

A capture praised

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Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) will help check the rise of Islamist militancy in the country.

Islamic scholars told the Daily Star Islam does not support terrorism and attack on innocent people. The interpretation of Islam by JMB and such militant outfits is wrong and subversive to the very spirit of Islam.

It is a great achievement of the government as no-one of the country's Islamic scholars supported Rahman, said Prof Muhammad Islam Ghani, principal of Dhaka Government Alia Madrasa.

"He (Rahman) tarnished the image of Islam by resorting to terrorism. Islam never supports terrorism, and the meaning of jihad is struggle, not killing innocent people."

Sylhet Bibhag Unnayan Sangram Parishad took out a procession in the capital, expressing joy and satisfaction over the arrest. The Parishad demanded formation of an investigation committee under a former chief justice to probe Rahman's crimes.

The Awami League and its front organisations however termed the arrest a "drama" by the government to convince the world community ahead of the next general elections.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina's Political Secretary Saheb Hossain Chowdhury said the arrest came at a time when the government is facing trouble due to acute crises of power, fuel and fertiliser. Besides, the 14-party opposition's movement for reforms is also being geared up, he added.

"It's simply a government game to divert public attention," he told The Daily Star.

"Books on jihad written by Jamaat's founder Moududi and its former ameer Golam Azam were found at Rahman's den. This once again proves that Jamaat and militants are two sides of the coin."

He wanted to know why Rahman wanted to talk to the state minister for home affairs and the IGP before his surrender. "Doesn't it mean he was maintaining contacts with people in the government and administration?" he questioned.

OPPOSITION 14-PARTY

AL-led 14-party opposition line-up termed the arrest "a drama staged by the prime minister".

The opposition leaders at a meeting at Dhanmondi AL office accused the government of patronising militants and arresting their chief only to divert public attention.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, presidium members Toifal Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Suranjit Sengupta, Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, among others, attended the meeting.

Emerging from the meeting Obidul Quader, AL joint general secretary, told The Daily Star they discussed the current situation of the country. He said, "The prime minister is blowing hot and cold as she is patronising and protecting the militants, but arresting them as part of a blue print."

AL presidium member Toifal Ahmed alleged it is just a planned drama of the alliance government. "JMB is like a cellphone of the BNP-Jamaat coalition; they open it when they need it. When they don't, they keep it shut," Toifal told a rally organised by the 14-party at Muktangan in the city, UNB reports.

Maolana Abdur Rob Yousufi, secretary general of Islamic Oikya Jote, said, "It's a great success of the government and the Islamic scholars were also demanding his arrest."

"We sighed with great relief and it was one of our major demands to the

CPB hartal

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The CPB enforced the hartal from 6:00am to 2:00pm demanding immediate arrest and punishment of those responsible for deaths of workers in Chittagong and Dhaka. The hartal was also enforced in protest at the ongoing power, fuel, fertiliser and seeds crises across the country.

The National Garments Workers Federation (NGWF), a combine of 16 workers' association, also called for a half-day strike in different garments factories of the country yesterday demanding punishment to those responsible for the deaths of workers in KTS Textile and Garments and Phoenix building.

Police arrested eight CPB leaders and workers including General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim near Paltan intersection as a procession led by him was making its way to Muktangan.

The CPB brought out another procession around 6:00am from the party office which paraded Bijoynagar, Dainik Bangla intersection and Paltan areas. Police chased away a CPB procession at Tejgaon around 8:30am.

Police later released Selim and the others. CPB held a rally in front of their central office where Selim and CPB President Manjurul Islam Khan spoke.

They mourned the death of the workers nor did it take any initiatives to capture the culprits.

They NGWF also brought out processions in different parts of the city and the adjoining areas.

They held a rally in front of BGMEA office in the capital demanding arrest of the owner of KTS garments within 72 hours and compensation of Tk 5 lakh to the family of each of the deceased and Tk 50 thousands each for the injured. They threatened to go for tougher movements if the owners are not arrested within the stipulated time.

The NGWF, at a press conference in CPB office, said they will lay siege to the factory inspector's office on March 9 and submit a memorandum at 11:00am. They will also observe a token hunger strike at city's Muktangan on March 10 from 11:00am to 4:00pm.

government for protecting the country's image abroad and restoring confidence of the investors," said Mir Nasir Hossain, president of Bangladesh Chamber of commerce and industry (FCCI).

He demanded trial of Rahman and exemplary punishment to check further rise of militancy in the country. Jamaat-e-Islami in a statement welcomed the arrest, expressing the hope Rahman and other top militant leaders will face exemplary punishment.

