

Creation of media

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for filing sedition case have reached a stage. So, we will file sedition case in two weeks," Babar said.

"The drive against militants will continue until their bases are uprooted, he stressed.

Trial of the militants, he said, will be completed in the shortest possible time.

Asked if the government would take action against ministers, lawmakers and the then superintendent of police of Rajshahi, who allegedly patronised Bangla Bhai, Babar said, "Our drive is against militant activities and any one found involved in them will face action as per law."

The state minister thought the number of JMB suicide squad members and activists is not big. Many JMB members are writing letters to the home ministry saying they were driven in a wrong direction and that they are now repentant for their activities, he mentioned.

Babar said the JMB network has been broken to a great extent, although not completely, but their ideology now has no footing.

"Some quarters are taking our success negatively. And someone is also terming it a drama but people will judge it," he said without naming them.

The state minister praised Rab, police, ulama and the people in general for their cooperation in arresting the militant linchpins.

Arrests of Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai are a major success of the government, he said.

Replying to another question, Babar said the government has no intention to grant amnesty to militants.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Abdul Quayyum said three cases -- one for assault on law enforcer, one under Explosive Substances Act and one under Arms Act -- will be filed against Bangla Bhai in connection with the Muktagachha incident. Besides, investigation is going on in murder cases against Bangla Bhai in Rajshahi and Bogra regions.

He said charge sheets have already been submitted in 44 cases against Bangla Bhai for the August 17 serial blasts last year.

Lt Colonel Gulzar Uddin Ahmed, director of Rab intelligence wing, who led the operation in Muktagachha, narrated it.

Those present at the briefing included Home Secretary Safar Raj Hossain, Additional IGP Anwarul Iqbal, Director General (DG) of Rab MA Aziz Sarkar, the DG of National Security Intelligence and directors of different battalions of Rab.

Villagers clueless

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they yesterday learnt was Bangla Bhai, used to visit him and stayed at his house.

The local residents told journalists that Chan had secluded himself from his family members and lived on his own. "He did not have friends, neither had any contact with his relatives," a villager said.

"I have been seeing those bearded-men coming to his [Chan] house for the last one year," said Chan's aunt Ajufa. Chan never bothered to answer to the queries of the villagers. "Once I asked his wife about the visitors," Ajufa, also the next-door neighbour, continued, "to which she meekly replied 'guests.'"

"The guests used to come after months gap and stay a night or sometimes a couple," said Chan's sister-in-law Sakina.

The villagers and Chan's relatives said they saw the guests bathe in the adjacent pond, offer prayers in Panjakhana and stay within themselves. They used to talk among themselves in the room where Bangla Bhai used to stay.

Chan secluded his tin-roofed 12 feet by 24 feet mud house with a six feet long verandah and two rooms, by putting fences all around the boundary and constructed a four feet by four feet enclosure with mud walls on the premises claiming that his guests would bathe there. Rab later found weapons hidden in a ditch inside the walled enclosure.

Newaz Ali, father of Chan Miah who also lives with him, said he knew nothing about the guests as he was not on good terms with his

son. Chan provides for his family by cultivating his own farmlands.

Chan was educated at Shukur Fakir Madrasa in Gayeshpur village under Muktagachha Upazila, his father told journalists, refusing to make any more comments either on his son or Bangla Bhai.

RK MISSION ROAD TENANTS
Mujahidul Islam alias Intiaz, 30, rented the ground floor of a four-storey house at 166/A/3 RK Mission Road in Mymensingh City, from where Rab arrested Fahima Khatun, 22, wife of Bangla Bhai.

The owner of the house Sekandar Ali lives abroad and his wife Asma lives in Dhaka with her family. Sekandar's nephew Hira, 30, looks after the house.

Asma told The Daily Star that Istiaq Ahmed, who introduced himself as a vegetable wholesaler, rented the ground floor at Tk 2,500 a month to live with his pregnant wife Roksana Khatun and brother-in-law Mushfiqur Rahman Ronny.

