

Indian cops arrest 3 for plotting terror attack in Delhi

The 'IS-inspired' suspects held with IEDs in Assam

Delhi Police today said they arrested three people, who were allegedly inspired by the global terror outfit ISIS, and averted terror strikes in the national capital and at a village fair in Assam.

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) were recovered from the spot. Pramod Singh Kushwah, deputy commissioner of Delhi Police (Special Cell), said in a statement that Mukadir Islam, Ranjeet Ali and Jameel Luit, all in their early twenties, were arrested after a joint operation by the Delhi Police and Assam Police.

The arrested are from Goalpara district of Assam, he said, adding that they were carrying a complete IED to detonate at the Raas Mela, a local fair in Dudhnoi Goalpara district in Assam.

The three were also planning to conduct terror strikes in heavy footfall areas of Delhi, the officer added. The arrested were classmates and had also radicalised some people

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Posts and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar hands over two awards of the "ITU Telecom World 2019" to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office yesterday. Bangladesh was given the awards at the global event, held in the Hungarian capital of Budapest in September, in recognition of its success in the telecom sector and digitalisation.

PHOTO: PID

Dhaka gasping for fresh air

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city, with 50 percent of the total pollution attributed to those. Shahab Uddin said in 2013, the number of brick kilns across the country was 4,985, but it rose to 7,900 in 2018. As many as 2,087 of the kilns are being operated around Dhaka city.

During the dry season, 58 percent of the city's total air pollution is caused by the brick kilns, according to the Department of Environment (DoE).

Although previous drives against illegal brick kilns had failed, experts believe it would be different this time around as there is an alternative to traditionally-used bricks in green bricks.

According to a 2016 Asian Development Bank (ADB) report, the country produces 22.71 billion pieces of bricks a year.

The brick kiln sector also consumes 3.5 million tonnes of coal and 1.9 million tonnes of firewood, emitting 9.8 million tonnes of greenhouse gas annually, according to a World Bank report.

Compounding the situation is the rising number of registered vehicles. Minister Shahab Uddin said the number of vehicles had increased over the years, contributing to air pollution.

According to data from the

Bangladesh Road and Transport Authority, the number of motor of vehicles in Dhaka almost doubled in the last nine years, rising to 13,70,500 last year.

The minister said it was necessary to make a coordinated effort while conducting the development works to check air pollution.

The government has published public notice in several newspapers describing measures to control air pollution, the minister said.

Solaiman Haider, director general of the DoE, gave a presentation on the air quality situation of Dhaka city in the beginning of the meeting yesterday, saying the government had already installed 16 air quality monitoring stations in Dhaka and different other cities.

Data from those showed that 197 days of 2018 were classified as "unhealthy" in Dhaka city.

Last year, 50 days were unhealthy, 80 days very unhealthy and 67 days extremely unhealthy.

The DoE operates three continuous air monitoring stations (CAMS) in Dhaka -- one in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, one in Farmgate and the last in Darus Salam -- to assess air quality.

The CAMS monitor the concentration level of pollutants such as carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, and PM10

HEALTH EFFECTS OF AIR POLLUTION		
POLLUTANTS	SOURCES	HEALTH IMPACTS
PM 2.5, PM 10 (particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micron and 10 micron)	Brick kilns, roads and construction work, wastes, fuel burning by motor vehicles	Breathing problem, asthma, lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary and cardiovascular disease
Nitrogen oxide (NOx)	Incomplete burning of transport fuel	Impact on liver spleen and blood, irritation of eyes, nose and throat
Sulphur dioxide (SO2)	Sulphur-content fuel burning	Cardiovascular disease, headache and anxiety, irritation of eyes, nose and throat
Carbon monoxide (CO)	Incomplete burning of transport fuel	Lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, cardiovascular disease

and PM2.5. Particulate Matter (PM) constitutes of pollutants such as dust, smoke, mist.

On some days, the pollution level of Dhaka city and its neighbouring Narayanganj and Gazipur was up to 300 in the air quality index (AQI) meaning the air was extremely unhealthy.

The AQI regards the range of 0-50 points as good air quality, 51-100 as moderately good, 101-150 cautionary, 151-200 as unhealthy, 201-300 very

unhealthy, and 301-500 as extremely unhealthy.

But how alarming is the situation? Renowned peer-reviewed journal The Lancet published a report in 2017 which stated that the highest number of deaths associated with air pollution took place in Dhaka.

High air pollution often leads to citizens developing numerous diseases, such as asthma, lung cancer, cardiovascular and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders.

Yesterday's meeting was also attended by the environment minister and representatives from the home ministry, roads and highways ministry, local government ministry, health ministry, housing ministry, industries ministry and both city corporations.