Jamaat Ameer and Industries Minister Motiur Rahman Nizami and Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid praised all of the operation members.

Ahle Hadith Andolan Bangladesh also congratulated the government for arresting the top militant leader.

Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon demanded arrest of those influential people who patronised Rahman and gave him shelter.

Former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said the government finally made the arrest to divert the public attention from misrule before next election.

AAMS Arefin Siddique, former president of Dhaka University Teachers Association, said, "The government would take action much earlier had it been against the Islamist militants."

Mujahidul Islam Selim, general secretary of Communist Party of Bangladesh, blamed Jamaat as chief patron of JMB. He demanded immediate arrest of the Jamaat and BNP leaders, who tried to "cover" JMB terming it media creation.

Liaquat Sikder, president of Bangladesh Chhatra League, said Rahman could have been arrested much earlier if the government wanted. The government staged a drama in the name of resisting militants, he observed.

Arrest to untie

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information about the August 17 terror strike and the militant networks both in and outside the country.

A Sylhet court yesterday placed Rahman on a 10-day Rab remand in a case filed under the Explosives Substances Act with Kotwali Police Station. He was then sent to Dhaka, where an intelligence task force is now interrogating him in Rab custody.

Gulzar, who is on the 6-member high-powered government committee probing into the August 17 country-wide bomb attacks, said their next course of action will concentrate on netting the three JMB Shura members still at large. They are Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai, close associate of Rahman and operations commander of another banned militant organisation Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh, Salahuddin alias Salehin, in-charge of Sylhet-Mymensingh region, and Faruq Hossain alias Khaled Saifullah, commander of the greater Rangpur-Dinajpur region.

According to well-placed sources, Salahuddin visited Sylhet recently. It was from his visit that the law enforcers got the clue that Rahman might be hiding in this area. They verified the clue with information received from other sources. After scrutinising the call-list in the cellphone of Hafez Mahmud, arrested last Tuesday in the capital's Baitul Mokarram area, they finally were sure that Rahman indeed was hiding in Sylhet, somewhere at Shaplabagh.

The three JMB Shura members arrested before Rahman are his brother Ataur Rahman Sunny alias Sajid, regional commander of Dhaka, son-in-law Abdul Awal Sarker alias Adil alias Ashiq alias Arafat, commander of the greater Rajshahi region, and Rakib Hasan Rassel alias Hafez Mahmud, Khulna regional commander.

Investigators said these three arrestees said they did not know much about the JMB network and operations, and so could not come up with some vital information the cops are looking for.

Hearing

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Judge Mohammad Monzurul Bachhid of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court adjourned the hearing and fixed April 4 for the next hearing. This is for the fourth time the hearing on charge framing against the accused was adjourned.

The two cases, one under the Arms Act and another under the Explosive Substances Act, were filed with Sabujbagh Police Station on September 8 last year.

The other accused are AHM Shamim, 23, Zakaria alias Jewel, 21, Nur Azam Siddique alias Yeasar, 27, Belal Hossain alias Tamim, 21, Aleya Ferdous, 27, and Akramul Islam, 23.

The Rab on September 8 last year arrested five of the accused at a house in East Bashabo, which was rented by Sunny to coordinate the August 17 countrywide serial blasts. The law enforcers believe he narrowly escaped arrest at that time.

Sunny, younger brother of JMB chief Shaekh Abdur Rahman, was captured by Rab in Dhaka on November 13 last year. As per his information, the elite force recovered huge arms and ammunition from South Manda in the city.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on October 10 last year submitted the charge sheets of two cases to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka. All of the accused, except Sunny, gave confessional statements to magistrates on different dates.

India, US

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sell the deal to the US Congress, Bush replied "people in the United States must understand that trade with India is in our interest, diplomatic relationship with India is in our interest and cultural exchange is in our interest".

"Congress has got to understand that if India's nuclear power is allowed, it will create less dependence on fossil fuel, lead to less demand and help bring down the international oil price, which will help the American consumers," he said.

Thirdly, nuclear power is clean fuel and reprocessing of fuel is clean and it will help reduce pollution, the US president said adding "this deal is in our interest".

Without naming Iran or North Korea, Bush took the opportunity to send out a clear message by saying that India has charted a way forward which was an opportunity for others to follow to benefit from civilian and peaceful nuclear power programme.

Answering a question from an American journalist about US nuclear non-proliferation lobby's concerns over the nuclear deal with India, Bush made a veiled criticism on non-proliferation hawks and said "some people just don't change and don't want to change."

