

JMJB mentor Rahman

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and is safely running his organisation from his base at Jamalpur Madrasa, sources said.

A former Jamaat activist, Rahman's identity as the JMJB chief was exposed by an investigation report run by The Daily Star in May 2004. But the government did not take any move responding to the news.

Rahman's name along with those of Bangla Bhai and Rajshahi University teacher Asadullah Al Galib repeatedly came out in confessional statements made by a number of militants arrested in the northern districts in recent months.

The arrestees also confessed that the recent bomb attack in Jamalpur was planned at a local madrasa and executed as directed by JMJB chief Rahman.

In an interview with The Daily Star last May, Rahman admitted that he has secretly been operating the JMJB since 1998. He also said that he did not want to go public, but the Bangla Bhai controversy forced him to go to Rajshahi to tackle the situation.

Rahman came out in public when Bangla Bhai allegedly sheltered by several BNP lawmakers led a killing mission in Rajshahi, Natore and Naogaon region early last year.

Born in Charshi village in Sadar upazila of Jamalpur district, Rahman overtly runs a madrasa named Al-Madina Islamic Cadet Madrasa and a mosque in Jamalpur. Saudi non-government organisation Rabeta-e-Islam and another NGO named Islami Oitijho Sangsha provided him with the financial assistance to establish those institutions.

He claimed that the JMJB is headquartered in Dhaka, but he refused to disclose the address. "When the time comes, we will inform you," Bangla Bhai, accompanying Rahman during the interview, had said.

JMJB has trained some 10,000 full-time activists across the country and it spends up to Tk 7 lakh on them a month, Rahman said. Majlish-e-Shura is the highest decision making body of the organisation. Rahman is the amir while Bangla Bhai is one of seven members of the Shura.

The members and supporters are split into three tiers. The first tier has activists called Ehsar, who are recruited on a full-time basis, and act at the directive of higher echelons, he added. The second tier,

Gayeri Ehsar, has over one lakh part-time activists while the third one involves those who indirectly cooperate with the outfit.

"We divided the country into nine organisational divisions," Rahman said adding that Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and Chittagong each has a divisional office.

Rahman's father late Moulana Abdullah Ibne Fazal was a member of Jamiatul Ahle Hadith, which is now led by arrested RU teacher Galib. Moulana Fazal was accused of collaborating with the Pakistani forces during the Liberation War of 1971.

During his student life, Rahman joined Islami Chhatra Shibir and later Jamaat-e-Islami. In the early 1980s, he studied at Madina Islami University in Saudi Arabia and worked at the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka for five years since 1985.

He travelled to many countries including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Malaysia.

He renamed Jama'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh as Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) after a fight between his disciples and the police at JMB's secret training camp in Joypurhat in August 2003. In the wake of the encounter, police arrested his brother Ataur Rahman Ibne Abdullah along with 18 other militants. But a few days later, they were released while the higher authorities transferred several police officials reportedly for being involved in the arrests.

The government on February 23 banned both JMJB and JMB for alleged involvement in bomb attacks and other subversive acts.

PM orders

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will increase.
State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, Inspector General of Police Ashraful Huda and high officials of different intelligence agencies were among those who met the prime minister yesterday.

Khaleda also asked the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), Armed Police Battalion and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to keep a close watch on their areas of operations.

A highly placed source at the home ministry said intelligence networks have been strengthened across the country and special teams of BDR and police have been put on standby in all districts, prepared to strike quickly upon information on any secret congregation.

Anup Chetia's

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security and other for political asylum - are now pending with the High Court, his lawyer Advocate Elina Khan told the news agency yesterday.

"Unless these two petitions are not disposed, he would be in the custody as his life is under threat," Elina added.

Meanwhile, when a journalist asked Foreign Secretary Shamsher M Chowdhury at a press briefing at Foreign Ministry in the evening about Chetia, Chowdhury said he will not make any comment termed the matter as a sub-judice.

A court sentenced the Indian separatist leader to seven years in jail for illegally entering Bangladesh, illegal possession of a satellite phone and several other charges.

Chetia, whose real name is Golap Baruah, was in jail since his arrest in Dhaka in 1997 from Shyamoli area.

SC vacates

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Bangladesh Bank and Security & Exchange Commission (SEC) have detected fake accounts opened with Premier Bank and closed the doors for its entry into the capital market.

The actions were challenged by Premier Bank which former Awami League MP HBM Iqbal is the chairman. The bank was launched in 1999.

On investigation, SEC and Bangladesh Bank have unearthed irregularities and more than 25,000 fake accounts in different names.