"I saw another veiled woman in the flat when I went to visit my house two months back," said Asma. "When I asked Roksana about the other woman she told me the woman was her sister-in-law who came to take care of her as she was carrying."

Other tenants of the building said they did not know the identities of the tenants on the ground floor, as they remained aloof.

'Fictitious character'

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herself, while exchanging views with editors in August 2004, said there is no Bangla Bhai.

"It's a propaganda against the government and the country. And it (the propaganda) is aimed at causing a rift within the four-party alliance," she said in parliament on March 15, 2005, pointing the finger at the main opposition Awami League (AL).

But Political Secretary to the PM Harris Chowdhury on May 30, 2004 told BBC Bangla Service that the PM had ordered the law enforcement agencies to arrest all people with criminal records including Bangla Bhai. He said the government has announced a bounty of Tk 50,000 on the banned outfit chief.

He, however, brushed aside the media reports on Bangla Bhai.

The bounty for information leading to the capture of Bangla Bhai was raised to Tk 50 lakh after the August 17 blasts across the country.

NIZAMI
Ameer of ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami and Industries Minister Matuir Rahman Nizami on July 22, 2004 said, "Bangla Bhai was created by some newspapers."

Accusing newspapers of having links with Bangla Bhai, he said, "If they (newspapers) do not have any relations with him (Bangla Bhai) then how come they publish exclusive interviews with him."

"Police have nothing to do when there is no existence of so-called Bangla Bhai. Whom should they arrest?" said Nizami on June 22 the same year while speaking at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan with reporters from different national dailies.

The Jamaat ameer on March 13, 2005 said, "They (AL) want to split the four-party alliance through peddling propaganda on the existence of so called militancy. Because they (AL) know it well that if the alliance exists it won't be possible for them to win the next election." **BABAR**
State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar on January 26 last year said there is no official existence of the JMB.

"We don't know officially about the existence of the JMB. Only some so-called newspapers are publishing reports on it. We don't have their [JMB] constitution in our records," he told the BBC radio.

On the government's inaction to capture Bangla Bhai, he said, "I oppose very strongly that our ministry has failed to take action, because we are still trying. How would we arrest someone who is absent physically or not available at all?"

But after banning the JMB last year, Babar told the same radio,

"We are embarrassed, as it is not being possible to arrest Bangla Bhai. We have put extreme pressure on the police to nab him."

SAIFUR RAHMAN
On the day the government banned the JMB last year, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman March 15, 2005, pointing the finger at the main opposition Awami League (AL).

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AMINI
After the government launched a crackdown on militants in February 2005, Islami Oikya Jote Chairman Fazlul Haque Amini in different public meetings and statements said that 'an evil force' has launched the propaganda of Islamist militants.

FOREIGN MINISTRY
Zahirul Haque, director general of the external publicity wing of the foreign ministry, on January 25, 2005 quoted an official of the US Embassy in Dhaka as that saying there is no existence of Bangla Bhai. But the US embassy later refuted the comment.

POLICE
The then Rajshahi superintendent of police (Masud Mia) welcomed the JMB team and said, "We (police) hail you (JMB) as you are helping us eliminate the Sarbarahars from Rajshahi. We must cooperate with you in the coming days so that people can rest without fear."

But he told The Daily Star in May 2004, "There is no one called Bangla Bhai and no party called JMB. It's the locals who have forged the resistance. I have come to know about Bangla Bhai through newspapers."

DIG (Deputy Inspector General) of Police [Rajshahi range] Noor Mohammad on June 23, 2004 said there is no 'so-called Bangla Bhai' in the region.

Like it was in case of the Bangla Bhai issue, the government has been bashing the media also as spinning stories of power, diesel and fertiliser crises.

Tyrant Bangla Bhai finally captured

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powerful bomb went off inside the tin-roofed room where Bangla Bhai was staying. The explosion destroyed the roof and a corner of the room caught fire.

