

From robber to terrorist

Huji men radicalised 5 in jail, claims counter-terror unit after arresting 6 in the capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

They all were dacoits by profession. Once the five men were arrested and sent to jail, but a jailed leader of banned militant outfit Harkat-ul-Jihad Bangladesh (HujiB) recruited them as members of the outfit.

After coming out of jail on bail, they formed a separate group under the leadership of another HujiB leader and got involved in mugging and dacoity. Their purposes were spending most the collected fund to strengthen the outfit by recruiting new members and freeing leaders from jail on bail.

An investigation team of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) revealed this after picking up six members of the outfit from the capital's Badda area on Thursday night. The arrestees include the five.

The arrestees are Md Billal Hossain, 25, Nur Alam, 28, Rafiqul Islam, 29, Abul Miah, 35, Abdur Rahman, 30, and Akter Hossain, 34.

Billal is the leader of the dacoity group of the HujiB.

CTTC chief Monirul Islam said their team also recovered a bottle of chloroform, a machete, three knives, two masks and a toy pistol from their possession.

During primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that they used to commit robbery to collect fund for the outfit as per instructions of their leader Md Ujjal alias Ratan, Monirul told reporters at Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium in the capital's Gulistan yesterday.

Ujjal was convicted by a court in the August 21 grenade attack case. He is now in Kashimpur High Security Jail.

Monirul also said Billal formed the seven-member group after 12 other HujiB members, who were also involved in collecting fund by committing dacoity, were arrested by police on March 4.

The counterterrorism official was talking to journalists during the break of a friendly cricket match between CTTC and Crime Reporters' Association Bangladesh.

Yesterday, a case was filed against the six arrestees and two absconding members of the group with Badda police station.

The CTTC chief said they were conducting drives to arrest the two.

Another top CTTC official, who is involved in the investigation, said the arrestees were members of an inter-district dacoity group. Their only objective was to commit mugging and dacoity.

"But they got in touch with the HujiB leaders in jail," said the official, requesting anonymity.

The HujiB leaders convinced them that it would not be a sin if they spent a portion of the collected money for the welfare of the religion after meeting their needs, the official said, quoting the arrestees as saying during primary interrogation.

Yesterday, a Dhaka court placed the six arrestees on five-day remand each after the law enforcers produced them before it seeking 10-day remand each, said SK Imran Hossain, assistant commissioner of CTTC unit.

12 student fronts unite

FROM PAGE 1

Oikya, Swatantra Jote, and Chhatra Moncho.

Speaking at the press conference, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (BSD) President Al Quaderi Joy said Chhatra League and its "shadow organisation" Muktiyuddho Moncho attacked Ducusu VP Nurul Haque Nur and his men on December 22.

"It could not have been done without the university administration's instigation," he said.

A four-point demand, including legal action and expulsion of those involved in attacks on Nur and his supporters, was also placed at the press conference.

Their other demands include resignation of the DU proctor for his failure to protect students, withdrawal of case against the injured and bearing their medical costs, and ensuring democratic environment and students' security on the campus.

Responding to a query, the alliance leaders said Chhatra League and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal were not included in the association as the two student bodies were either now involved in criminal activities or had been involved in such activities in the past.

"Activists of the ruling party's student body have been carrying out criminal activities on campuses and compelling students to join their political programmes. The aim of our alliance is to ensure that no organisation can run criminal activities," Akhtar said.

Nur and 28 other activists of

Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad were made accused in an attempted murder case on Thursday.

In another programme, Rashed Khan, a joint convener of the parishad, said, "Filing of the case against the injured is an example of misrule."

Police said they would add information of the case (filed by the parishad) to the previous one lodged by police in connection with the December 22 attack.

But they were still in the dark whether police took the case, Rashed said while addressing a protest rally in front of the National Museum at Shahabagh yesterday.

"We were tortured and sent to hospital, yet a case has been filed against us," he said.

Referring to the attack, Rashed alleged that Muktiyuddho Moncho activists carried out the attack on them first and then the BCL men joined.

He also demanded withdrawal of the "false case" against Nur and others.

After the rally, the parishad activists brought out a procession which paraded across the campus.

On December 22, Nur and his supporters came under attack from a faction of Muktiyuddho Moncho, mostly comprised of BCL men, at his office at the Ducusu building.

Nur and at least his 26 supporters were wounded in the attack. Eight of them are still undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Khulna coast into 3rd place

FROM PAGE 1

Rangpur were never in the game, being cut down to 97 for seven after 15 overs, before managing to reach 130 for nine in 20 overs.