Currencies worth

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dollar, Brunei dollar, Saudi riyal, taka and some Singaporean metal coins in the luggage and shoes of a Singapore-bound passenger.

The officials arrested the passenger, Mahbubur Rahman Ripon, 32, son of Ershad Uddin of Darikandi village in Rupganj in Narayanganj and seized his passport.

Dhaka asks

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Minister M Morshed Khan led their respective sides at the talks.

Communication Minister Nazmul Huda, Minister for Food and Disaster Management Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman and Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury were, among others, presented at the talks from the home side.

The Myanmar delegation included the director general of the Political Department of Myanmar foreign ministry and Myanmar ambassador in Dhaka.

Briefing newsmen on the talks, Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury said the two sides discussed ways for further cooperation in the field of trade and commerce, direct road links and repatriation of the Rohingya refugees.

The two sides also agreed to work in close cooperation for strengthening such regional cooperation like BIMSTEC and for socio-economic benefit of the two nations.

Nyan Win arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning on a three-day visit at the invitation of Foreign Minister Morshed Khan.

The Myanmar foreign minister also called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office in the afternoon.

Bilateral issues including promotion of trade, communication, progress of implementation of various agreements and MoUs signed between the two countries on trade, road links and expansion of agriculture were discussed during the meeting.

As the prime minister raised the issue of repatriation of some 20,000 Rohingya refugees staying in Bangladesh, the Myanmar foreign minister said the process of their repatriation will continue with the help of the UNHCR.

Nyan Win apprised Khaleda about various developments in his country including democratisation process.

He also invited Khaleda to visit Myanmar.

US embassy

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Reaz Rahman, advisor to the foreign ministry, last week.

Reaz Rahman also met US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Christina Rocca.

Denying the report, a special release of the US embassy said the governments of Bangladesh and the United States are continuing discussions regarding the terms of reference under which the US government might be able to offer useful assistance to the investigation into the killing of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria.

The Washington Times report also said that the US pledged its help in hunting for the assassins of Kibria, who was killed in a grenade attack on January 27.

"The United States said it was highly appreciative of Bangladesh's peacekeeping efforts, and Bangladesh acknowledged the tremendous help of the United States in helping to promote democracy," Arshad was quoted by the daily.

When contacted, Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury said he does not have any information on the matter.

Director General of the External Publicity Zahuril Haq said: "It was found to be bogus and baseless."

Arrested militants

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the CrPC on requests of three police stations of Bogra and Gopalganj.

Police said a number of arrestees at Shahjahanpur and Gabtoli police stations of Bogra linked Galib to a murder and a bomb attack they are accused of. Some other arrestees in Gopalganj accused of a robbery at a Kotlipara NGO office also alleged involvement of the three arrested associates of Galib in that crime.

But, the home ministry press note on the ban of Jagrata Muslim Janata, Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB) on Wednesday accused them of a series of bomb attacks and murders to create anarchy using people's religious sentiments.

DEVELOPMENTS IN RANGPUR

Our Rangpur correspondent reports: Police yesterday showed the two suspected JMB operatives picked up Tuesday night from Gangachara upzila arrested in connection with a robbery.

Fazlul Hoque and Samiul Alam were held with a large number of books on Islamic revolution.

But, when they were produced before a magistrate yesterday, police said they are suspected to be involved in a recent robbery at Bangladesh Betar, Rangpur Centre.

Police said they have taken the two arrestees on an eight-day remand to interrogate them about their network in the northern districts.

CRACKDOWN OR 'EYE-WASH'?

A number of government officials believe the current crackdown on Islamist militants is probably an 'eyewash' to gain confidence of the international community, to whom Bangladesh's image has gone down significantly in recent times.

They think the on-going meeting in Washington on Bangladesh jointly organised by the European Union (EU), the World Bank and the US State Department, without the representation of Bangladesh, has irked and prompted the government to wake up to the militant threat at last.

Explaining the motivation of the prime minister for finally launching the crackdown on Islamist militants, whose presence has persistently been denied for long, an influential minister said, "The government has been facing a serious image crisis abroad for the last several months over the Islamist militant issue. Major donor countries and agencies have been raising the issue in every meeting with the government."

He said, "Some donors even

threatened to stop aid and co-operation."

But a strong influence of the rightwing BNP leaders kept the ruling coalition high command from paying much attention to the issue, the minister added.

"The government could have avoided many violent incidents if this decision to crack down on militants was taken a year ago, when the religious extremists started to operate openly," he observed with regret.

A highly placed home ministry source yesterday also expressed doubts whether the government would continue the drive or just use it as an 'eyewash' as has happened in the past.