"While the room was burning, we saw Bangla Bhai at the windows," Lt Col Gulzar told reporters. "Then I again asked him to surrender...I told him that I'll be forced to open fire since he has injured our man."

As the injured militant leader asked Rab to douse the fire, the Rab men told him to come out first. "We put pressure on him to surrender and he had no other alternative," said Gulzar. "We told him to throw away his firearm."

Finally Bangla Bhai, in trousers and black T-shirt, came out of the house at around 7:30am and the Rab men took him into their custody. Injury marks were seen in his left hand and lower abdomen. His beard and hair were burnt.

Bangla Bhai's bodyguard Masud was found lying badly injured in the explosion. His right arm was burnt. The whole house was burnt and only the pillars were standing amidst the debris. "The bomb exploded inside the house, but we cannot say whether he tried to commit suicide," Gulzar told The Daily Star.

Sydney said JMB Shura member Salahuddin, now absconding, had arranged the Muktagachha house for Bangla Bhai.

After the operation, the Rab men extinguished the fire with the help of locals.

Injured Rab Sergeant Rafiq was in the meantime flown in the capital by a helicopter and admitted to Combined Medical College Hospital (CMH).

The Rab men recovered a sub-machine carbine, its magazine, one foreign-made pistol, one machete, a knife, four batteries, torchlight and a cellphone set from the burned house. They also seized two locally-made revolvers, six bullets, four knives, two rifle bullets, one live bomb and two machetes from a hole adjacent to the house.

Rab sources said they were about to file three cases -- one under arms act, another under Explosives Substance Act and the third for

assaulting the law enforcers.

POST-OPERATION SCENARIO
The Rab men handcuffed the militant leader and took him to Muktagachha Hospital where he was given first aid as he was severely bleeding. Then Bangla Bhai and Masud were taken away from the spot by a tuktashav van.

The Rab vehicles were waiting at Battola, five kilometres off Rampur. The two injured militants then were taken to the MMCH where doctors operated on Bangla Bhai at 11:30am. His bodyguard Masud with a severely burnt arm and injuries all over the body was treated at the same hospital.

While the infamous militant leader was undergoing operation, the Rab men took his wife to the hospital. And she identified him.

The doctors after checking his pulse and blood pressure said his health condition is stable. "At one stage, he started telling his past at the operation theatre," Dr Mohammad Ali Siddiqui, who operated on him there, told reporters.

After the surgery, Bangla Bhai was taken to Mymensingh Circuit House. A helicopter of Bangladesh Air Force from the capital landed on the Circuit House ground and left for Dhaka with Bangla Bhai and others at 11:50am.

THE TYRANNY OF BANGLABHAI
Bangla Bhai, who used to introduce himself as Azizur Rahman and Omar Ali Litu while conducting militant operations in the northern region in the name of outlaw cleansing, started his activities openly with direct patronage from local administration, police and some ruling party lawmakers and ministers in 2004.

Bangla Bhai and his men killed 22 people and maimed and tortured over 300 in his vigilante operation in the northern region from April to July 2004. He went into hiding on May 23, a week after the government ordered his arrest. But he continued to lead his militant organisation from hideouts.

Although newspapers published series of reports on JMB killing and torture, the government denied the reports and blamed newspapers for 'creating fictitious character'.

First hearing

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Hossain, 23, Faruq Hossain alias Kosai Faruq, 25, Mohammad Wahiduzzaman alias Pintu, 20, Abdus Salam, 22, and Nurul Islam, 23.

Of them, Sentu in now in custody while the others are still at large.

Earlier, the District Magistrate's Court issued warrant of arrest against seven absconding JMB members and on March 1 the court transferred the case to the sessions judge's court for trial.

Investigation Officer of the sedition case filed with Dhamrai Police Station Sub-Inspector Iqbal Hossain on December 27 last year submitted the charge sheet of the case against them to a first class magistrate's court in the city, showing 25 people as prosecution witnesses.

