

# V-Day back with call

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However, despite the panicky situation across the country, people from all walks of life are to pay homage to the Liberation War martyrs and take a fresh vow to resist evil forces unitedly.

On this day in 1971, the nation achieved the final victory against the Pakistani occupation forces under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through a long movement for autonomy, nine-month long struggle for independence and, above all, an armed war for liberation.

President Prof Dr Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina have greeted the countrymen on the auspicious occasion.

President Iajuddin Ahmed was to lead the nation in paying the homage at the National Mausoleum at Savar in the early hours, followed by the prime minister and her cabinet colleagues.

The national flag is hoisted atop all government and semi-government offices as well as public and private buildings. The capital and other cities have already worn festive looks with national flags and festoons.

Special prayers will be offered at mosques, temples, churches and other worship places, seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country. Television channels and Bangladesh Betar are airing special programmes while newspapers have brought out supplements on the day.

Meanwhile, the government has taken strict security measures to avert any terror incident on the day. All the venues including the National Mausoleum at Savar, Bangabandhu Stadium and Bangabhaban have been put under tight security.

Police, Rapid Action Battalion and other law enforcement agencies have

been directed to keep round-the-clock vigilance at the programmes of the national day, home ministry sources said.

## V-DAY PROGRAMMES CURTAILED

Leaders of the organisations that have curtailed their victory day celebration programmes said they have cut their programmes considering the mounting public insecurity with the government failing to ensure safety of people's lives in the face of militant attacks.

Every year, varieties of programmes including discussion, film show and exhibition of documentaries on the Liberation War, musical soiree, drama, dance and recitation at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital and elsewhere in the country generally begin the celebration from the first day of December. These programmes highlight the spirit of the war and recall the supreme sacrifice of the martyrs for the liberation of the motherland.

This year, however, such programmes are not being held as yet. Sammilita Sangskritik Jote (SSJ), a leading cultural body, has taken up a three-day programme this year instead of its regular 15-day arrangement due to the rising militancy in the country.

Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote, Projanma Ekattur, Amra Muktiyoddhar Santan, Bulbul Lalitakala Academy and Protogishil Chhatra Jote also curtailed their programmes.

## BREAKING UP WITH SECULARISM

The hard-earned independence was for the emancipation of the Bangladeshes as it was based on their own cultural heritage which is basically secular in nature.

It is a matter of soul searching why Bangladesh has moved away from its base of building a secular state and

failed to bring economic freedom of its people.

One reason may be the killing of the war heroes. Killings of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the four national leaders who supervised the Liberation War in 1971 and the four sector commanders have been great loss for the country. These great fighters had been killed in the first decade of the country's independence which obviously created opportunity for those who did not want Bangladesh to emerge.

The erosion began following the assassination of Bangabandhu with the change in the 1972 constitution when military rulers scrapped the secular nature of the state and later declared Islam as state religion. Such moves facilitated establishment of the fundamentalists, like Jamaat-e-Islami, politically and socially, and finally won for their share of the state power.

On the rising militancy, many pro-liberation forces and freedom fighters are now pointing finger to Jamaat for patronising the militants. The extremist forces have targeted pro-liberation forces for their attacks, from political rallies to cultural programmes to celebration of Bangla New Year. The same forces that had killed hundreds of thousands of people during the Liberation War in the name of saving Islam, are now allegedly carrying out similar massacre in the name to establishing the rule of Islam.

But, hopes never die. In 1971, it was a unique time when Bangladeshes were united in one dream, irrespective of their political or other affiliations. The nation defeated the heavily equipped Pakistani military forces. They are now determined to be united once again to eliminate the religious militants who have become a threat to the country.

# Call of duty

**FROM PAGE 1**  
That's how the journalists covered the finale when the Pakistan army surrendered to the allied forces on December 16, 1971. That's how the first newspaper of an independent Bangladesh came into being. That's how the frustrations and elation of the newpersons translated into a newspaper.

The Dhaka war theatre proved too uncertain for them and they covered the most dramatic event in the history of the nation without being assigned. Still, they did it because they were all professionals to the core.

On that chilly winter afternoon, the journalists were the least prepared for the curtain to drop on a nine-month brutal war that saw a nation torn to bits with the massacre of 3 million. Still they could feel the anticipation in the air – that freedom is just round the corner, and that the people can once again breathe freely in a free country.