"Things change and leaderships make the difference. I am trying to think differently. This deal is in our interest. This will help both the countries to grow", Bush said adding "the relationship between the two countries is changing for the better".

Manmohan Singh said President Bush is admitted for his strong stand against terrorism and "we have agreed on the need to root out terrorism".

He said the two sides identified a number of areas and initiatives for cooperation including energy, science and technology, agriculture and investment.

"There are no limits to Indo-US cooperation," he added.

Bush said India and US had built their strategic partnership based on common values and both were promoting democracy globally.

He pointed out both the countries have suffered from terrorist attacks on their home soil.

Ministries seek

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Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to cover its losses.

Meanwhile, another meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Purchase approved the BCIC proposal for procuring one lakh tonne urea in two deals through international bids. It also approved a tender bid to set up a Tk 85-crore 500-bed hospital in Khilgaon, Dhaka.

Bomb-making

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Police have submitted charge sheets in 122 cases, and trials of 61 cases have so far been started, the home secretary said.

Verdicts in four cases were given and 22 people were awarded death penalty, seven life imprisonment and one 15 years' jail, he added.

A trial court in Barisal on February 9 sentenced Rahman, Bangla Bhai, Molla Omar and Amzad alias Khalid Saifullah to 40 years' rigorous imprisonment under the Explosive Substances Act.

Seizure list

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'Jibanta Nama' and 'Allah Ain O Sotloker Shashon' were found on a table in the southwestern bedroom wet with other books - 'Amader Dawa' published by Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Majlish and 'Iman Nabayan' by Dr Sayed Shaifur Rahman.

The other books include 'Hedayetun Nah', 'Rasulullah Nama', 'Usbah', 'Namaj Ki', 'Ar Rahikuk Mukhtum' and 'Sahih Khutbaye Muhakki'.

Although Rahman is known in home and abroad as the chief of outlawed Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, he is a former activist of Jamaat.

His father Abdullah ibne Fazal was a member of Jamiatul Ahle Hadith, which is now led by arrested Rajshahi University teacher Asadullah al Galib. Fazal is accused of collaborating with the occupation Pakistani forces during the Liberation War in 1971.

The law enforcers seized a damaged two-kg handmade bomb, 11 detonators including one attached with six 1.5 volt pencil batteries, 11 power gel (explosives), 21 CDs, one multi-plug with wire, two sharp knives, a pair of pliers, one balance with weights, one 100cc Dayang red motorcycle, four to five books including 'Muktiprapto Daler Pathoyo', 'Sotto Sundor' and 'Biplob Tarunno'.

They also seized four blank cheques against the name of Sabbir Ahmed. Two of the cheques are of Rupali Bank, Pallabi branch, Dhaka and the rest of Islami Bank, Laldirghipar Branch, Sylhet.

Prized terror don surrenders

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the Rab of "violating human rights" by cutting off its utility supplies.

"You have stopped my gas, electricity and water supply," Rahman appeared on the window and spoke in a weak tone. "It is violation of human rights."

"I want a peaceful solution. I want to meet Khaleda, Hasina, Ershad and (Lutfozzaman) Babar," he blurted out. He also wanted to talk to the media.

"Once I surrender, I will not get the chance to talk with the media and say what I have to tell the countrymen," Rahman said in a weak voice, asking for a loudhailer.

The Rab members applied both coaxing and threats to snap the terrorist's psyche. "You have wasted enough time. We won't tolerate any more," a law enforcer shouted at Rahman.

"They [Khaleda, Hasina, Ershad and Babar] could not come here," another law enforcer said. "We have made sitting arrangement for you in the next house where you can talk to the media. You will be given all types of legal support."

The law enforcers asked Rahman to come out unarmed only in his pyjamas. "We will keep our words, but you will have to come out first. You will not carry anything in your hands or on your body. You have to show you are safe for all," a Rab officer said on a loudhailer.

A hesitant Rahman consulted with his two aides—Moizul Islam alias Hridoy Chowdhury, 40, and Hanif alias Abdul Aziz, 27—also held up in the building. He repeated his demands for a few more times. Then he nodded to his cohorts, signalling with his head that the game is over.

A few moments later, Rahman in a white flannel beard and draped in long pajamas, a red-and-white chequered scarf and a topi on his head walked out of the single-storey house at East Shaplabagh. He was clutching a copy of the Quran.

The terrorist looked like a cornered mouse.

He and his two accomplices were immediately handcuffed and whisked away in a sports utility vehicle, not letting Rahman talk with the mediamen who had been waiting there since Tuesday night.

Journalists were also not allowed at the Rab-1 office in Dhaka when Rahman and other arrestees were taken there at 3:00pm yesterday.