Dhamrai police arrested Sentu, Wahab, Yaqub, Anwar, Faruq and Salam with nine manuals on bomb making and other contraband materials on the Dhaka-Aricha Highway on February 20.

They showed the six men arrested under the Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code and produced them before a first class magistrate's court in Dhaka on February 22 last year with a prayer for a seven-day remand to interrogate them. The court granted a two-day remand.

Thirteen days into their arrest, the six operatives of the banned Islamist militant outfit were released on bail. Sentu was re-arrested in November while the others have been absconding since then.

Investigating into the case, Dhamrai police later found that the activities of the accused were of sedition in nature. With approval from the home ministry, SI Zehad Hossain of the police station filed the sedition case against the six arrestees and their accomplice Pintu on September 11.

Killing of Dulu's

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Communist Party (PBCP) murdered Mazedur Rahman Mridha, a cousin of deputy minister Ruhul Kuddus Talukhdar Dulu in April 2003. In February next year, they killed Dulu's nephew Sabbir Ahmed Gama and threatened to kill the lawmakertoo.

A retaliation was on the cards. Over 50 friends of Gama, a Jubo Dal leader, with assistance began hunt for outlaws in villages of the Naldanga, Bagmara and Atrai, Raninagar upazila. But their efforts were not enough to deal with highly organised outlaws.

Siddikul Islam Bangla Bhai, reportedly a well-wisher of Dulu's family, was active in these areas since 2001.

Some elderly people said Bangla Bhai's father Nazir Hossain Pramanik was a zaigeer (live-in tutor) at Dulu's village home at Ramsa Kazipur in Naldanga of Natore, a claim the lawmaker saw as conspiracy.

"Bangla Bhai father never stayed at our house. How is it possible? My house is at Naldanga in Natore and my house is at Bogra. It is a tale told by those who are conspiring against me," Dulu told The Daily Star.

However, Bangla Bhai kicked off his infamous reign of terror soon after the killing of Gama. On April 1, 2004, Bangla Bhai began his jungle rule by hacking Osman (Babu) to death with swords. Later, the group along with some 300 cadres from outside killed some 22 people and tortured several hundreds between April 1 and July 31.

On the first day, local journalists heard the name of their organisation as al-Qaeeda, on the second day it became Mujahidin Alliance Council for protecting Muslims (Muslim Rakha Mujahidin Oikyya Parishad). By the second week of April the party was named as Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh.

PM claims success

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alliance to power in 2001 general elections 'to get rid of the reign of terror of the previous government'.

After assuming power, the coalition government took various steps, including 'operation clean heart' and the formation of Rab, to free the country from terrorism. And the government succeeded, she told her audience.

She criticised the main opposition Awami League for not arresting and trying any bombers for bomb blasts that began during its rule.

"We have captured bombers and terrorists," Khaleda told her audience amidst claps and mentioned the arrest of main 'bomb terrorist' few days ago and another 'top terrorist' yesterday.

The prime minister alleged the opposition and the previous government was in favour of terrorism while BNP is against terrorism.

Chaired over by local MP Mohammad Giasuddin, the meeting was also addressed by Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim, Ltair Rahman Anwar MP, Abu Salam MP, Begum Shamsun Nahar Khatwaja Ahsanullah MP and Nganj BNP General Secretary Taimur Alam Khondakar.

Khaleda urged people to vote for the BNP-led alliance in the next general elections to maintain the pace of development to make Bangladesh a self-reliant country.

"When Bangladesh is praised both at home and abroad for its march forward, the opposition is displeased and trying to launch a movement without any issue to topple an elected government," she told the meeting.

Taking a swipe at the opposition for conspiring to block the country's ongoing development and the inflow of foreign investment, she criticised Awami League for abstaining from parliament for years enjoying all

Arrest 'dramas'

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Hasina expressed fear that militant kingpins Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai may be killed at the direction of the alliance government to prevent publishing of the names of the masterminds and patrons of the JMB inside the government.