"Gen, what's your comment?" "Comment? You need it? Nothing," that's what Hedayet Hossain Morshed got from Lt Gen AKA Niazi, the man who waged the most ferocious genocide in history in the then East Pakistan that was later to become Bangladesh after much of blood and fire.

It was perhaps the last and only answer that came from a droopy-faced Niazi after he put down his rank badge.

And Aftab's 120mm double-reflex lens Yashika camera went on clicking from the moment the Indian army had arrived in front of Hotel Intercontinental, now Dhaka Sheraton. Only, his rolls finished just after taking the last picture – Niazi putting his signature on the instrument of surrender.

Away in Bangshal, the news editor of Dainik Pakistan, later to turn into Dainik Bangla, Fauzul Karim Tara, waited anxiously inside home as chaos and confusion marked by staccato gunshots echoed around the locality on that winter afternoon. For him, the first working day in independent Bangladesh began actually a day later, for his newspaper office did not open on December 16.

But then on December 17 proved to be the most glorious day of his life as Tara turned the key on the iron vault. He reached out and with all the care fished out the 'mast' – 'Dainik Bangladesh' written above a crossed-out 'Dainik Pakistan' headline – that he had prepared months before the grand day came. His hands trembled, his heart thumped, for he had been waiting for this day to come through the thick of the nightmare.

But the risks and uncertainties of the day did not deter Morshed from coming out to the streets on December 16 morning.

"We knew victory is at the door," Morshed recalls the day almost dim in the memories of many. "And we had prior information from sources that the Pakistan army is going to surrender today. At around 11 in the morning, a friend named Ferdous Azmi and I decided to go out."

Ferdous had a white Fiat car. They made a Bangladesh flag – green and red with a golden Bangladesh map in the middle – and hit the road.

"I saw people grouping around the corners. But no cars on the empty asphalt roads. A strange barrenness, rather a sadness enveloped the city. People looked at our car in confusion and consternation."

Around the same time, Aftab took out his Italian Vespa and sputtered around the city and then headed for the cantonment.

"I heard on the BBC, Shwadhin Bangla Betar and Akashbani on December 15 night the Indian ultimatum to Pakistan army to surrender by next day. On December 16 morning, Akashbani said General Jacob is coming to Dhaka around 12 o'clock and the Pakistan army would surrender. I thought something must happen in the cantonment," Aftab recollected. "But as I reached near the place where today's Sonargaon Hotel is, I saw a convoy of cars crawling towards Shahbagh."

Aftab pulled his Vespa by the railroad that used to run through there and let the convoy pass, and then talked it to Hotel Intercontinental.

When Morshed reached Race Course, later renamed Suhrawardy Udyan, because he vaguely caught some conversations between the Pakistan army and Indian troops on a powerful FM radio and got the hint that the Race Course might be the place for the curtain to drop.

Somewhere near the Race Course, he saw some people aimlessly moving around. Confused, Morshed went away to see more of the city and then returned to the Race Course where some people were trying to set an iron table on the ground.

"I probably saw some Indian troops. But no one could actually say whether the surrender ceremony was going to be held there," said Morshed.

So, he went away to see more of the city.

About the same time, Aftab was standing on the bonnet of the jeep of an Indian brigadier at the corner of Intercontinental to snap the cheering crowd. The people were embracing the Indian troops.

Suddenly, the Pakistan army started firing from nowhere. There were raw panic and confusion. The Indians were firing too.

"We jumped onto the ground and lied low," Aftab describes the moment. "Everything was in confusion. I took some snaps, but could not care to focus. As the shots stopped, I found the brigadier dead in his jeep, bodies of Pakistani soldiers and revellers littered the street."

As order was returning to the scene, Aftab saw choppers flying overhead, he knew it's time to head for the Race Course again.

"I saw Aftab in the Race Course," Morshed chips in. "I just said hi and edged towards a place already circled by troops."

The choppers hovered above the ground and more troops slid down to the ground by rope.

"And then I saw the troops walking fast in our direction – Niazi, Haider, Aurora and others. I started taking shots," Aftab continues.

