

Banned outfit planning fresh bombings in poll-bound Bangladesh: report

Bangladesh's banned Islamist militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) has begun stockpiling explosives and is planning a fresh round of attacks across the country in the run up to the Dec 18 general elections, officials said.

The military-backed caretaker government has failed to follow up its drive against Islamist militancy, media reports Tuesday said quoting security officials.

JMB and other banned groups have been allowed to regroup and militancy actually grew during the past 22-month tenure of Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed's interim government, The Daily Star newspaper said in an editorial Tuesday.

The seizure of a large cache of explosives and hand grenades - 'made in Bangladesh, made by JMB' - over the last weekend had sent 'a chill down the investigators' spine that the outlawed militant outfit has developed expertise to manufacture powerful grenades and explosives using materials available in the local market', the newspaper said in a report.

'Some investigators say they were stunned to see JMB could produce such explosives again even in the heart of the country and without smuggling in materials from abroad,' officials who requested anonymity told the newspaper.

Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed, additional director general of the elite force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), told The Daily Star Monday: 'We had information regarding JMB regrouping and its recruitment moves through dawat [invitation] activities. But after the latest operation, we learned they have gone further as they stockpiled explosives too.'

The JMB is believed to be behind the countrywide synchronised bombing Aug 17, 2005. It had reportedly procured the material, including battery, wire, capacitor, resistor, switch and electric circuit from the local market.

But it had smuggled in detonators, power gel and other explosive materials from abroad, unnamed sources said.

The procurement now is largely local.

RAB last Saturday seized 70 kg of explosives in the heart of the national capital after information given by Hanif, a JMB ehsar (full-time member), arrested the same day in Mirpur.

The elite force also recovered 40 kg of nitric acid, 150 cases of improvised grenades, a large quantity of bomb-making materials, and over 2,000 Jihad-related books while raiding two houses in Mirpur and another house in Shanir Akhra in Dhaka.

Momtazur Rahman, a deputy director of RAB Bomb Squad, said they have information that JMB's explosive expert 'Boma' Mizan, absconding since the blasts in 2005, had surfaced.

Col Gulzar said they could learn of the plans behind storing explosives if they arrest Mizan, Mawlana Sayeed and Sayem (names disclosed by Hanif) and JMB's incumbent chief Saidur Rahman.

A RAB official who took part in Saturday's operation said Saidur Rahman narrowly escaped arrest during the raid in Mirpur.

Saidur Rahman is leading the outfit as its ameer after its former ameer, Shaikh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, were executed, says a source.

Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai and four of their colleagues were hanged for killing two judges.

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