

JMB chief Abdur Rahman

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media channels however mentioned her name as Ayesha Rahman.

The JMB chief, who has a Tk 50 lakh bounty on his head, warned he has a large number of powerful explosives in his possession. Eight explosions were also heard from the house, but it could not be known whether there was any casualty.

Rab intelligence wing chief Lt Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star last night they reckon two JMB operatives, identified later as Mojul and Hanif, were with Rahman in the house.

Over a thousand-strong force drawn from Rab, Bangladesh Rifles and the police was besieging the house. The law enforcers also had been trying to flush out the Islamist militant linchpin and his accomplices by streaming water and lobbing teargas shells into the house through holes drilled in the roof until 8:00pm.

Rab Director General Abdul Aziz Sarker at 11:45 last night told The Daily Star over telephone that they would refrain from breaking into the house at night. They want to do it in the daylight.

Thousands of locals thronged the area and gathered around the sealed-off place to witness the imminent arrest of the mastermind behind all the bomb attacks in the country since the August 17 near-simultaneous bomb strikes across the country last year.

OPERATION DETAILS

Acting on intelligence and confessions of arrested JMB Majlis-e-Shura member and Khulna regional chief Rakib Hasan alias Hafez Mahmud, Rab members launched simultaneous combing operations in search of Rahman's hideout in Tila g a r h . S h a p l a b a g h , Brahmanpara, Mirapara and Kalashil areas in the north-eastern divisional city at around 8:30 Tuesday night.

Split into several teams, the Rab forces started searching every house in the areas in the dark of the night.

When a Rab team knocked at Surya Dighal Bari, a single-storey house in East Shaplabagh Road 2, at around 9:00pm, no response came from inside. Smelling a rat, the Rab team returned to the house after searching 40 other houses in the area and knocked at its door again.

Finding no response once again, some Rab troopers scaled the gate and jumped onto the compound at around 12:30am yesterday.

All of a sudden, a man in his 30's appeared in a grilled veranda brandishing a sword. He shouted "Naray Tasbir" and then quickly disappeared into the house.

The Rab team then called in additional forces and cordoned off the area. The Rab members enquired of the neighbours about the owner and the tenants of the house. When the locals told them that the landlord lives abroad, they became even more certain that Rahman was hiding in the house.

Rab forces from other areas rushed to the spot and took position around the house, while several teams were stationed at different points in the area.

At around 1:00am, Gulzar Ahmed started asking Rahman over a megaphone to surrender, while Rab men kept their firearms pointed at the door.

"Abdur Rahman, come out and surrender. We're not your enemy. Come out. We'll not do any harm to you. We'll ensure your safety and security," the repeated Rab announcement reverberated in the dark of the night.

But Rahman shouted from inside that he would not come out. "Don't call me by my name. I'm a Mujahid [who fights for Islam]," he said at the top of his voice.

"This state system is wrong. Come back to the path of Islam," he kept on saying.

Those who are in the brothels are also mothers and sisters of some people, he said, adding, "You're looking after them and thus assisting in their physical violation. This is the rule of this country."

"You don't fight against these. On the contrary, you announced a bounty of Tk 10 lakh on an innocent child and have come with firearms to win it."

After one hour of such preaching, he finally stopped.

As the Rab men gain urged him to surrender after some time, the JMB chief said they were trying in vain to persuade him, adding, "Our victory is certain. Don't think it'll be easy to capture me. Don't take us as weak. We've jihadis even in Rab and the police."

Warning that there are powerful bombs in their possession, Rahman said: "It won't be easy to capture us alive. We'll explode the bombs if necessary."

"We don't believe in surrender to anyone except Allah," he declared.

At around 4:00am, Rahman asked the Rab men to talk with the state minister for home affairs. "I don't want to talk to you. Arrange for me to talk with the minister."

Rab men asked him to surrender considering the welfare of his family. But Rahman made no response.

Rab took position on the rooftops of adjacent houses, barring locals from coming out of their homes.

Sounds of three small explosions

came from the house at around 8:00am and two others at 9:15am.

The law enforcers cut the gas supply to the house at 9:00am and the power supply half an hour later.

Sylhet City Mayor Badruddin Kamran and Deputy Commissioner of the district SM Faisal Alam also requested the JMB top gun to surrender several times over a bullhorn yesterday, assuring him of security and proper legal assistance.

Three crackers exploded at 12:30pm when Rahman's wife Rupa was coming out of the house with their two-year-old son Ahmed in her lap. Rab escorted them to a Rab tent setup nearby.

Rahman's daughter Afifa Rahman with her four-month-old child Talha, his sons Mahmud alias Ashraf and Fauad, the wife of a JMB activist with her child and a nine-year-old domestic help came out of the house later. But, Rahman's eldest son Nabil alias Tanveer was not among them.

All except the minor ones were handcuffed after they had come out. Rab took them to Rab-9 headquarters.