The heroes and villains are still held in suspended animation. Niazi, head down, taking long strides beside Aurora. A defiant Haider looking ahead with a puffed up chest.

A contingent of Indian soldiers stood still. Two of them stepped forward and stood beside Niazi to walk him down the row for a guard of honour.

"The two soldiers started walking, but Niazi did not. He stood still, like a statue. A nice shot for a photographer," Aftab's eyes looked dreamy.

"Finally, Aurora put his hand on Niazi's shoulder, his long-time friend, his foe for the past nine months. The soldiers sat down," says Morshed. "As a reporter, my instincts bristled. I devoured every moment. I drank every fraction of the scenes," Morshed's voice grew thick.

The instrument of surrender was signed. And Aftab's camera clicked once again.

"The light was really bad. The winter sun was fading and I was so tensed that hardly could I focus or set the aperture right," says Aftab.

It was time to lay down the arms. But Aftab's camera won't click anymore. He has run out of film.

"For a few seconds, I could not believe my bad luck," said Aftab. "I was bewildered and panicked. I rushed out of the park and jumped on my scooter. I headed for the stadium, hoping to get a film before it is too late. And I finally got it at a cigarette shop near the stadium. But when I returned, everything was over. I could not take the final shot."

Around the same time, Rashid Talukder who worked for Sangbad as photographer came out on his blue Vespa and Roliflex 120 camera as it was talked all around that Pakistan is going to fall any moment.

"I was loaded with all the rolls I would need to cover the day," said Rashid. "As I reached Fakirapul, I saw some Pakistani soldiers fleeing towards Razarbagh police line, firing blank shots to protect themselves from the wrath the Bangladeshes."

He saw some bodies littered on the road near The Bangladesh Observer office.

"People were looting the central bank and the governor's house now called Bangabhaban," he recalls.

"At Tikatuli, I saw an Indian tank. The Indian troops asked me to show the way to the airport. It was around noon. I escorted them all the way to Tejaigan and then headed back to Shaheed Minar where some freedom fighters had gathered."

He was taking snaps. And then news came that the Pakistan army is in the Race Course to surrender.

"As I was about to go, one of my neighbours came panting and told me that my studio assistant, Shahjahan, has been shot by a stray bullet from Pakistan army near Fakirapul. Someone said my eight-month old daughter who was in Shahjahan's cradle has also been shot."

In a panic, Rashid scooted off to home to find a bleeding Shahjahan. "My daughter was unhurt. But Shahjahan was in a critical condition with a bullet wound in the neck. I took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital at about 4:30pm."

Rashid knew he is missing the most glorious moment for Bangladesh. But he could not leave Shahjahan, the little boy of 13 lying in a shock, life slowly bleeding out of him.

In the hospital, Rashid came to know that the surrender ceremony was over. With a heavy heart he came out and headed for home.

"I know my life as a photographer remained unfulfilled because I could not cover the best event in my life. It is like committing suicide," Rashid's voice grew thick.

That night Shahjahan died. Rashid later renamed his studio 'Studio Shahjahan' that still stands at Purana Pallan.

But Morshed's luck was better, much better he would say today. As soon as the ceremony was over, he grabbed the chance of asking Niazi: "Gen, what's your comment?"

It was already getting dark. Thirty-four years back, there was less dust in the air and the closing lights looked rather bluish, not the yellow hue of today.

In that blue late afternoon, Tara wondered what has been going around as intermittent gunshots reverberated in the narrow alleyways of Bangshal. He knew a nation has been born. But he still was not sure whether it was safe to go out. The night came with an eerie feeling.

"I thought of my colleagues. I wondered if I would get them together to bring out the paper," Tara said. "It was an impossible time. Nothing was sure, everything surreal. I knew it was not possible to bring out the paper that night and that I have to wait until the next day."

On December 17, only Ittefaq was published, just a one-page, without any photograph. Aftab who worked for Ittefaq cannot remember how the paper came out on the 17th. He says he submitted his photograph to the office on the 18th. The 19th issue of the Ittefaq carried his snap of the surrender ceremony.

But other papers started office from December 17.

Aftab's office, Ittefaq, had been

torched soon after the Pakistan army cracked down on March 25 night. He did not know if he has the job, whether it meant anything in a devastated office with his news editor Sirajuddin Hossain killed by the Razakars and Al-Badr who collaborated with the Pakistanis.