Rab officials said they will not allow any journalists as they have already started their interrogation. They said they may arrange a briefing for journalists today.

Nerve-racking raid

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were afraid the fanatic terrorist leader might blow up the building or go for some other savagery anytime out of desperation.

"He is simply unpredictable; no one knows what he will do in such a situation," a senior officer of Rapid Action Battalion said early yesterday on condition of anonymity. He also remarked that Rahman is very sharp and has been trying to offset every move taken by Rab to flash him out of the house.

"To our knowledge, there is no other instance in this country where an accused criminal threatens to commit suicide or resist arrest even when surrounded by so many law enforcers," the Rab officer said, sighing with relief after Rahman's surrender. "It's what makes this operation unique," he quipped.

The law enforcers conducted the entire operation with utmost caution, as until Rahman's surrender and how many explosives he had with him.

Their apprehension intensified when the ensnared JMB chief warned he had powerful explosives and he would blast them if the law enforcers tried to force him into surrender.

"No one could say he would not do it, as he already had proved the cruel vein of his mind by killing so many innocent people in suicide bombings," said another Rab officer.

Although the raiders streamed tonnes of water into the house, they were not certain whether that really dampened or defused the explosives.

"We lobbed tear gas canisters to weaken him and poured water to defuse the explosives. But who could say he did not have more explosives or still good ones?" was the question that kept the law enforcers' nerves on edge, the officer explained.

They watched every move of Rahman with suspicion and wariness. Even when Rahman's family members came out of the house Wednesday noon and surrendered,

the Rab, police and BDR men were extremely alert. They feared that it might be a trap or a strategic move of Rahman.

Every sound coming from the house made them jump.

"If Rahman exploded the powerful explosives as he had threatened, the casualties would be huge," the Rab officer said.

The Rab team adopted and discarded one strategy after another to know what was going on inside Surya Dighal Bari. They inserted an espionage device with a camera at its top through a hole drilled in the roof and used another gadget to listen through the wall.

The raiding party members stayed on guard round the clock for 34 hours, taking only small breaks. A crowd of curious local people also hanged out on the periphery of the spot, holding their breath in suspense. When the JMB chief at last gave in the people in the area burst into cheers and jubilation.

US, UK, EU hail

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all acts of extremists and political violence should be brought to justice in a transparent and lawful manner.

Welcoming the arrest of Shaekh Abdur Rahman as an encouraging outcome of the fight against terrorism, a British High Commission spokesperson in Dhaka said the combat should continue with support from all irrespective of party politics so that Bangladesh does not succumb to extremism.

In reply to a question, the high commission spokesperson said, "It's encouraging that Bangladesh's government is taking action against extremists. The fight against terrorism will require a sustained effort and support from the Bangladeshi people across the political spectrum to ensure that the country does not succumb to extremism."

The British mission, whose Bangladeshi-origin custodian Anwar Chowdhury was wounded in a grenade attack in the same city where the JMB chief was captured yesterday, hoped that the country would be able to deal with the threat without compromising respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The European Union (EU) warmly welcomed the arrest of Shaekh Abdur Rahman, the chief of outlawed JMB that has waged a militant campaign for Islamic rule.

"The EU warmly welcomes the arrest of Abdur Rahman and the significant boost which this provides to Bangladesh's effort to combat terrorism," an EU spokesperson told the UNB.

The spokesperson said, "The EU commends the efforts of security forces and others which have led to this development."

The EU reaffirmed its continued solidarity with Bangladesh in the context of global efforts to combat terrorism.

A case was filed with Sylhet Kotwali Police Station against nine, including Rahman. A motorcade of top Rab officials took them to the court of Magistrate Ershadul Haque who sent Rahman on a 10-day remand upon a petition submitted by the police.

The law enforcers seized a two-kg bomb, 11 detonators, power gel, electric wires, 21 CDs and books on Jihad, and a motorcycle from the house. The police later sealed the house.

THE OPERATION

Earlier, on receiving and verifying information from several sources about Rahman's possible stay somewhere in Sylhet town, the Rab decided to conduct the operation in East Shaplabagh area in Sylhet city.

Around 60 Rab men from the headquarters started for Sylhet at around 6:00pm Tuesday and started door-to-door search in Shaplabagh area around three hours later.

After being sure about Rahman's stay at Surya Dighal Bari on Road No. 2 of block-A of East Shaplabagh residential area, Rab men cordoned off an area of 2-kilometre radius centring the house and repeatedly asked Rahman to surrender.