Rangpur were bolstered by the inclusion of former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson, who arrived in the country the previous day and was immediately made the team's third captain in their sixth game, summing up the sad state of their campaign. The loss continued Rangpur's run at the bottom of the table with five losses from six games. The big win for Khulna, on the other hand, saw them rise to third position with four wins from six games.

Watson's appearance did little to change Rangpur's fortunes as the Australian scored just five runs in his debut BPL innings. Mohammad Naim hit a nine-ball 20 and Lewis Gregory top-scored with 34 off 26 balls, but the rest of the Rangpur scorecard made for sorry reading. Khulna pacer Shahidul Islam became the latest local pacer to grab the spotlight as he cut through

Rangpur's middle order with figures of four for 23 in four excellent overs.

Earlier, Rangpur had won the toss and asked Khulna to bat first, and their strong score was ensured by Mushfiqur's second fifty of the tournament. He stitched together a partnership of 39 runs for the fourth wicket with opener Nazmul Hossain Shanto, before featuring in a match-defining 62-run fifth-wicket stand with Najibullah Zadran, who scored 41 off 26 balls. Mushfiqur was the sixth wicket to fall in the last over, having hit four boundaries and two sixes.

A slight silver lining for Rangpur was that ace left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman continued to show glimpses of form by picking up three wickets for 28 runs in his four overs.

In the day's first game, Dhaka Platoon could only muster a sub-par 124 for nine against leaders Chattogram. In reply, Chattogram's stand-in skipper Imrul Kayes hit a well-paced 53-ball 54 to take the team home with six wickets and eight balls to spare.

Wind, rain chill North

FROM PAGE 1

The cold has also been affecting farmers who cultivated potatoes and prepared paddy seedbeds recently in Bogura, said Azizur Rahman, assistant agriculture officer of the Bogura regional office.

In Thakurgaon, a retired high school teacher, who received burn injuries while trying to keep himself warm by sitting beside a fire on December 20, died yesterday morning at the burn unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The victim is Nazmul Haque, 70, former assistant teacher of Panchagarh

Bisnu Prasad Government High School and an inhabitant of Amkathal Malipara village in Panchagarh Sadar upazila.

Quoting family members, local UP Chairman Golam Musa Kalimullah said the school teacher's clothes caught fire while he was burning straws to keep himself warm. The lower portion of his body suffered severe burn injuries.

His family members first brought him to Rangpur Medical College Hospital on the same day. The following day he was shifted to the DMCH where he breathed his last.



People crowd near a truck after it veered off Dhaka-Aricha highway and plunged into a pond in Savar's Jorpal area yesterday. The accident left two people dead.

PHOTO: STAR

Shrinking revenue a growing worry

FROM PAGE 1

in the world and well below peers in the region. Five years earlier, it was 9.9 percent.

The ratio is likely to shrink further this fiscal year if the collection trend of the first four months and the upward slant of GDP growth are considered. Collections grew just 4.83 percent, down from 6.74 percent registered a year earlier.

Value-added tax, the largest source of revenue, was up just 1.79 percent during the period -- a worrying development particularly because the much-awaited new law that was framed to boost collections was rolled out on July 1.

The VAT and Supplementary Duty Act 2012 that passed muster for all quarters had four different rates instead of just one prescribed by the International Monetary Fund, washing away the spirit of the law.

No wonder then that the VAT collections growth thus far has been lower than a year earlier.

The VAT law was supposed to be supplemented by automation, but that has not come through yet. For instance, 25 types of businesses were supposed to be fitted with electronic fiscal device (EFDs) from this fiscal year.

At the time of writing, 10,000 EFDs have arrived at the Chittagong port out of the requisite 2 lakh, but their software is yet to come through.

"I was assured that EFDs will be installed in shops from July 1. Unfortunately, it did not happen," Kamal told reporters earlier on December 4.

This laissez faire statement sums up

best Kamal's attitude so far in sorting out the most imperative problem of the economy.

And because of the revenue shortfall, the government had to dig into banks' funds this fiscal year. By December 9, it has borrowed 99.5 percent of its target for this fiscal year, choking out private investment along the way.

Already, private sector credit growth hit a nine-year-low of 10.04 percent in October, 3.16 percentage points lower than the central bank's target for the first half of the fiscal year.

Capital machinery and industrial raw material imports have shrunk too, according to Bangladesh Bank's latest data.

Banks' ability to lend had already taken a big hit because of the runaway defaulted loans and then came this new pressure from the latter half of 2019 in the form of heightened government borrowing.

"As of today, what is on the balance sheet will remain the same -- it will not increase in anyway," Kamal told a press briefing on January 10, soon after taking charge of finance ministry. But, the situation of defaulted loans has only gotten worse in 2019.

