid special trains, were scheduled to leave Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday, said sources said.

Train operations in railway's East zone was better.

CONGESTIONS ON HIGHWAYS

Holidaymakers faced immense sufferings due to traffic congestion on Dhaka-Tangail highway in Tangail and on the highway from the western end of Bangabandhu Bridge to Hatikumul in Sirajganj.

Vehicles remained stuck in a 64km-tailback from Chandra intersection in Gazipur to the approach road of the Bangabandhu bridge since 3:00am, due to huge pressure of vehicles and bad shape of road at some places.

Hundreds of vehicles also got stuck between the west end of the bridge and Hatikumul. Due to the huge pressure, the bridge authorities were forced to suspend toll collection thrice, police and transport workers said.

Sohel Rana, a private job holder, said their bus of Nabil Paribahan bus started from the capital's Gabtoli for Dinajpur at 12:30am yesterday. It was already two hours late.

"We faced huge traffic congestion on both sides of Bangabandhu Bridge. It took 12 hours to reach Bogura, which normally takes five hours," he told this newspaper over phone.

He reached Dinajpur around 5:45pm yesterday, meaning the journey took around 18 hours.

Ahaduzzaman Miah, additional superintendent of police in Tangail, said potholes and mud appeared on roads following rain. Incomplete underpasses, some accidents and vehicles breaking down after hitting potholes worsened the situation, he said.

The 25-kilometer section from Bangabandhu bridge to Hatikumul point witnessed huge traffic jam due to the pressure of vehicles and the

sorry state of Nolka bridge, said police source.

Faruk Hossain, a bus driver, said the distance between Dhaka and Pabna was merely five hours, but it took between 12 and 15 hours yesterday, because of nightmarish jam at Nolka and Hatikumul points.

Many Eid holidaymakers alleged they paid extra for tickets amid a huge demand.

WOES AT FERRY TERMINALS

Rajib Rudra and his family members started from their Mohammadpur home around 5:30am to go to Magura. But they could not even reach Paturia ferry terminal in 11 hours.

Usually, it takes two to three hours to reach the terminal, from where passenger cross the Padma and head towards different destinations.

They finally crossed the Padma river at 6:00pm, Rajib said later.

Huge pressure of vehicles led a 20-km long queue on Dhaka-Aricha highway ahead of Paturia-Daulatdia ferry terminal, said police.

The situation turned that bad due to huge presence of vehicles. Besides, some local buses dropped off passengers and changed directions at will, said Superintendent of Police in Manikganj Rifat Rahman Shahim.

Zillur Rahman, assistant general manager of BIWTC at Aricha Ghat, said they were trying to handle the situation with 20 ferries, but strong currents of the Padma were causing trouble.

The situation at Shimulia and Kathalbari ferry terminals were comparatively better, said sources there.

Meanwhile, a huge number of passengers thronged the Sadarghat Launch Terminal since the morning and the number increased in the evening.

By 9:00pm, more than 100 launches left the terminal, said Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice-chairman of Bangladesh Inland Waterways (passenger carriers) Association.

He said the number of launches was sufficient for passengers heading home.

[Our correspondents from Tangail, Pabna, Manikganj, and Munshiganj contributed to this report]

UN rights chief condemns latest US Venezuela sanctions

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights chief on Thursday intensified criticism of US sanctions targeting Venezuela, condemning the latest measures as "extremely broad" with the potential to exacerbate suffering among an already vulnerable population.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has raised concern about previous sanctions imposed by Washington against the government of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Little time

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Two others diagnosed with dengue died in Dhaka yesterday.

With them, the unofficial death toll of the dengue outbreak is now at least 77. The government maintains that the number of deaths is 29.

At least 2,002 dengue patients got admitted to hospitals across the country in 24 hours since 8:00am on Wednesday. A total of 36,668 people has contracted the mosquito-borne disease this year, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

At Mugda hospital, Director Amin Ahmed Khan said the facility was seeing the highest number of patients since its establishment in 2013.

The medicine ward, equipped to handle 60 patients, now has around 300, mostly suffering from dengue, said a doctor.