Rahman held talks with the law enforcers until 4:00am the following day, repeatedly saying he would rather commit suicide than surrender. He said there are powerful explosives in the house.

The law enforcers snapped supply of electricity, water and gas, lobbed teargas shells inside the house, threw water through the windows, ventilators and a hole drilled on the roof.

At one stage, Rahman's wife Nurjahan Begum Rupa, daughter Afifa Rahman, sons Ahmed, Fuad and Ashraf, Afifa's son Talha, domestic help Taslima, Moizul's wife Chameli Begum and her minor son came out of the house at 12:30pm on Wednesday.

Rahman, however, did not make any response to the Rab's repeated calls for surrender.

Later, the law enforcers took a pause in their attempt to break into the house at night but kept watch on one of the rooms through intelligence devices.

On a telescopic camera popped through the hole drilled on the roof, the Rab noticed some movements at around 5:00am yesterday. They also used devices for listening through the wall to track movements and thus Rahman's position in the room.

SYLHET REJOICES

Hundreds of people from all walks of life crowded in front of the Rab-9 headquarters, cheering at Rahman's

arrest when a motorcade carrying Rahman and other arrestees started for the court.

"This culprit has put us down and insulted all people of Sylhet by taking shelter here," a rickshawwan-puller said.

"Abdur Rahman disgraced and tainted Sylhet and its people. Had we known about his stay here, we would have taught him a good lesson," an NGO worker said.

DAMAGED BOMB

The high-powered handmade bomb Rahman kept with him was damaged by the water thrown by firefighters.

When Rab men asked Rahman why he had not blasted the bomb although he said he would do so, Rahman said, "How could I explode it? You have damaged it throwing water."

The bomb was later kept in a polythene bag on a table in a bedroom of the house.

Aug 17 blasts

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addresses of the accused and ordered the IO of the cases to submit supplementary charge sheets.

After fresh enquiry, IO Munshi Atique submitted the supplementary charge sheets yesterday before the magistrate of the cognizance court that include two new accused.

They are Ismail alias Habibur Rahman of village Charshi Khalifapara in Sadar and Rakib Hassan alias Russell of village Banshi Baitalain Nandail upazila in Jamalpur.

The IO also named Asaduzzaman Hajari of village Kesmatpur in Keshabpur upazila in Jessore whose address was missing in the charge sheet submitted earlier.

The other accused are Abdullah, Nasir Uddin Dafadar, Momtaz, Asadul Islam, Abul Khair, Nayeem, Fakar Uddin Raji, Maniurazzaman Munna, Khokon, Noor Ali and Habibur Rahman of Satkhira, Mahbubur Rahman Liton of Koira upazila in Khulna and an Indian national Gias uddin.

In the charge sheets, the IO confirmed that the accused in collaboration with each other blasted bombs in five points in the town on August 17.

He wanted dialogue

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for 'dialogue' with the media at around 6:00am, Rab officials asked him first to come out and surrender, saying they would arrange talks with the media men.

The conversation turned into a bargain although Rahman's voice was much lower than on the previous day.

Rab asked him what he wanted and Rahman replied, "I want dialogue with the media and the countrymen."

A Rab official told him over loudhailer, "You will be able to talk with the media but you have to prove yourself safe first."

Assuring him that he would be brought out of the house safely as was done in the case of his family members earlier, the Rab official said, "Come out, there will be no problem."

Rahman responded, saying, "Give me a microphone to hold dialogue."

Rab again asked him to come out but the JMB chief said, "If I do so, I'll not be able to talk with the media. You'll also make me utter the words you forced my brother to do earlier."

"Impossible," the Rab official said, adding he would be taken to his brother.

At this point, Rahman said, "You'll make me say I've done wrong, I'll not say that. I want to talk from here safely. There is no problem if the media is here. If I go outside, I'll not be able to talk the way I can do from here."

Asked how long he wanted to continue the talks, the militant kingly said it would depend on them (media men).

"Come out, you'll be able to talk as long as you wish. There is sitting arrangement in the nearby building. You see many journalists are here. We're giving you words before them you'll be able to talk with them. But there is only one condition, you'll have to talk after coming out safely."

"We're talking with you for two days and we want you'll not waste any more time," the Rab official said.

Reacting angrily, Rahman then said, "You've attacked me, you lobbed teargas (shells), threw water. Why did you injure me with gas (teargas)? You've snapped gas, electricity and water supply (to this house), stopped supply of food and even water for

ablution. Is not it human rights (violation)?"

At this time, the JMB chief was seen standing near a window on the eastern side of the house, flanked by his two aides—Mo