NOISE-FREE ZONES
The inter-ministerial meeting yesterday also decided to declare the surrounding areas of the Secretariat, Zero Point, Paltan, Kadam Foara, Shikkha Bhaban as noise-free zones from December 17.

Environment Minister Shahab Uddin came up with the announcement while talking to journalists at his ministry office this afternoon, according to a press release of the ministry.

Effective measures will be taken to stop the usage of hydraulic horns to check noise pollution, the minister said.

The minister, in the press release, said the decision was an outcome of the meeting to take appropriate measures to prevent air and sound pollution in Dhaka.

The authority will also trace the sources of the unwanted and unnecessary sounds in the capital to make the effort a success, he added.

Egypt police free journos held in raid on news outlet

AFP, Cairo

Police in Egypt have released three news editors detained on Sunday in a swoop on local news outlet Mada Masr, the independent organisation said on its website.

The publication posted on social media that nine plain-clothed officers raided their Cairo office and questioned journalists there for several hours, demanding that they unlock their phones and laptops and hand them over.

Three journalists including chief editor Lina Attallah were arrested, but released later from Dokki police station.

A journalist at Mada Masr confirmed the release of those held and said they had spent only about 10 minutes at the police station before being freed.

Sunday's raid came at around 1:30 pm (11:30 GMT), a day after Shady Zalat, 37, a news editor who has worked at the prominent website since 2014, was arrested from his home.

The Mada Masr Twitter feed reported Zalat's release on Sunday at around the time the other journalists were being detained.

Mada Masr publishes investigations into corruption and security issues in both Arabic and English.

It published a controversial article last week alleging that President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi's son Mahmoud would be transferred to Moscow on a diplomatic posting.

His reassignment from a senior intelligence post in Egypt came after he had been criticised within the security apparatus, Mada Masr reported.

The article, citing unnamed Emirati and Egyptian officials, gave details about the country's security agencies at a time when press freedoms are shrinking in the Arab world's most populous nation.

AFP asked the interior ministry to comment but none was forthcoming.

Restaurants in Dinajpur slash use of onion

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Amid a rise in onion prices, the use of the cooking ingredient has dropped significantly in the restaurants in Dinajpur.

Traders said they had been seeing poor sales of onion for more than a month, as the spice had gone beyond the reach of most of the customers.

In the town's kitchen markets, a kg of the bulb was being sold at Tk 250 on Monday, while onion-leaf was selling at Tk 60 a kg in wholesale markets, reports our Dinajpur correspondent.

Sambhunath Das, a wholesaler at Bahadur Bazar, said his daily sale of the bulbs dropped down to 200kg from a tonne in the span of several weeks.

Talking to the correspondent, several restaurant owners said the high price of the spice prompted them to use less of it in their dishes. Otherwise, they would not be able to sell the dishes at affordable prices.

Mohammad Rustom, owner of Rustom Hotel in Nimtola area, said he started buying five kgs of onion against a regular demand of 25 kg per day.

"We cannot charge our customers extra for using the right amount of onions in dishes," he said.

Besides, many restaurants stopped serving their customers sliced onion in free salads.

"We stopped serving onions in free salads since the price crossed Tk 150 a kg," said Goni Mia, owner of a small restaurant in Bahadur Bazar.

They also started using only a kilo of the bulbs against a demand of seven kgs per day. "I used to spend Tk 200 for onions every day. Now for only a kg, it costs me Tk 250."

Many eateries have also stopped using the spice to cook traditional omelettes. Piyaju (a dish requiring lots of onions to cook) is not being sold for a long time now, he said.

Officials of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Dinajpur said the situation would improve when the locally produced onion started arriving at markets.



People gather near a truck of the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh near the Jatiya Press Club to buy onion at Tk 45 per kg. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Commissioner

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expelled from the viva voce exam. EC Secretary Alamgir told a meeting on November 14 that the appointment and financial issues were outside the purview of the commission, he said.

"The chief election commissioner [KM Nurul Huda] supported the secretary's statement at the meeting."

As usual, all election commissioners sent an unofficial (UO) note to the CEC on Sunday, seeking information on the functions of the secretariat and the purview of the commissioners regarding the functions, Mahubb said.

In the note, four commissioners Mahubb, Rafiqul Islam, Kabita Khanam, and Brig Gen (ret) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury requested the CEC to take effective measures in this regard and inform them.

"The activities of the constitutional body [Election Commission] is now in question due to internal irregularities," Mahubb said, adding that the EC secretariat was not

accountable for its activities in some cases, but the commission had to shoulder the responsibilities in almost all the cases.

He said it is necessary to strictly follow the constitution, Representation of the People Order-1972, Election Commission Secretariat Act-2009 and the related rules to end such an unexpected situation.