Still he knew he has to go to office and submit his pictures.

In his small studio at Shahjahanpur, he developed the pictures and then went to office in the afternoon.

Morshed went to Dainik Pakistan office in the evening of December 16 but found nobody to work. There was a Beluch guard who opened the gate; he went to his desk and wrote the report. The next day, he went to office again around 11 in the morning with his report.

"There were already some journalists and employees in the office," recalls Morshed.

"Everybody was cheering and embracing each other. We could not hold back tears," recalls Tara.

"But then it was time for work. None of us were assigned to cover the event, none to write it, none to edit. But we knew it was our duty," Tara goes on. "I opened the safe and brought out in trembling hands the head piece that I had asked our artist Kalam Mahmud to prepare about two months back."

"I dropped the report on the news editor's table and then went out," says Morshed. "I had a huge job ahead. I had to look for my freedom fighter friends, friends who went missing, comrades."

## Babar sees end

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He was talking to the journalists after inaugurating a workshop on 'Prevention, Protection and Prosecution Interventions in Addressing Trafficking in Persons'. International Organisation for Migration (IOM) organised the daylong workshop at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

The state minister said militancy is not an issue that can be solved overnight, but fanatics will ultimately turn back from their ideology.

He said the cases against the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) cadres under trial will be settled and the culprits will be punished for their misdeeds.

Asked about the recovery of huge quantity of arms and ammunition, Babar said the government believes there are many JMB arms depots still to be traced out.

On the arrest of JMB commander Ataur Rahman Sunny, brother of JMB chief Shaikh Abdur Rahman, he said it is no doubt a great achievement but the law enforcement agencies will have to work harder still to arrest the remaining JMB cadres.

On the rumoured arrest of the JMB chief, the state minister said, "He has not come to our hand yet but it's now a matter of time that we'll be able to give you the good news."

## BTV to cover

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(Bangladesh time) at the People's Sports Complex Stadium.

However, every possibility is there that the news at eight will interrupt the live broadcast and the BTV will show the missing part's recording immediately after the news.

The state-run television had earlier turned down a free of cost offer for live coverage of the tournament from a private company saying that the timing was coinciding with it's 8 o'clock news.

Defending champions Bangladesh earned their place in the final with a 1-0 victory over hosts Pakistan in the second semifinal while two times champions India booked their seat with an identical win over Maldives on Wednesday.

## Dollar turns

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some more import bills of the BPC to the tune of \$1 crore very shortly.

Besides, this month Sonali Bank had to make a part payment of a \$2.2 crore bill for import of fertiliser by the government and will have to pay the rest soon. The bank is also due to pay another \$3 crore on December 19 for the aircraft hired to carry hajj pilgrims.

A few months back, the banks in the country deferred some import bills on advice of the central bank in the face of a huge leap in import volume. They now have to pay those dues. As a result, some private banks that used to sell dollars previously are now forced to stop supplying dollar to the inter-bank forex market.

Facing a shrinking forex reserve, Bangladesh Bank has also stopped supplying dollar to the market. The reserve which was over \$300 crore in June stood at \$241 crore on Wednesday.

A widening trade gap created by accelerating import growth and decelerating growth of export has also contributed to the deepening dollar crisis. In July-August, import grew by 16 percent and export by only 3.4 percent.

Again, over the last few days, a number of large letters of credit have been opened for import in the telecom and power sectors. And, with the year-end approaching, the multinational companies are sending their profit home. These are also contributing to the dollar shortage, foreign bank sources said.

# Ctg JMB chief tells

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Arrested on Tuesday with huge explosives and bombs at Kattali, Mohammad said the JMB has close links with al-Qaeda and its top leaders maintain regular contact with the terrorist outfit from JMB chief Abdur Rahman's hideouts.

Some Rab officials tried to intervene when Mohammad was divulging information about the involvement of Jamaat-Shibir with JMB.

Rab Chittagong region chief Lt Col Hasinur Rahman shouted at the reporters, "Why don't you ask him about Indian intelligence agency RAW and his visit to India instead of asking him about Saidee?"