In the afternoon, Rab brought Rahman's wife to the house and made her request Rahman to surrender.

"Come out, we've given all-out assurance of safety and legal assistance," Rupa told her husband over a bullhorn, but to no response.

ATTEMPTS TO DEFUSE EXPLOSIVES

Firemen rushed to the spot and

poured water through the window in the afternoon to defuse the explosives inside the house. They also tried to break a boundary wall to pour in water.

In the evening, they drilled a hole on the roof to stream in water. Sources said, they saw something that looked like an explosive device in a room.

Rab Additional Director General Mahbub Mollah told The Daily Star, "We're giving him time and scope to surrender as we want to capture him alive."

The law enforcers also lobbed tear gas canisters into the house to flush Rahman out.

On January 2, one Hridoy Chowdhury rented the house from Mainul Haque, brother of the owner of the house Abdul Haque, who lives in the UK.

Law enforcers arrested Mainul yesterday.

Mainul told Rab he rented the house to Hridoy according to Tultikor Union Parishad member Nurunnabi alias Deshi's recommendation.

Rahman's wife told Rab that she used to stay in a room and not go out as she maintained purdah. "I don't know what has been kept in other rooms," she said.

She, however, said two JMB activists are in the house with Rahman but she does not know them, as she never went before them.

Rahman spread

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Siddique Islam alias Bangla Bhai as the latter's anti-Sarbhara operations in some northern districts gave rise to controversy due to media reporting.

Bangla Bhai, allegedly sheltered by several ruling BNP lawmakers, led a spate of killings in Rajshahi, Natore and Naogaon in early 2003 and 2004.

In an interview with The Daily Star last May, Rahman admitted that he has been secretly operating the JMB since 1998. He also said the headquarters of the JMB is in Dhaka.

He also said the JMB has trained up some 10,000 full-time activists across the country and it spends up to Tk 7 lakh on them per month. Majlis-e-Shura is the highest decision making body of the organisation.

The members and supporters of JMB were divided into three tiers: Ehsar-full-timers who act at the directive of the higher echelons, Gayeri Ehsar-part-timers, and a third one consisting of those who indirectly cooperate with the outfit.

The organisation divided the country into nine organisational divisions.

The JMB was renamed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh after a fight between Rahman's disciples and the police at a secret training camp in Joypurhat in August 2003.

Following the "encounter", the police arrested Rahman's brother Ataur Rahman alias Sunny and son-in-law Abdul Awal along with 17 other militants.

A few days later, however, they were released while the higher authorities transferred several police officials reportedly for making the arrests.

In a press note issued on February 23 last year, the home ministry announced the JMB and BNP had, accusing Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai of carrying out bomb attacks and killings in recent times to create anarchy in the country.

Then newspapers started reporting on the activities of Bangla Bhai and JMB in the northern region of the country about a year ago, the government said it was false. It even blamed the media

for "creating" the "fictitious" character of Bangla Bhai.

"We do not know officially about the existence of the JMB. Only some so-called newspapers are publishing reports on it. We do not have their constitution in our records," State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar told the BBC on January 26, 2005.

Even Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, while exchanging views with editors in August last year, said there is no existence of Bangla Bhai.

Ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and Industries Minister Matiur Rahman Nizami on July 22 last year said, "Bangla Bhai has been created by some newspapers."

Finance and Planning Minister Md Saiful Rahman on February 23 last year dubbed the onset of Islamist militancy across the country as nothing but a "foul propaganda" by a section of the media.

On the same day, however, after the government banned the JMB, Babar told the BBC, "We are embarrassed as it is not being possible to arrest Bangla Bhai... We have put extreme pressure on the police to hold him."

On May 15 last year, a cabinet committee meeting on law and order ordered the police to arrest Bangla Bhai and his followers. A week later, the JMB operatives staged a showdown in Rajshahi and met the deputy commissioner, superintendent of police (SP) and deputy inspector general of police (DIG).

Masud Mia, the then Rajshahi SP who had been suspended a few days ago, welcomed the JMB team, saying, "We [the police] shall not help you are helping us eliminate the Sarbhara from Rajshahi. We will cooperate with you in the coming days so that people can rest without fear."

Rajshahi range DIG Noor Mohammad on June 23 said there is no existence of "so-called Bangla Bhai" in the region.

Zahirul Haque, director general of external publicity wing of the foreign ministry, on January 25 this year quoted US Embassy officials in Dhaka about the non-existence of Bangla Bhai. The US embassy, however, refuted his comment.

Lanka's lower middle

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but also topscored 72 off 133 balls and helped their side recover from the early danger.

At close, Samaraweera, who had also spoiled the Tigers' early advantage in their previous Test in Colombo by making a hundred, was at the crease with 57 while Malinda Bandara accompanied him on eight.