He said similar instructions had come after a bomb explosion in Dinajpur on February 13 and arrests of several Islamist militants in Chapainawabganj in March 2003. The government then began a drive against militant groups which further intensified following the August 14, 2003 gunfight between police and JMB operatives in Joypurhat and the arrests of about two dozens of militants in its wake.

"But that drive was stalled during the Iraq War in fear of kindling a negative sentiment at home," the official said.

Similarly, findings of the investigations into the 22 killings and innumerable incidents of tortures on villagers by the JMJB cadres last year did never see the daylight, as police filed only one final report and a charge sheet in those cases.

However, he noted, this time the government appears to be determined to root out the Islamist militancy.

Meanwhile, a number of ministers and senior BNP leaders yesterday expressed the view that from the steps taken against the two Islamist outfits and the ongoing arrests of militants it seems the government is under tremendous pressure and the militants are going out of control.

They censured the government for its inaction and indifference to the rise of fundamentalism for so long. They also regretted the fact that each time the government takes steps it is only after the situation gets to its worst and the image of Bangladesh is greatly impaired.

The leaders also said it would be wise for the prime minister to immediately remove those ministers and party leaders who backed JMJB Operations Commander Bangla Bhai and persuaded her not to take action against the militants in time.

Opposition thinks

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Bangladesh yesterday said the policies of Jamaat and IOJ must be banned to smother the extremism spreading fast at the grassroots level.

They said the government has banned the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) only to 'show the donors' and the decision was taken on the eve of a high-profile donor meeting in Washington.

Demanding a ban on the politics of Jamaat and IOJ, the mainstream opposition parties are now planning to intensify street agitation and campaign through diplomatic channels, highly placed sources in the opposition camp said.

"We'll put pressures on the government to expel Jamaat leaders from the cabinet and exclude the Islamist parties from the alliance," said a senior AL leader. "Then we'll ask for a ban on their politics based on religious extremism and terrorism."

Terming the ban on JMJB and JMB an eyewash, AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta said: "Whatever is taking place in the country in the name of Islamist militancy, is of the Jamaat, by the Jamaat, and for the Jamaat."

A leader of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) said the government never paid any heed to the opposition's long-drawn demand for taking actions against growing religious fundamentalism and extremism.

He said the government has recognised the demand and the existence of extremist groups in the country through banning the two organisations at the pressures from outside.

Sources said the opposition camp will capitalise the changed situation and make it the focal point of their anti-government movement. "We'll declare our next agitation programme from the grand rally in Dhaka on March 2," Suranjit told The Daily Star.

CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim however expressed doubt about the government's sincerity to eliminate extremists. He said, "If the government is sincere then it should expel the war criminals and Jamaat leaders from the cabinet first."

"We will force the government to stop religious and fundamentalist politics through united movement," Selim told The Daily Star.

The CPB leader alleged that Jamaat has link with the extremist groups operating in different

Grenade found

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Sanjida Afrin Polly, wife of police sub-inspector Shah Alam, saw the grenade at around 9:00am near their ground floor apartment in the two-storied staff quarters opposite the thana at KD Ghose Road.

On information, police and Rab men rushed to the spot and found the grenade with its pin removed.

Rab evacuated residents of the building, cordoned off the area and stopped traffic on the adjacent road until 5:00pm, that created panic among the locals.

An 11-member team of army explosives experts from Jessore Cantonment, headed by Major Khaled, detonated the grenade at the spot at 4:40pm.

No-one could say who had brought the grenade.

Meanwhile, City Mayor Shaikh Tayebur Rahman survived a bomb attack at KD Ghose Road in February last year while a traffic sergeant of Khulna Metropolitan Police survived a grenade attack at Lower Jessore Road in March.

In Jhenidah, fishermen netted a plastic bucket containing the 12 bombs covered in polythene bags while fishing in a pond owned by Hasibuddin Wednesday afternoon. They got panicked, threw the bucket into the pond and informed police.

A team from Sadar Police Station recovered the bombs with the help of the fishermen and locals.

Police said the bombs are live. Intelligence agencies are investigating the matter.

EU takes hard line

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ations. According to the EU, such a situation calls for a review of aid strategy.

However, the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) took a softer stance and said Bangladesh has performed impressively in many social sectors and any hard decision like that the EU advocates would lead to a major setback.

The donors however agreed unanimously that the situation in Bangladesh has been deteriorating fast and felt concerned at the government's inaction in improving governance.