Another setback arising out of the slowing revenue collection is that the government's budget deficit crossed the sensible perimeter of 5 percent for the first time in 12 years in fiscal 2018-19, and is on course to breaching it again this fiscal year if the root cause is not fixed with urgency.

Thrift is of great revenue, Roman statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero once said, and the government would do

well if it pays heed to this saying, now.

Implementation of development projects continues to come about at snail's pace, leading to cost overruns. And the government's subsidy burden is only getting heavier, and if the duty waiver to certain sectors are factored in, it seems indulgent in times of revenue shortfall.

Another worrying development is the continued slowdown in exports, one of the lifelines of the economy, thanks to a contraction in garment orders on the back of strengthening competitors and the US-China trade war.

This episode is not an eyeopener but just a reconfirmation of what the experts have long been warning: excessive reliance on one item is not wise and neither is complacency.

Moving up the garment value chain has long been advised for Bangladesh's garment sector, but the country's apparel exporters were just happy with the global monopoly for low-value, basic products.

This has opened the floor for upstarts to challenge Bangladesh's second position in global apparel trade. And Vietnam, India, Turkey, Pakistan, Cambodia are not squandering this opening.

Their time to export is much shorter than Bangladesh's: it takes 315 hours, in contrast to 105 hours for Vietnam and 81 hours for India. It takes 180 hours for Cambodia and 130 hours for Pakistan.

Looking ahead, if the problems causing slowing revenue, shrinking exports and runaway defaulted loans are not addressed at the soonest, 2020 looks sets to be a bumpy ride.

Smuggled clothes worth Tk 4 crore seized in Benapole

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh seized smuggled Indian clothes, worth over Tk 4 crore, from Amrakhali in Benapole on Thursday night.

Lt Col Salim Reja, commanding officer of BGB 49 Battalion, said on information, a BGB team raided the area beside Benapole-Jashore road and recovered a huge quantity of men's and women's wears from an abandoned lorry around 11:30pm.

The clothes were later deposited with Jashore customs warehouse, he said.

A case was filed with Benapole Port Police Station.

IS claims execution of 11 Christians in Nigeria

AFP, Kano

Jihadists aligned to the Islamic State group have released a video claiming to show the execution of 11 Christians in restive northeast Nigeria.

The footage posted online late Thursday by IS-linked propaganda arm Amaq showed 11 blindfolded men being shot and stabbed by jihadists from the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) at an undisclosed location.

"This is a message to Christians all over the world," said a masked man in the one-minute video.

He claimed the killings were in reprisal for the death of IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his spokesman.

IS leader Baghdadi committed suicide in October to avoid capture during a US special forces raid on his hideout in the province of Idlib in northwest Syria.

In recent months, ISWAP has intensified its attacks on Christians, security personnel and aid staff, setting up roadblocks on highways and conducting searches.

Terminal

FROM PAGE 1

Celebrated architect Rohani Baharin designed the terminal. Her other works include Changi International Airport's Terminal 3, Wuhan Tianhe Terminal 2, Guangzhou Baiyun New International Airport, Ahmedabad International Airport, New Islamabad International Airport, Can Tho and Phu Quoc International Airports.

The three-storey terminal building, which will be 2.30 lakh square metres, will be built by Mitsubishi and Fujita of Japan and Samsung of Korea.

It will have 115 check-in counters, 64 departure and 64 arrival immigration desks, 27 baggage scanning machines, 40 scanning machines, 12 boarding bridges, 16 carousels and 11 body scanners.

There will also be new car parking facility for 1,230 vehicles, a new 63,000 square metre import and export cargo complex, a 5.42 lakh square metre apron for 37 aircrafts, among others.

A water supply system, sewerage treatment plant, intake power plant distribution system, equipment of cargo complex, airfield ground lighting system and hydrant fire system are also included in the project, according to civil aviation ministry officials.

Around two crore passengers will be able to use the HSIA following construction of the third terminal, 70 percent of the funding for which is coming from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica).

In its current form, HSIA can handle eight million passengers a year. But the number of passengers is expected to reach 14 million by 2025 and 24.8 million by 2035, so the timing of Terminal 3 could not be more crucial.

Around 130 domestic and international flights -- including 26 foreign airlines -- carrying 25,000-30,000 passengers use the HSIA every day.

The airport handles about 1.6 crore luggage every year of about 70 lakh passengers with the eight carousels in the two international terminals. In other words, it is already operating at full capacity.

In short, it all sounds good on paper. But, the real challenge starts from today, as it is the execution that matters in the end and never the idea.