She said the alliance government has created militancy in the country and established a reign of terror and looting in the country.

The former prime minister mentioned different development works during the AL period.

Prices of daily necessities including rice, oil, sugar, fuel, fertiliser, seeds and others have hiked during the rule of the coalition government, the AL chief said.

She said the alliance government does not believe in the Islam of great Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (sm), rather they believe in the Islam of Houda.

Massina urged the people to unite to get rid of misrule, corruption, militancy, and repression of the alliance government.

The government will have to meet the opposition's proposed reforms in the electoral system to ensure free, fair and neutral elections in the country. Gono Forum President and eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said.

He said the alliance government created militancy and used them to destroy the country.

AL General Secretary and 14-party coordinator Abdul Jalil said the alliance government has tried to divert people's attention from the ongoing anti-government movement through their stage-managed drama of the arrests of Abdur

National and international human rights bodies strongly decried the government inertia in taking action against Bangla Bhai and other JMB leaders.

Even the government top brass denied any existence of Bangla Bhai. Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and Industries Minister Matuir Rahman Nizami accused newspapers of having links with Bangla Bhai, questioning how could newspapers publish his exclusive interviews without having any relations with him.

Even after the prime minister ordered arrest of Bangla Bhai, law enforcers did not comply it and rather assisted Bangla Bhai to carry out his vigilante action.

With the arrest of Bangla Bhai, the second top man of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which claimed responsibilities for the serial bombings since August 17 last year, five members of JMB's Majlish-e-Shura have been captured.

Before capturing Rahman and Bangla Bhai, the law enforcers had arrested JMB Shura members Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal and Hafez Mahmud. The rest two members -- Salahuddin, JMB's in-charge of Sylhet-Mymensingh region, and Khaled Saifullah, responsible for Rangpur-Dinajpur region -- are still on the run.

TIPS LEADING TO CAPTURE

The Rab men were on a manhunt on information extracted from Abdur Rahman, his brother Ataur Rahman Sunny and son-in-law Abdul Awal, who are now being quizzed together by Task Force Intelligence (TFI) in Dhaka.

Talking to journalists after the operation, Commander Mashuk said the information on Bangla Bhai's whereabouts had been extracted from JMB chief Abdur Rahman, who was captured from Sylhet on March 2.

"Senior officials of different intelligence agencies interrogated Rahman extensively Sunday night. He disclosed some information on his whereabouts and we conducted the operation after verifying that information," said Mahsuk.

Lt Col Gulzar told journalists in

Mymensingh: "We verified the information given by Rahman and became sure that Bangla Bhai is hiding somewhere in Muktagachha."

"We first captured his wife from a house in Mymensingh town. She later guided us to Bangla Bhai's hideout at Rampur," said Gulzar.

MASSIVE RAIDS

Inspector General of Police Abdul Quayum yesterday said the law enforcers raided 40 places across the country on Sunday night to arrest Bangla Bhai.

"Rab and police have been working for several months to arrest top militant leaders and Bangla Bhai's arrest is a success that came after their relentless efforts. It's not a success that came in one day," he told reporters yesterday.

CROWDS REJOICE

As the information of Bangla Bhai's capture spread, hundreds of people from nearby villages rushed to Rampur. The cheerful crowd stood on the rooftops of houses, trees and both sides of the road as the militant leader was being taken away from the spot.

In Mymensingh town, hundreds of people came out of their houses, offices and shops to have a glimpse of notorious criminal Bangla Bhai and kept on clapping as the Rab men were taking him to the MMCH in a motorcade.

Defying law enforcers' barricade, curious people forced into the MMCH when Bangla Bhai and his bodyguard were taken there.

Rab men, reporters, photographers and cameramen of local and national newspapers and electronic media even entered the operating theatre.

Jamaat bemoans

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did not correctly present their earlier statement about the creation of Bangla Bhai.