The Rab seized from him some audiocassettes that contain religious speeches by Jamaat lawmaker Delwar Hossain Saidee and books published by Jamaat-backed publishing houses.

A number of the cassettes belong to Sirmoon Shilpi Goshthi and Ronagan Shilpi Goshthi, cultural wings of Shibir.

## NEXT TARGET

Mohammad said they were to target NGOs and the country's intellectuals in their next attacks.

Sunny held a secret meeting at the polytechnic institute in Dhaka to finalise the next course of action Tuesday.

He said Sunny could not evade arrest as police and Rab raided a dormitory of the institute, but he managed to flee to his Chittagong hideout. But the Rab eventually arrested him on Tuesday night.

## JAMAAT LINKS

Admitting his and many other JMB activists' past involvement in Jamaat politics, Mohammad said he had joined JMB four to five years ago.

Satisfied with his performance, JMB chief Abdur Rahman and MJMB Operations Commander Bangla Bhai took him to Bagmara in Chapainawabganj in April, 2004 to suppress the outlaws [sarboharas].

The local lawmaker and administration had cooperated with them in this connection, Mohammad told reporters.

After the success at Bagmara, Mohammad was first appointed as JMB Chittagong regional commander. JMB Military Commander Ataur Rahman Sunny, also arrested in Dhaka on Tuesday, later made him the

Chittagong divisional commander.

"A huge quantity of explosives and bombs was smuggled into the country through Chapainawabganj border before August 17 and disbursed to JMB leaders and activists by SA Paribahan courier service," Mohammad said. He added that all bomb attacks were carried out at the dictation of Rahman. Mohammad said he once entered India to go to Afghanistan for higher training from al-Qaeda militants but failed to cross the India-Pakistan border.

## JMB CHIEF DISTRIBUTED BOMBS

Mohammad told the reporters Rahman himself had distributed explosives among divisional chiefs just a week before the August 17 blasts, reports UNB.

He however could not say about the source of JMB fund, saying only Rahman knows everything about it.

Mohammad also could not say the quantity of explosives distributed at divisional levels, as each divisional chief was given the explosives separately.

## ARRESTS

Following his confessional statement, the Rab held three other JMB militants in separate raids across Chittagong and Cox's Bazar between Wednesday night and yesterday morning.

The arrestees are Chittagong district commander Rafiqul Islam Jahed alias Roman, 22, deputy commander for Cox's Bazar Manirul Islam Manir, 24, and Cox's Bazar regional leader Mashur Rahman Milon, 23.

## HUNT FOR BOMB EXPERTS

The law enforcers are looking for five JMB bomb experts, who are highly skilled and have the technical knowhow to manufacture sophisticated bombs for its suicide squad, following the Tuesday's double arrest, our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong adds.

The Rab and police gathered details about two of them – Mizan, in charge of Chittagong Division, and Osman, based in North Bengal.

Five students of chemistry department at Dhaka University are also involved in manufacturing bombs, sources said.

# Voter list

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not served to the chief election commissioner (CEC) and the EC secretariat for reply.

After hearing both sides, the division bench of Justice MA Matin and Justice M Rezaul Haque, re-fixed the hearing date at January 2, 2006.

The two writ petitions – one filed by Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil and another by AL lawmakers advocate Rahmat Ali and Asaduzzaman Noor – will be heard on that day as public interest litigation.

The CEC has been made respondent while Election Commissioners AK Mohammad Ali and M Munsef Ali pro-forma respondents in the petitions.

The AL lawmakers also challenged the validity of appointments of over three lakh enumerators, supervisors, assistant registration officers, registration officers and upazila election officers by the Election Commission (EC) secretariat for preparing the voter list.

The EC will begin collecting voter information at grassroots level in the new year with a target to publish the final voter list on June 1, 2006.

The counsel for the petitioners submitted that the CEC's unilateral move to prepare the fresh electoral roll and subsequent recruitment of over three lakh staff were made in contravention of the constitutional mandate vesting the power on the EC.

They argued that the appointment by the government as well as the decision for preparing an electoral roll afresh instead of revising and updating the existing electoral roll was also inconsistent with the article 119 of the constitution.

The appointment of three lakh staff were made bypassing the objections from the majority election commissioners and in a non-transparent manner, they said.

