

The Bangla Bhai Story

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reveals that the Dulu-Aminul (ex-post and telecommunications minister Barrister Aminul Haque) alliance wanted to kill two birds with a single Gamma stone. They deployed the JMB to eliminate the Sarbarahars for avenging the Gamma murder and filed case accusing 16 Awami League leaders and workers for gaining points from the BNP top brass.

Under cover of the outlaw cleansing, the BNP bigwigs in the North actually intended to stamp their political supremacy over the Rajshahi, Natore and Naogaon region. The effectively used the militants to destroy their political opponents, ensuring BNP's dominance in the long run.

Buyed by kudos from the Hava Bhaban (political office of BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman), Dulu later influenced the authorities to submit charge sheet against 21 AL men and transfer the case to speedy trial tribunal. Trial court in its verdict handed death to the 21 AL activists in August 2006, with the defence lawyers claiming that a deputy minister influenced the judgement.

Beside the filthy political game, Dulu on February 7, 2004 led an arson attack on the village Ramshakazipur and Amtali Bazar in retaliation to his nephew murder. A case was filed in this regard and police submitted charge sheet on May 3 this year accusing Dulu and 93 others. According to the charge sheet, Dulu's cohorts in his presence set fire to at least 37 houses and shops at the Ramshakazipur village and Amtali Bazar, looting valuables.

Bangla bhai emerged from an armed procession after JMB's first known murder in Palashipur village in Bagmara Upazila on April 1, 2004, a month after the militant outfit was hired. Fed up with the Sarbarahars sufferings, the local people at first considered the killing as a blessing in disguise. But it did not take them long to wake up to the rude reality that a Frankenstein was indeed born.

PATRONS OF JMB
Dulu and 'district minister' Aminul Haque (Rajshahi 1 constituency) were instrumental in Bangla bhai's illegal vigilante operation. The two talked Rajshahi Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu (ex-BNP lawmaker from Rajshahi 2 constituency), fellow MPs Nadin Mostafa and Alamgir Kabir (Naogaon 6 constituency) into their JMB game.

Alamgir Kabir and his brother-in-law Wahidur Rahman were involved with the Sarbarahars politics in the past but became enemies of the underground operatives finding their ways into politics of people they used to call petty bourgeois.

Another ex-BNP MP from the region (Rajshahi-3 constituency) Abu Hena was not directly involved with the militants, but he did not cooperate with the people and took no position on the JMB issue. But his workers and followers directly or indirectly supported the militants.

"At that time, we in the administration came to know that Dulu deployed Bangla bhai with the backing from the Hava Bhaban. Nadin Mostafa, Alamgir Kabir and Mayor Minu then joined the initiative, led by Aminul Haque," a public servant, preferring not to be named, shared his experience of witnessing the JMB incidents with The Daily Star.

Recalling his phone talks with Dulu and Aminul, he said, "I understood from their conversations that they were the driving force behind Bangla bhai."

"Dulu asked me how I was and I said fine. He then said 'you are fine because of the JMB, at the cost of my nephew's (Gamma's) blood,'" the official said.

Aminul Haque, meanwhile, told him that the situation in Bagmara improved since Bangla bhai got into action. "Such things (JMB vigilance) are bound to occur when Sarbarahars go out of control."

He also recalled that it became mandatory for all to send public and private jeeps, cars, microbuses and motorcycles to Bangla bhai's procession. Police cars would stay within 500-1000 yards of the vigilante operation area to back up Bangla bhai. The officers-in-charge of police stations were compelled to be there.

Bangla bhai was no new face to Aminul, Dulu and Tarique Rahman. Bangla bhai even used to visit the Hava Bhaban long before his Rajshahi operation, confirmed JMB sources and some Bogra people close to Tarique.

Tarique used to take updates on Bangla bhai operations in Rajshahi through telephonic conversation with the BNP leaders concerned. He also frequently directed controversial SP Masud Miah on the matter.

"Tarique Rahman is with us. He is my friend. Quit worrying and just do what I say," a close associate of Bangla bhai quoted the militant leader as saying. The fugitive ex-JMB leader told The Daily Star over phone that a top Jamaat leader once requested the JMB leadership not to tell anyone about militants' Jamaat backgrounds.

However, Dr Firoz Mahmood Iqbal, the assignment officer of ex-PM Khaleda Zia and an influential Hava Bhaban figure, was the other man who maintained regular liaison with Masud Miah and Bangla bhai, a police official said.

Interestingly, both Tarique and Bangla bhai hail from the same Gabtoli upazila of Bogra district. Bangla bhai's home village is Kannipara and Tarique's grandfather's house is 8km away in Bagmara.

This Bogra connection is said to have created a special bond between the two, who kept contact over

phone.

IGP SPILLS THE BEANS

Frustration of the police administration over the JMB was personified as the then DIG in Rajshahi.

Briefly speaking for the first time on his account of Bangla bhai, IGP Nur Mohammad says, "The then Rajshahi SP had links with minister Aminul Haque and Hava Bhaban. This connection made the SP so powerful that he would take directives from Aminul and the Hava Bhaban, not from me. The SP acted as they wanted him to do."

"The local police administration, the SP and local politicians in particular helped them (the JMB). I tried my best to resist them. But I could not be successful due to the police administration, specially because of the Rajshahi SP who was suspended then and the local politicians."

He also could not get any help from Lutifuzzaman Babar. "I did not get any help from the home minister. After I informed the home minister for the first time (about JMB excesses), he suggested me to work as per the dictat of Aminul Haque."

"I talked to the home minister twice or thrice on this matter, he kept on pushing me towards Aminul Haque. When I talked to the district minister Aminul Haque, he said 'do not talk on this matter. You don't need to pursue this matter. This has come from the highest level. From prime minister to Tarique Rahman, everyone knows about it,'" the IGP added.

