

"The task for both of you is to gather information about foreign students studying at the madrasah. Let's see how we can assist them."

That was the first time I was introduced to Abdul Rahman, three days before departing to Madrasah Al Bukhari in Fergana, Uzbekistan. It was a sudden mission without any explanation.

I understood that this person named Abdul Rahman had never been out of the country on any expedition before. So, this was his first expedition, coincidentally with me and with the assigned task.

I had seen him in the study class before. We had crossed paths and exchanged greetings, but never had a friendly conversation. He was a quiet young man, but sharp-eyed. I mean, he could read people!

Hamid Ibrahim, from Amir of the International Student Welfare Division, measured my reaction in his usual style, raising his eyebrows with his black eyes just above the frame of his glasses perched on his nose.

I simply nodded, with my eyes glancing to the left, towards Abdul Rahman, who was sitting in a meditative posture facing Hamid Ibrahim.

"Jamal, I appoint you as the Amir of the expedition," Hamid Ibrahim explained. "In Tashkent, one of our contacts will join you."

"In shaa Allah!" I replied happily because I was given absolute authority to make decisions throughout this expedition without interference. This wasn't my first assignment leading a reconnaissance mission.