"Actually our Ameer Nizami had said in parliament that a section of the media gave wide coverage of an ordinary leader like Bangla Bhai whereas they give small coverage of a big rally organised by Jamaat," he said, adding, "There would not have been any misunderstanding had our statement been published properly."

Addressing a press briefing at his official residence following the arrest of militant kingpin Bangla Bhai, Mujahid said, "A section of the media are presenting false and fabricated news of Jamaat's involvement with militancy."

Avoiding direct answer to whether Bangla Bhai was a creation of the media, as they claimed earlier, the Jamaat leader alleged incorrect presentation of their previous statement in the media.

Those who want to ban Islamic politics in the country are presenting false news involving Jamaat with a terrorist syndicate like the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to mislead the people, Mujahid said.

He said Jamaat is a legal political party and believes in the democratic process.

The minister, however, said it would have been much easier had the top terrorists been arrested earlier.

Criticising the main opposition Awami League for terming the arrests of Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai as a staged drama, the Jamaat leader said the AL has started a nasty politics for going to power using the issue of terrorist activities.

US for full

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crimes happened before that."

In reply to a question about counter-terrorism capability, Chammas said the US government is working with Bangladesh government in imparting training to police personnel as part of the US government's anti-terrorism assistance programme.

She said five US experts are conducting a two-week training programme that began Sunday, which is one of seven courses. As many as 10 courses will be conducted this year.

The US diplomat said the two countries have separate military-to-military programmes under joint exercises.

UK GOVT

The UK government yesterday lauded the continuing efforts of Bangladesh government in taking action against extremists and terrorists, saying that it needs sustained effort to combat terrorism.

"This is excellent news for the people and friends of Bangladesh, who'll be delighted and relieved at the arrest of Bangla Bhai," a spokesperson for the British High Commission in Dhaka said in the wake of the arrest of the high-profile Islamist extremist.

"Combating terrorism requires a sustained effort and support from the people of Bangladesh across the political spectrum to ensure that the country does not succumb to extremism and is able to deal with the threat without compromising respect for human rights and the rule of law," said the spokesperson.

5 conditions

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Getting the public procurement law approved by the cabinet was a condition for the release of the DSC-3. The law has already been placed in parliament after the cabinet okayed it. But some amendments have been made to the draft bill, specially the provision of constituting an independent review panel has been greatly altered.

A planning ministry source said the WB may express dissatisfaction over the amendments.

IAEA chief eyes deal to allow fresh Iran talks

AFP, Vienna

UN nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei said yesterday he hoped an agreement resolving the question of Iran's small-scale enrichment work could be reached in about a week, clearing the way for new talks.

ElBaradei, speaking as the International Atomic Energy Agency here began a meeting that could lead to punitive UN Security Council action against Iran, said there was a "furry of activities" trying to get Tehran and the European Union back to the negotiating table.

"The sticking point remains the question of the centrifuge-related R and D (research and development)," he said.

"That issue is still again being discussed this week and I'm still very much hopeful that in the next week or so an agreement could be reached."

Talks between Iran and the European Union on guaranteeing that the Islamic republic is not seeking nuclear arms broke off last August when Tehran resumed enrichment activities toward making what can be nuclear reactor fuel or atom bomb material.

A resumption of Iran-EU negotiations could head off Security Council action over fears that Iran is secretly working on making nuclear weapons.

Iran, which claims it has the right to enrich uranium for nuclear reactor fuel as part of a peaceful energy programme, began actual enrichment in February but on a small-scale, which it says is only for research.

ElBaradei said there were "contacts going on trying to reach agreement on modalities for Iran and the Europeans to go back to the negotiating table."

"There has been lots of progress on many elements of that agreement. I think there is agreement that industrial-scale enrichment should be suspended."

"I think there is an agreement that Iran should continue to implement the additional protocol and ratify it as early as possible," he said, referring to the protocol on wider IAEA inspections.