After threadbare deliberations in three sessions, the EU is learnt to have slightly budged from its hard-line position. But so far, the donors have agreed that, although they would not take any stern decision about stopping aid to Bangladesh, they would mount pressure on the government to improve governance.

The donors also decided to keep watch on the government actions and attitudes towards the militants and to ask to put a stop to 'crossfire' deaths.

The donors also said similar meetings might be held every year, even in Dhaka next year.

Meantime, the government has asked Bangladesh's Alternate Director to the WB Dr Akbar Ali Khan not to attend the last session of the two-day meeting to which he had been invited.

Dhaka feels that since the government has not been invited, Dr Akbar needs not attend it.

However, the WB is learnt to have been displeased by the decision, as it considers Dr Akbar as a member of its staff and not an official of Bangladesh government.

The opening day of the two-day meet organised jointly by the EU, the WB and the US State Department had three sessions.

In the first session of the day, the donors identified the main challenges to governance in Bangladesh. The second session was 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.

The donors again met yesterday morning to peter out a consensus on mitigating the challenges. However, details of yesterday's meeting could not be known as of filing of this report.

11 more militants

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Development Board mosque.

The arrested were identified as Amanatullah, 26, of Khaalpara in the town; Mamunur Rashid, 22, of Dinajpur, and Mahbub Alam, 27, of Sadar upazila.

Acting on information from Mahbub, police arrested Asiruddin from his house at Laxmipura and seized bomb-making materials, dummy rifles, printers, acid, electric wires, batteries, leaflets, toll receipts, some leaflets and a motor cycle.

After quizzing the arrestees, police later arrested three more militants including 'moazzin' of Tatipara village mosque Abdul gaffur, 35; and Imam of Thakurgaon sugarcane research institute mosque Imam Moklesur Rahman, 31.

Police also recorded some important information from them.

Top police officials said the JMB might have a network in different upazilas of the two districts and led the arrestees.

Thakurgaon police also held one more JMB cadre on Wednesday night but his identity could not be known.

GAIBANDHA MILITANTS REMANDED

A magistrate court yesterday remanded the 12 JMB militants arrested Wednesday following their confession to police, reports Our Correspondent in Gaibandha.

Police claimed to have gathered some important information about their network and activities in the area.

The arrested also disclosed that Siddiqui Rahman (Bangla Bhai), under the guidance of Dr Asadullah Galib, set up an organisational network of Jagrata Muslim Janata of Bangladesh in remote areas two years back. During that period, Bangla Bhai frequently visited the areas in disguise for recruitment and training.

Business leaders

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on militant groups alleged to be involved in bomb attacks and other subversive activities.

Representatives of the business community, which bore the brunt of eight hartals in last one month, sought immediate commitment from all political parties that they would not resort to hartal whether in power or in opposition.

As an alternative to hartal, the FBCCI resolution recommended that the opposition should be allocated an hour a week in the state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) to express its stance and opinions to the public.

Describing unemployment as the main national problem, they said that if hartal continues there would be a slowdown in investment growth as well as job market.

The leaders of industry and commerce urged the government to conduct independent and thorough investigations into the bomb and grenade attacks and arms haul incidents. They demanded the probe reports be made public.

Besides, they asked the government to stop mass arrest before hartal. If the political parties fail to reach a consensus against hartal, the business community will hold anti-hartal rallies across the country.

They called on the government to immediately open dialogue with the opposition parties to bring an end to the confrontational politics. FBCCI assigned its President

Jamaat, IOJ

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meeting in Mymensingh.

He said there is a conspiracy to prevent Islamic revolution in the name of taming the Islamist militants. "But the conspirators will not succeed."

Maulana Abdur Rob Yusufi, secretary general of a faction of the IOJ, opposed the ban on Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) and Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh.

"There's no Islamic militant organisation in the country," he told the BBC Bangla Service last night.

Jamaat is denying the existence of the JMJB and its figurehead and dreaded killer Bangla Bhai in the northern region from the very beginning.

Jamaat Ameer and Industries Minister Matiur Rahman Nizami, however, told the BBC yesterday that militancy cannot be allowed in the name of Islam.

Jamaat-run newspaper Daily Sangram yesterday blamed the AL for launching anti-state propaganda campaign that provoked donor agencies to hold the Washington meet.

A number of Jamaat lawmakers also believe the government has launched the operation in the wake of the AL propaganda.

"The government has launched the crackdown in line with the US prescription. The main opposition has also provoked the donor agencies to take anti-Bangladesh and anti-Islamic stance," Jamaat lawmaker Mufti Abdus Sattar Akon yesterday told The Daily Star.

No proceedings

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Parishad president.