A total of 788 patients were undergoing treatment on Thursday, of them 527 had dengue, he said.

"We have cancelled the leave of all doctors and nurses," Amin said, adding, "We are trying our best to ensure treatment to all with our limited resources."

The pictures at different government hospitals in the capital have been similar since the outbreak of the mosquito-borne disease.

The pathological test units are particularly crowded as huge numbers of people come for free NS1, IgG or IgM tests needed for dengue diagnosis.

Liakat Hossain, assistant registrar of unit-6 at the DMCH, said they were really struggling to handle the huge pressure.

Usually, around 150 patients are admitted at the medicine unit-6 which has 50 beds, but now it has around 225 patients.

"Although I had been suffering from dengue and my platelet came down to 1.40 lakh last week, I did not take leave due to the excessive pressure of patients," he said.

Monaem Dighai, 52, of Ashulia died of brain stroke on Wednesday at Shaheed Suhrawardi Medical College Hospital.

Monaem was admitted there on August 6 in a critical condition but he did not get any bed at the ICU which was full.

"We have 10 ICU beds at the hospital, of which three are now occupied by dengue patients," said Uttam Kumar Barua, director of Shaheed Suhrawardi Medical College Hospital.

Four die in two days

In the capital, Mehrzad Hasan, 8, breathed his last around 8:59am yesterday at the United Hospital, reports Unb.

Mujibur Rahman Mollah, 55, died while undergoing treatment at Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital around 2:00am yesterday.

However, two others died of dengue at the DMCH on Thursday.

Form independent probe commission

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At the inception of the observation, the committee welcomed Bangladesh for signing or approving many charters and protocols relating to human rights.

The committee then urged the government to inform it about the progress on these issues by August 9 next year, giving priority on three things.

The first is ensuring that magistrates and law enforcement authorities properly follow High Court directives on prevention of custodial torture and death. The second one is making sure that independent bodies, private organisations or NOG representatives can inspect the places of detention as well as ensuring a system for investigating allegations from detained persons. The third is protecting the NGOs which are assisting the UNCAT to stop harassment.

At the same time, the UNCAT appreciated Bangladesh for talking initiatives for reforming and amending eight laws, including the Custodial Torture and Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 and the Prevention of Cruelty against Women and Children Act 2000.

The UNCAT defined the unacknowledged detention of the people -- whether they are killed or they come back -- as internationally disappeared.

The UNCAT committee then expressed disappointment at the government not providing it with information about whether investigation had been conducted into the killings of Ekramul Haque of Cox's Bazar and Sheikh Mokhlesur Rahman and similar allegations.

The committee in the final observations mentioned the concern expressed by the disappearance-related committee of the United Nations Human Rights Commission over repeated incidents of enforced disappearance in Bangladesh.

The committee recommended that the government instruct the law enforcers to stop unacknowledged detention, to ensure that nobody is in any hidden prison or detention centre inside the country. It also recommended that the government publish a list of all acknowledged detention centres immediately.

The committee said there were believable allegations of torture, arbitrary arrest, unacknowledged detention, forced disappearance and extrajudicial killings in the custody of Rapid Action Battalion.

It termed the incident of seven murder in Narayanjan an exceptional incident, but said no criminal investigation and trial has taken place

against the (culprit) RAB personnel for violation of law.

The committee of the UNCAT urged the government to constitute an independent commission to probe the allegations against the RAB personnel and to ensure protection of the people from harassment and threats.

It then recommended stopping the practice of sending members of the armed forces to the Rab on deputation for a specific period.

The UNCAT urged the government to scrap the Section 13 of the Armed Police Battalion Act saying that the section has given impunity to the law enforcers from the allegation of torture and extrajudicial killing.

The committee also expressed concern over incidents where human rights activists, lawyers and journalists were harassed and victimised for raising voice against torture and enforced disappearance.

It, however, welcomed the commitment made by Law Minister Anisul Huq at its review meeting for not taking any revenge and to recommend scrapping some rules of laws, including Information Communication and Technology Act and Digital Security Act, which may damage the image of the state.