The secretary of the EC secretariat in collaboration with the party in power has made the selection of the staff, mostly from the ruling party, which is contrary to law, they said.

The CEC's unilateral decision, they submitted, tends to usurp the role of the EC in contravention of the basic tenets of the constitution. The CEC's action can easily be abused for manipulating the election in favour of any particular party, they pointed out.

The CEC's activities have already raised concern among the conscientious section of the people regarding the role of the EC in holding a fair

## Appointment

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Advocate Saidur Rahman Khan.

The government formed the three-member ACC, a corruption watchdog, on November 21, 2004 with former HC Judge Justice Sultan Hossain Khan as its chairman.

The petitioner's counsel MK Rahman submitted that the commission was formed ignoring the prescribed list of eligible persons recommended by a selection committee for the appointment of commissioners.

He said the name of Miah was also not on the prescribed list of eligible persons.

# Press curbing law planned

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Hosein, chairman of the editorial board of the daily Ittefaq, there is no representative of other major newspapers in the 14-member council. Sources said Barrister Mainul opposed the move to amend the act.

Editor of daily Inqilab AMM Bahauddin, who was also a member, resigned from the council after Justice Abu Sayeed Ahammed took over as the chairman on May 26 this year to replace his predecessor, BNP lawmaker Justice Mozammel Haq.

A well-placed government source, however, said there is a dilemma within the government about the proposed amendment. The ruling party policymakers are also divided on the issue.

Information Minister M Shamsul Islam told The Daily Star yesterday that they would examine the proposal. He however said the government has always been working to safeguard the media's freedom and the media has enjoyed the greatest freedom under the present government.

When a group of journalist leaders met the prime minister to discuss the militancy issue on Wednesday, the issue of Press Council Act was raised and some journalists urged the premier not to take any decision to control the press.

## AMENDMENT PROPOSAL

Section 12(1) of the existing law says the council will have the authority to warn, admonish and censure after investigation if a newspaper or news agency violates the ethics of journalism or present news against the public taste, or if an editor or a journalist commits any professional misconduct.

The proposed amendment says the council can fine a newspaper, news agency, editor and reporter Tk 5,000 to Tk 20,000 if they are found guilty. If the same fault is committed thrice, the Press Council can direct the proper authorities to cancel the publication of the newspaper concerned at least for one day.

The Bengali version of the draft, however, specifically says that the publication can be cancelled for a day.

The fine will be realised in 30 days of the verdict. Half of the fine will go to the complainant as compensation while the rest to the council's coffer. In case of non-payment within the stipulated time, the fine will be realised through a proceeding under Public Demands Recovery Act, 1913.

"Excepting the judgements and orders passed in the cases on trial, in case of violence or disobedience of any other order or orders of the press council, Contempt of Courts Act shall be applicable," the proposed amendments says.

The Press Council has also proposed amendment to section 12(2) of its act.

The section, as exists, says: "If the council is of the opinion that it is necessary or expedient in the public interest so to do, it may require any newspaper to publish therein, in such manner as the Council thinks fit, any report relating to any inquiry under this section against a newspaper or news agency, and editor or a journalist working therein, including the name of such newspaper, news agency, editor or journalist."

The council proposes for adding to the section 12(2): "The delinquent newspaper shall publish the report/judgement/order of the Press Council within seven days of its receipt and in case of failure, the Press Council shall direct the concerned authority to stop the action of declaration of the delinquent newspaper till the date of publication of the report/judgement/order of the Press Council."

## VERSION OF PRESS COUNCIL

## CHIEF

The proposal was chiefly made by Chairman of Press Council Abu Sayeed Ahammed who finds it "very necessary" for the sake of greater interests.

"Realising its necessity and urgency, I took the proposal to the information minister. He suggested getting the proposal approved at a meeting of the council. Later, the council approved it," he told The Daily Star yesterday over telephone.

The chairman could not remember instantly when the meeting was held and who were present in the meeting. Asked if there was any opposition, he said: "Mahbubey Alam (president of Supreme Court Bar Association and a member of the council) strongly opposed it and submitted a note of dissent."

On the necessity of the amendment, he said: "We need to strengthen the law to stop misuse of press freedom. We need to make it more effective."