Left-arm pacer Syed Rasel gave Bangladesh a brilliant start removing left-handed opener Michael Vandort, who chased a wide ball only to edge the ball into Khaled Mashud's gloves, in the third ball of the innings and then it was the tale of two left-arm spinners, Mohammad Rafique and Enamul Haque.

The Lankans went to lunch on 96-2. But the next session certainly belonged to the home side as they reduced the tourists to 195-5 at tea after Rafique and Enamul had initiated the collapse.

Maheela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara looked dangerous, but experienced Rafique got rid of the Sri Lankan captain (30 off 40 balls) who mistimed a drive and skied the ball to Shahadat Hossain at mid-on.

The home side were really ecstatic when Sangakkara immediately offered a catch at forward

short-leg to Mohammad Ashraful, off Enamul, after a 108-ball 69 that contained eight boundaries.

Young Enamul then trapped Tilakaratne Dilshan (22) leg before to wrap up the rival top-order, but Malahar joined Samaraweera to stage a superb fightback before Pacer Shahadat bowled Malahar.

Rafique and Enamul shared four wickets between them and new ball bowlers Rasel and Shahadat took one apiece.

Earlier, Bangladesh could add only four runs to their overnight total of 315-9 before being bowled out. Lasith Malinga picked up the wicket of Shahadat to finish with figures of 4-57 as the most successful Sri Lankan bowler.

Rafique and Enamul had a photograph and other details of Hridoy as a precautionary measure before renting out the house to him. He also informed the local union parishad members about the rental.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), which has been spearheading the blockade, arrested Mainul yesterday afternoon and taken Hridoy's photograph from him to ascertain the man's real identity.

The office of Sahmat, a Left-leaning cultural body, is overflowing with a variety of anti-Bush stickers and posters and even T-shirts that mock at the US president, who is visiting India for the first time.

DFID official denies

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said the representative of DFID (Department for International Development, UK).

He said there are some 'odd exceptions' in this case but did not elaborate on them.

The DFID official made the comment at a press briefing in Dhaka yesterday, replying to a question about Finance Minister Md Saiful Rahman's views on donors' dictations. Saiful alleged a few days ago that the donors often dictate the government in different policymaking issues.

"We see lots of reports in the newspapers about donors' dictations but I do not think so. One thing donors usually do is to ask the government to follow the aid utilisation rules adopted in a Paris meeting a few years back," David Wood said.

The DFID representative also said the donors are there only to extend support and the development in Bangladesh must be made by the Bangladeshis themselves.

He stressed the need for accountability in government, donors and NGOs, capacity building of the government and effective utilisation of aid.

The briefing was organised to inform the press about the grandAsia 2015 Conference to be held in London on March 6-7. The conference jointly sponsored by the DFID, World Bank and ADB (Asian Development Bank) will confirm commitment to development and poverty reduction in Asia.

The conference will also discuss how increasing aid demands of Asia can be met.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair will formally open the conference to be participated by dignitaries including Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, UK Secretary of State for International Development Gareth Thomas, ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda and World Bank Vice-President Praful Patel.

Senior ministers and officials from Cambodia, China, Japan, India,

Outlaw killed

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Khan Tipu, 27, regional commander of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Jamiajuddho).

Rab sources said Tipu was wanted in 12 cases filed with Khulna and Rupsha police stations. He was also involved in looting five rifles from Sundarbans Sea Food in 1997, the sources added.

Rab-6 members arrested Tipu at Sonadanga in the city on Tuesday. On his confessional statement, they along with Tipu set out for Gunaria village at about 2:30am yesterday to arrest his accomplices and seize the hidden firearms.

When they reached there, Tipu's cohorts opened fire, forcing the members of the elite force to retreat.

Rab said Tipu was caught in the shootout and died instantly. A shutter gun and two bullets were recovered from the scene.

The body was sent to Khulna Medical College and Hospital for autopsy.

Criticising the prime minister's remarks against hartal, Hasina said the prime minister now talks against hartal, but during the Awami League rule (1996-2001) they called hartal for 30 days. "You attended the parliament only for 28 days and everyday you gave ultimatum for ousting us," she said indicating the prime minister of

PM's response

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step towards election engineering.

"That's why the chief election commissioner continues to prepare a fresh voter list ignoring the High Court verdict."

She announced that the 14-party opposition combine will lay siege to the chief election commissioner's office and upazila election offices on March 12 to press home the demand for a fair voter list.

She said: "We've placed the reform proposals to establish people's right, as we don't want to come to power through backdoor or conspiracy... BNP believes in such a course and is now conspiring to return to power."

"No proper investigation was held in the Chittagong arms haul case," Hasina said, accusing some ministers of arms smuggling in the country.

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patronising and harbouring the bombers, the AL president said: "She [PM] stops investigations where Shibir cadres are linked... Shibir cadres killed Rajshahi University professor Taher and because of that your administration cannot catch the cul