Attention must be paid that the project is completed on time and there are no further cost increases.

When the project was first conceived, its outlay was projected at Tk 13,610 crore. But earlier this month, the Executive Committee of approved an additional Tk 7,788.59 crore for the project.

'Robber' killed

FROM PAGE 1

forcing the law enforcers to retaliate.

After the robbers fled the scene, the law enforcers recovered bullet-wounded Subal from the spot, he added.

He was then rushed to Noakhali General Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he further said.

According to the OC, Subal was the leader of a notorious robber gang and had 11 cases against him.

Police also claimed to have recovered arms and ammunitions from the spot.

AL, BNP grapple with glut of aspirants

FROM PAGE 1

Three other councillors are now behind bars and at least eight of the councillors were facing investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission for various irregularities.

AL insiders said these councillors have embarrassed the party and that was why the party's top leadership was likely to choose candidates with clean records.

"We will try to finalise a single candidate for each ward. The most deserving candidates will be chosen," Mahbubul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of the AL, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also said no controversial person would get the party's blessing. The Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has 54 wards while the Dhaka South City Corporation has 75.

A total of 1,234 councillor aspirants have bought nomination forms from the AL chief's Dhanmondi office in the capital, while 476 aspirants from the BNP collected theirs from the party's Nayapalton headquarters.

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, said, "We are yet to pick the councillor candidates ... We will try to field a single candidate against each councillor post."

He also said the party may not extend its support to candidates in some wards. "Those may be kept open for all contenders," he said.

Sources in the BNP said three committees, each having seven members, were formed to finalise the

councillor candidates for the two city corporations.

Those committees were working in coordination with the party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman, who is in London now.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday sent letters to the committee members, asking them to finalise the candidates today.

Party's Vice Chairman Mohammad Shahjahan was made chief of the Councillor Scrutiny Committee for the DNCC, while BNP chairperson's adviser Abdus Salam was made chief of the committee for Dhaka south.

The third committee was formed for picking candidates for the reserved seats for women. It is being headed by the party's standing committee member Selima Rahman.

The BNP-led 20-party alliance has already extended its support to the candidates to be picked today.

BNP sources said 280 nomination forms were collected from the party office for the DSCC ward councillor posts and 220 of them were for the general councillor posts. A total of 196 nomination forms were collected for the DNCC councillor posts.

Yesterday was the last date for buying nomination forms, while today is the deadline for submitting them.

Talking about the importance of ward councillors in running city corporations, experts said the public representatives are considered to be "local guardians" of city dwellers.

They opined that councillors should be given more power to ensure better services to the people.

Local government expert Tofail Ahmed said that in the existing system, councillors have no executive power. To make the city corporations functional and vibrant, councillors, not the mayors, should be put at the driving seat.

Former Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain echoed Tofail's statement.

MAYOR CANDIDATES

The AL and the BNP are set to announce names of their candidates following party meetings today.

BNP insiders said Tabith Awal was likely to get the party ticket to run for the DNCC mayor. In the south, it may be Israaq Hossain.

But the situation is complex for the AL and it was yet to finalise its candidates until last night.

A total of 12 mayor aspirants have bought AL nomination forms for contesting DNCC mayor election while eight for the DSCC mayor.

The AL will announce the names of its candidates after its meeting of Party Parliamentary Board for Local Government polls, to be held this evening at the Gono Bhavan.

Incumbent DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon, who is seeking a second term, met AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader at the party president's Dhanmondi office yesterday. The AL's second-in-command asked Khokon to begin election-related activities, said party sources.

Current DNCC Mayor M Atiqul Islam is likely to get AL nomination for the mayor polls in the city corporation, the sources added.

Philippines bans US senators, mulls visa for Americans

AFP, Manila

The Philippines banned two US senators and threatened to introduce visa restrictions for Americans entering the country, the president's spokesman said Friday, if Washington pushes ahead with sanctions against Filipino officials involved in jailing a leading opposition leader.

Senators Richard Durbin and Patrick Leahy were banned from

entering the country after introducing a provision in the 2020 US budget that would prevent officials involved in the incarceration of Senator Leila de Lima from entering the US, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said.

De Lima, one of the highest-profile critics of Duterte's controversial war on drugs, has been imprisoned since February 2017 over a drug charge -- but has claimed innocence, and accused

him of persecuting political opponents.

"If they will enforce this provision in the US budget, then we will be compelled to require all Americans entering into this country to secure a visa before they can be allowed entry," Panelo said on Friday.

American tourists -- who can enter visa-free for up to 30 days -- account for more than a tenth of arrivals, according to the Philippines tourism department.