

House To-Let

Retired army doctor wants to let 1st floor of two luxury units house with all modern amenities including spacious lawn, separate servant quarters, garages etc. Foreigners preferred at Shahid Suhrawardy Avenue, Block-K, House-15, Baridhara, Telephone: 888205, 871038. C-102

House To-let at BANANI

2 storied independent house at Road 25, House 38, Banani presently occupied by foreigners. 4 bedrooms in the first floor and 1 in the ground floor. Guest room, 2 living rooms, dining, library, 6 baths, 2 garages, 2 servant rooms. Spacious lawn in the front and back. Available for rent from 1st March 1999. Foreigners preferred.

Contact.: 831442, 410606, 9333508.
Between Sunday & Thursday, 9 am - 7pm.

APARTMENT TO-LET

প্রথম আলোর পড়াশোনা পাতা

ঘরে বসে বিনা পয়সায় এসএসসি পরীক্ষার্থীরা পেয়ে যাবেন ভালো করার সহজ উপায়।

প্রথম আলোয় প্রতিদিন থাকছে—

মডেল টেস্ট আর বিষয়ভিত্তিক আলোচনা।

থাকছে—

শিক্ষার্থীর মেধাকে জাগিয়ে তোলার আর তার মনোযোগ ফিরিয়ে আনার বৈজ্ঞানিক ব্যবস্থা।

প্রথম আলো

একুশ শতকের দৈনিক

Office of the Executive Engineer

Sirajganj O&M Division

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"We have no secrets. Had we been doing anything otherwise, the people would have seen it. Even police would not have spared us," the *maulana* said.

We talked at length on various other issues, including the botched attempt to assassinate poet Shamsur Rahman. Do you think that Shamsur Rahman is a 'murtad' (infidel)? Said the *maulana*: "Why should we call him an infidel. He is a poet. I have read some of his pieces. We definitely condemn any attempt to kill him."

On Taslima Nasreen, he also said he would protest if any one misinterprets or abuses the holy Quran. But I have no right to take her life, he said adding that one has the right to have his or her faith in religion as dictated by the Quran. As we discussed Taslima Nasreen, the *maulana* surprised us by singing a popular tune composed by her first husband, late poet Rudra Muhammad Shahidullah.

"*Bhalo aachhi, bhalo theko*..." the *maulana* sang in perfect tune.

He gave a resume of the madrassah's activities and background. He claimed that father-in-law of a Chittagong University teacher donated the hill and its surrounding 20 acres to the madrassah, set up in 1981.

"A mosque, the first floor of which was just being finished, had received some Tk 13 lakh from wealthy Saudi and Kuwaiti Sheikhs," he said.

"Regularly, our principal Maulana Ejaharul Islam visits Saudi Arabia and other rich Gulf states to collect *zakat* and *fita* from Bangladeshis working there to run the madrassah. There are visitors from the Gulf

states at our *madrassah* and they also leave donations."

Hossain denied there is anything shadowy about the *madrassah*. "It is open to scrutiny, even police came last week to investigate. They searched everything looking for clues but found nothing."

The students

Zafar Imam, 8, is aiming to become a Maulana, preparing himself at the Lalkhan Bazar Madrassah of Chittagong, which is now under investigation for its alleged links with 'Harkatul Jihad'.

A typical day for Zafar begins with the crack of dawn at the *madrassah* located on a shaven hilltop, with a mosque, an open bath, an unfinished two-storey building and a tin-roof barrack type house on the slope, where students squat with teachers.

After offering Fajr prayer, he sets out for the day's ritual which includes classes from 8 a.m. till 11 a.m., learning Koran, Bangla, English and Mathematics. After lunch, a quiet time is spent in leisure and games. He pays Tk 300 for boarding, instead of Tk 500 because his father cannot bear to pay more, he said.

Like Zafar, a number of students receive subsidy. The *madrassah* management also pays for some 100 orphans, a teacher said.

The classes were nearly empty when this correspondent visited the place. The *madrassah* students were yet to return after their Ramzan and Eid vacation.

Only a few like Zafar, the only son of Shahab Mia, a farmer from Feni, has returned. Even the teachers are yet to re-

turn at the 500-strong *madrassah*.

The students are encouraged to participate in physical activities like playing games and join physical exercise. Hossain said answering a question.

The Neighbours

Below the hill a local grocery owner, Sheikh Ahmed, said he had been there for a decade but seen nothing unusual except trouble with some residents of the *bustee*.

Mohsin, an electrician said he had not seen any arms training. He had heard that members of 'Mujahid Party' come at night. But he had not seen anyone using guns, only the students practices 'lathi kasrat', which takes place during Ramzan after *sehri*, he added. He also heard that they also go abroad for jobs. The electrician said he has free access to the *madrassah*. However, "lathi kasrat" (exercise) after *sehri*, seemed like an odd practice.

Syed Obaidur Rob, president of IJARADAR Malik Samabaya Samity, whose signboard claims that the organisation is the owner of the slum that occupies most of the land down hill and some other parts, said they have a dispute over the ownership of the neighbouring lands. There had been clashes and the slum was once set on fire.

Freedom Fighter-turned auto-rickshaw driver Abdus Samad said he knows about guerrilla training. Such things are not possible here at the *madrassah*. He had not seen anything like that.

Babul, who declined to provide his full name, claimed that about six months ago he saw some bearded and long haired 'hujurs' practising with tree branches. He has heard that they are going to stage a rally with thousands of people. Why did you not report this? In response, he said the *madrassah* authority had implicated us in many cases. So we remain quiet. But he admitted that there is no physical evidence of arms training.

Mohiuddin, a student of Islamia Degree College, said that the *madrassah* people had always criticised every government that came to power. They also prevent use of microphone during cultural functions in the area, Mohiuddin added.

We spoke at length with the local police. Police sources said that they have found nothing so far inside the *madrassah* that could be linked with arms training and subversive activities.

They said the place had already been under surveillance for a year. The watch is still continuing. Even their source of income is being investigated, the police said.

Police first began investigating the activities of this *madrassah* following raising of slogans by some youngsters during a demonstration about two years ago in the city. They raised the slogan, 'Amra Sobai Hobo Taleban. Bangla Hobe Afghanistan'. (We all will become Taleban and Bangla will become Afghanistan). "Although the slogan was not repeated anymore but we mounted vigilance around some *madrassahs* as most of the demonstrators were from the *madrassah*," the police sources said.

The police believe that the institution had served as a centre for indoctrination. The Barrack-type classrooms below the hill where there are no tables or benches raised questions in our mind. But this is typical of *madrassah* in which students and teachers alike squat on the floor, the sources said.

But suspicion remained why the students, the senior ones whose age group is 18-20, practised with *lathi* during *Sehri* as some locals said.

This correspondent found nothing to corroborate press stories about this *madrassah* at Lalkhan Bazar being the venue of arms training of any extremist group. Question arises as to why did this particular *madrassah* was identified to be the centre of arms training.