Prof Yunus, who was murdered last year by unknown assailants, had issued Galib a show cause notice in 1998 asking why he went to India with a business passport without first obtaining the authority's no objection certificate. Sources said Galib stayed in India for 11 days in 1997 when Yunus was the RU register.

Prof Yunus' death is one of the controversies surrounding Galib. Intelligence information reveals that the professor is connected to a web of controversial militants both at home and abroad, using his network of madrasas and organisations to harbour and assist many of them.

Abdur Razzak Salafi, an Indian National wanted by the Indian government for militant activities, came to Rajshahi in the mid-90s and took shelter at Galib's madrasa as a teacher.

Another militant, Abdur Razzak of Moshinda Shikarpura at Gurdaspur in Natore, who underwent militant training in Pakistan and was later sentenced to prison by the Indian government in 1996, came to Galib in Rajshahi with a large cache of jihad and arms training-related books.

Galib appointed him a teacher at his Naodapara Salafi Madrasa, a controversial school where he trained a number of students in the armed struggle for jihad until 1999.

The madrasa authorities provided lethal weapon running and karate training to some 500 students until 1998, when they were forced to expel 12 for training students following protests from several other teachers. Madrasa teacher Shamsul Alam confirmed the training and said it was intended for self-defence.

Yet another of Galib's associates, Abdur Rouf of Nashipur at Gabtoli upazila in Bogra, who was

Abdul Awal Mintoo to talk with the political parties to bring them to the negotiating table.

FBCCI asked the government to help the Anti-Corruption Commission to work independently. They also asked for immediate initiatives to make parliament fully functional with the participation of the opposition lawmakers.

Apart from FBCCI president, vice-presidents and directors, leaders of its associated trade bodies viz. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association attended the meeting.

BSF kills

one

UNB, Chuadanga

A Bangladeshi national was shot dead by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) at the frontier village, Dhupkhali, in Jibanagar upazila on Wednesday night.

The victim was identified as Chand Mia, 32, son of late Khodabux of Madhabkhali village in the same upazila.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources said the BSF opened fire on Chand while he was trying to enter the Indian territory. The body of Chand, who died on the spot, was taken away the Indian border guards.

Unmet conditions

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The IMF however insists on full reconstitution of the board.

On this issue, Saifur said, "We also want to bring changes but there is shortage of expert manpower."

On capital adequacy of the bank, he said, "We are required to inject huge funds even if we want to maintain local standard."

The government wants to have some stake in the bank to maintain some control on it despite the IMF suggestion for privatisation. "We are considering this model for privatisation of the bank along with other possible ways," the minister added.

The IMF raised questions about the shortfall in revenue collection. The NBR could not launch joint audit programme for income tax and value added tax (VAT) of 1,000 large taxpayers. The NBR has so far audited only three large taxpayers' estimates.

The government had a revenue deficit of about Tk 1,500 crore in the last seven months of the current fiscal year.

Bilateral issues

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international consortium, which will build and operate the pipeline will pay carriage fee for transporting gas across the territory of Bangladesh. The GTCL will maintain and operate the pipeline within the Bangladesh territory.

the Rajshahi district president of Ahab, went missing for two years beginning in 1997. Some teachers of the madrasa suspected that he was sent abroad for training. When he returned, he was made principal of the Ahab-sponsored madrasa at Nashipur and was later made the Bogra district president of Ahab.

One Akhtar Hussain was trained in Pakistan and came to Rajshahi in 1995 to work as a teacher at the Ahab-sponsored madrasa at Sathkira. He was then sent to Saudi Arabia in 1998, and was later made a teacher at the Nashipur madrasa in 2002.

Another Salafi madrasa teacher, Abdur Razzak Bin Yusuf, was also trained in India and was well known as an outspoken extremist.

Galib's other close associates include Indian militant leader Abdul Matin Salafi, who was expelled from Bangladesh in 1988 for anti-state activities. The two traveled extensively together throughout the country in the early 80s with a mission to launch an Islamic movement.

Sources named the Saudi organisation Hayatul Igachha as well as the Kuwait organisation Jomiyatul Eh-ya-e turaj (Revival of Islamic Heritage Society) as the main funding agencies for Ahab.

Ahab's youth organisation AH Jubo Shangha now has more than 50,000 activists across the country, all of them active in Jama'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh since 1994.

Intelligence branches have been reporting against Galib's underground activities since 1997, but two ministers of the Awami League government, as well as a present minister from Rajshahi, the Rajshahi city mayor and two Jamaat lawmakers of Sathkira have repeatedly protected Galib through certificates issued at various times.