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## Govt finally cracks down on militants; Galib arrested

Bans JMJB, JMB, combs for Bangla Bhai; 16 more Islamists held

STAR REPORT

Waking up to the militants' threat, the government at last banned Islamist outfits Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) yesterday accusing them of a series of bomb attacks and killings to create anarchy.

The ban following a persistent denial by the government of the existence of JMJB throughout last year coincided with yesterday's arrest of Dr Muhammad Asadullah Al Galib, chief of another Islamist militant outfit Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab), with three of his top associates in Rajshahi.

Three JMB operatives in Gaibandha and two in Rangpur and two JMJB activists in Rajshahi were

also arrested yesterday in the belated crackdown on Islamist militants, particularly in the North.

Although newspapers in the last few days have revealed a long track of militant links and activities of Rajshahi University Arabic teacher Galib, police arrested him under Section 54. Police said the arrest was made on requests from three police stations in Bogra and Gopalganj, where a number of Islamist militants arrested for murder, bomb attacks and robbery had linked him with the incidents.

Sources said the government took the steps under pressure from the donors and diplomatic quarters in the wake of an alarming rise in militant attacks across the country that claimed scores of lives in the last

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## Eating own words

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has finally eaten its own words by banning Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), an Islamist militant organisation led by Bangla Bhai.

When newspapers started reporting on the activities of Bangla Bhai and JMJB in the northern region about a year ago, the government said it was false. Even the media was blamed for creating such a 'fictitious' character.

The government high-ups, ruling

coalition leaders and high police officials had repeatedly denied the existence of Bangla Bhai and JMJB, brushing aside the newspaper stories and interviews of the militant leader.

"We have no official knowledge of the existence of JMJB. Only certain so-called newspapers have been running reports on it. We have no record that any such group has formed," State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar said on January 26.

Making the comment to the BBC

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## Rich tax-dodgers

REFAUL KARIM BYRON

He spends Tk 15 lakh a year on the education of his two sons at the American International School. He drives an expensive BMW car. And he is one of the top 20 richest persons of the country. But however unbelievable it may sound, he reported to the National Board of Revenue (NBR) that he spent only Tk 120,000 last year.

"He is not alone in evading tax. Many rich and well-established professionals practice similar dishonesty when it comes to paying tax," says NBR Chairman M Khairuzaman Chowdhury.

The NBR has recently launched an audit of large businessmen and professionals after a survey found that the moneyed people are the

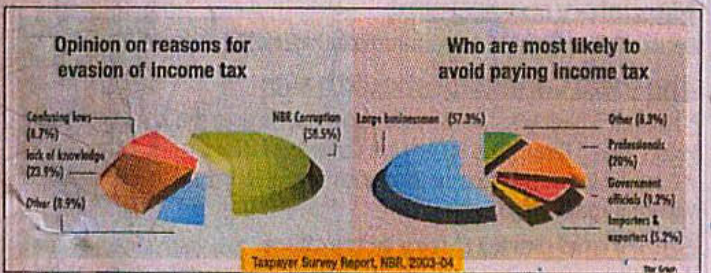
biggest tax evaders.

The nation-wide taxpayer survey conducted in late 2003 reported that large businessmen represent 57.3 percent of the income tax evaders. Twenty percent of the evaders are professionals, 9.2 percent government officials and 5.2 percent importers.

The survey conducted under a Department for International Development (DFID) funded revenue reforms project also revealed that 58.5 percent people believe that corruption in the NBR is responsible for income tax evasion.

The survey has recommended that the NBR publish names of the evaders in newspapers to create social resistance. Since there is a legal bar on such a measure, the

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## JMJB, Jama'atul behind bomb attacks: Home ministry

STAR REPORT

The home ministry yesterday afternoon issued a press note announcing the ban of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) accusing them of a large number of bomb attacks and killings in recent times to create anarchy.

"The government notices with

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## Islamist militancy is a propaganda by media: Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday dubbed the onset of Islamist militancy across the country as nothing but a 'foul propaganda' by a section of the media.

"Taking advantage of press

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## UN HR agency asks govt for information on grenade attacks

UNB, Dhaka

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has asked Bangladesh government to furnish information regarding the assassinations of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina's rally that killed 22 people, including Awami Mahila League leader Ivy Rahman.

The UN agency also called upon the government to provide information about "police excesses on demonstrators" rallying in different parts of the country to protest the killing of Awami League politicians and on journalists covering the protests.

Its request came in a letter dated February 3 and addressed to the permanent representative of Bangladesh to the UN offices in Geneva, a copy of which was made available in Dhaka yesterday.

In the communiqué, issued by Ambeyi Ligabo, special rapporteur of

the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression in the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the agency asked for details of the inquiries, judicial or other procedures undertaken and reports thereof.

The special rapporteur also asked the government, "Whether the inquiries were inconclusive, and if so, why?" He also asked, "Whether the perpetrators have been brought to justice, and if not, why not?"

He, in addition, urged the government to take "all necessary steps to investigate all human rights violations in the country, to prosecute and punish the guilty."

He also called for adopting effective measures to prevent recurrence of such acts.

The Bangladesh government has been given time till April 3 this year to furnish its reply to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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## Washington meet begins

STAR REPORT

The donors yesterday started their meeting on Bangladesh at Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC to discuss their aid strategy against the backdrop of rising Islamist militancy, violation of human rights, sliding law and order, and poor governance.

The opening day of the two-day meet organised jointly by the European Union, the World Bank and the US State Department has three sessions.

In the first session of the day, the donors are to identify the main challenges to governance in Bangladesh. The second session is to exchange their experience in and views about Bangladesh, and the third session to find out ways of helping the country in mitigating the challenges.

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## JS session adjourned for quorum crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The speaker adjourned the parliamentary session on Tuesday for four days amid signs of an acute quorum crisis, as a large number of ruling BNP lawmakers started remaining absent from the parliamentary proceedings.

Against the backdrop of lawmakers' losing interest in attending parliament, the BNP chief whip has asked other whips of the party to communicate with the party lawmakers urging them to join the House on time, sources said.

"We will also sit next Sunday to adopt some strategies for ensuring lawmakers' presence in the House," said a ruling BNP whip wishing anonymity.

The session that began on last

Tuesday after a four-day recess witnessed severe quorum crisis and ruling party policymakers apprehending that the situation may worsen as the Jatiya Party (Ershad) started boycotting the session since Tuesday last.

The 15th session that began on January 31 amid boycott by the main opposition Awami League witnessed quorum crisis almost every workday. Even the House was adjourned on February 10 in the face of quorum crisis.

After many BNP lawmakers' request to adjourn the session for a few days on the grounds that they are busy with programmes in their constituencies, BNP policymakers also suggested the speaker to do so, sources said.

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## Electoral balance makes BNP weak-kneed against militants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP think-tank drags its feet in tackling the Islamist militancy spiralling across the country out of fear of hurting the electoral balance in the next polls, said sources close to the policy-making circle.

Most of the party bigwigs are very concerned about the ominous rise of Islamist extremism, but they appear to suffer from the tunnel

vision that they need the support of the fundamentalist forces to win the next polls.

"The government therefore is little committed to tackling the issue effectively," said a top BNP minister, who has little say in the policy-decision of late because of his stand against Islamist militancy.


The division in the ruling BNP is all too evident with extreme right-wing leaders calling all the shots

over the left-middle group, said party insiders.

A few BNP leaders from the extreme right block strongly endorse the theory that Bangladesh is now a victim of an international conspiracy.

But many progressive leaders, whose voices hardly influence the government thought-process these days, are worried about the gradual

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