"It's not possible to hold a fair election without coordination between the Election Commission and the Election Commission Secretariat," Mahubb observed.

SECRETARY DENIES ALLEGATIONS
Talking to reporters, EC Secretary Alamgir said his office was readying a "status paper" in detail on the recruitment process and the answer to the UO note to be submitted to the CEC.

Denying the allegation that there was "arbitrariness" in running the EC secretariat, he said they were going by related laws and rules. "I heard such an allegation for the first time."

"One can complain about an arbitrary attitude if we don't follow their [commissioners'] instructions."

He said the state's executive, judiciary and legislative branches have separate functions. "You can call it an interference if the judiciary interferes in other division's activities and vice versa."

Citing different laws and rules, Alamgir reiterated that the EC secretariat was bound to inform and obey the orders of all the commissioners only in election-related issues.

He said the EC secretariat did not require the commission's approval for issues except elections, and the secretariat took steps on those issues upon approval of the CEC.

"But we have to provide information to the election commissioners if they ask for any."

ACC finds

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Without the "grace marks" taken into account, only four of the recruits passed both the exams and five failed both the tests, according to the case statement.

The other 23 had passed the written test but failed the MCQ test. Mosaddique's nephew got 72 and 55 in the written and MCQ tests, including the "grace marks". "He was given the grace marks so that he passed," said an ACC official.

The FIR said a 10-member committee held the viva exams between January 20 and January 22. The exam had 100 marks, which is unprecedented in recruitment for government service.

The pass mark for viva is 25, according to the Operation Manual of Biman but even that is not followed.

"It is an instance of gross irregularities and corruption," read the FIR.

The candidates had to be between 18 and 30 years old and in case of children of freedom fighters up to 32 years. But the members of the selection committee raised the age limit to 40.

Biman published two recruitment circulars on September 18, 2018, and September 19, 2018, for pilots for short- to medium-range Boeing 737s and Bombardier Dash-8s.

According to the circular, the minimum GPA in Physics and Mathematics in HSC or equivalent was set to 3.00. But Biman published another circular on October 9, 2018, lowering the minimum GPA to 2.4 for A-level candidates.

The FIR said 30 candidates, including Mosaddique's nephew, were able to apply because of this and Biman recruited 13 of them.

Ex BAPA chief SM Helal said, "The whole country and the whole world witnessed the shameful event which tarnished Biman's image. The persons involved in the irregularities should get exemplary punishment."

Asked whether Biman would take any action against the recruits, Biman Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Mokabbir Hossain said the Board of Directors of Biman have already approved their appointments.

"Many of the cadets have joined their jobs as first officers after training and the rest are receiving training."

"At this moment, we have no way to decide something fresh regarding the recruited pilots."

He claimed that he was not aware of the 13 cadets who, according to the ACC, were recruited under relaxed terms.

The Biman MD said operations of the national carrier would be hampered if he took action against those pilots.

Aviation expert Kazi Wahidul Alam said stern actions should be taken against the officials involved in the pilot recruiting process.

Asked if those pilots were a threat to safety, he said a pilot becomes capable after proper training and flying an aircraft for certain number of hours. Biman has to spend a lot on their training.

"I think the Biman board should take all these matters into consideration in the case of taking actions against those recruits," he added.

Biman incurred a loss of Tk 201 crore in 2017-18 fiscal year due to widespread corruption, irregularities, and mismanagement.

The civil aviation ministry has recently revealed several incidents of corruption and irregularities in different sections of Biman, including recruitment of pilots, ticket selling, and leasing planes.

Following these, the ministry moved to overhaul Biman management and make Biman a profitable venture, Civil Aviation Ministry Secretary Mohibul Haque told The Daily Star recently.

Mosaddique was forced to resign on April 30 for his alleged involvement in irregularities in the recruitment of pilots, sources in the ministry said.

Spreading its wings in 1972, Biman has been incurring loss most of the years due to corruption and mismanagement, aviation experts said.

In the last 10 years, Biman made profits only in three fiscal years -- 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17.

Amid widespread allegations of anomalies, the Jatiya Sangsad committee on civil aviation in 2010 had formed a five-member parliamentary sub-committee to probe the irregularities and corruption.

Led by late lawmaker Mayeen Uddin Khan Badal, the sub-committee found corruption involving Tk 700 crore in the purchase and maintenance of aircraft and equipment of Biman in 18 years prior to 2010.

Badal in the sub-committee report said there was graft in every section of Biman.

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star last night could not get in touch with Mosaddique, his nephew, Capt Farhat, principal of BATC Partha Kumar Pandit, and Manager Fakhrul for comments.

Alamgir said there was no chance of any irregularities in the appointment process as everything was done properly according to related laws and rules.