"I have said several times (to Aminul) that you are the local minister and I am the DIG. I cannot allow this to go on. He asserted again saying that this matter has the approval of the prime minister and Tarique Rahman.

"You can say this is my weakness... But, I am unfortunate that I had to serve under such bribe-taking political minister (for home)," quips the IGP, drawing attention to the recent deluge of news on Babar's corruption."

POLICE ADMIN IN TATTERS

The anti-Bangla bhai law enforcers found themselves in a soup as they were advised by the then government top brass not to interfere with JMB operations.

"The state minister for home never asked us to nab Bangla bhai even after several people were killed," said a top police official.

Three police superintendents of Rajshahi, Natore and Naogaon had been openly helping Bangla bhai band at that time. As a result, the Rajshahi DIG failed to bring the situation under the control of law.

"The DIG eventually found out that the police administration was not carrying out his orders," confirmed another source.

Our investigation revealed that SP Masud Miah at one stage told the DIG that Bangla bhai was given a 'mandate' and the JMB was unstoppable.

Naogaon SP Fazlur Rahman was also Aminul Haque's favourite. Natore SP Nazrul Islam was known as an incompetent partisan officer in the police force who also enjoyed Haque's blessing, police sources said.

"Majority of the OCs, sub-inspectors, constables and other officials were given postings in Rajshahi, Natore and Naogaon on political considerations. None of them could be touched and the chain of command eventually collapsed," police sources said.

The tension of pro and anti JMB officers came to fore when on May 23, 2004, Dulu and Aminul arranged several patrol trucks for the JMB to bring out an armed procession. The procession submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and SP, kicking up a row between Rajshahi DC Aziz Hasan and SP Masud Miah.

A civil servant recalled that the DC had asked the local administration to receive the JMB memo without allowing the procession to enter the Rajshahi town. He felt that if Bangla bhai entered the town, it would have created a national news and it would hurt the image of the government. SP Masud Miah on the other hand wanted the procession to enter the town so that it could demonstrate its show of strength.

The JMB men gathered at a Bhabaniganj ground in Bagmara that morning for submitting the memo to the DC and the SP. The administration then tried to discourage the processionists. The then Rajshahi DC General Abdul Matin, Bagmara upazila UNO Subol Bose, Bagmara OC Ruhul Amin Siddique, Additional SP Arzu Miah and Putia Circle ASP told the Bangla bhai followers not to enter the town.

Some of these officials included Masud Miah's representatives, who officially spoke against the procession but secretly encouraged the militants to go to the town.

The Bangla bhai men eventually went to the town and handed over the memo for the state minister for home. The DC then asked them not to take the law in their hands and warned that the administration would not help them if they do so.

On the other hand, the SP literally embraced the Bangla bhai goons. Receiving the memo, he told them, "You go ahead. The police is with you."

Bangla bhai also submitted a memo to the Bagmara UNO.

In the memo, the militant kingpin asked the state minister for home to take action against the press. "We are eliminating the Sarbarahars under the leadership of Bangla bhai, but the media is writing false information and spreading confusion. Take action against the media," it stated.

The militants and their patrons landed in an awkward situation when the media brought the gruesome

operation into public domain. This is why both JMB and BNP-led government lashed out at the media in the same language, terming the reports on Bangla bhai fiction.

The government even denied the very existence of Bangla bhai, saying it a media-made character. Ironically, the same government, amidst intense pressure from home and abroad, was compelled to arrest in 2006 the 'non-existing' JMB terror, who was hanged to death along with five others during the caretaker government regime for killing two judges in Jhalakathi.

A police official said the police and other high officials at supervisory level in the Rajshahi region were not allowed to supervise the law and order situation, prompting the DIG to hold meetings with three SPs.

At one stage of the meeting, the DIG warned the SPs if Bangla bhai was allowed to continue with his terror they would be held responsible. But the threat did not work as the SPs were obeying orders from some ministers and the Hava Bhaban.

After few days, Bangla bhai invited people over loudspeaker to attend open killing of two persons, one of them was killed by hanging upside down from a tree. His death screams were relayed over microphone for the villagers who did not attend the execution. The whole country was stunned in disbelief when the gruesome photo appeared in all the national dailies next morning.

Sensing mass resentment, the government officially asked the police to arrest Bangla bhai for the first time. But nothing happened as the devils went into hiding, with their piastra ministers ensuring their safety.

Interestingly, when the JMB carried out a nationwide bomb attack on August 17, 2005, the government did not blame the militant group. Instead, many government top shots tried to point out that only a large organised political party like the Awami League could orchestrate such an attack.

At that time, Dulu and Aminul were busy defending the JMB with Khaleda arguing that the militants are BNP's 'vote bank,' said a top official at the PMO (Prime Minister's Office). Though the country was reeling from an unusual terror fight, Khaleda took one long week to ask her home minister to arrest the JMB culprits.

ADEFIANT OC

ABM Golam Kibria replaced Bangla bhai-loyal Bagmara thana OC Ruhul Amin Siddique Siddique in late July 2004. He found no Bangla bhai there then but his followers were plentiful.

Now OC at the New Market thana in Dhaka, Kibria told The Daily Star, "After I took charge of Bagmara, I arrested 70 Bangla bhai men in one drive. Then the BNP and Jamaat leaders from the Rajshahi district and Bagmara begged with me and then created pressure on me to release them."

"But I sent them to jail as per the law," said a beaming Kibria, who soon became an enemy of SP Masud Miah.

Police sources said that Kibria once warned SP Masud that he would file a general diary against him if he kept on pushing him for unlawful assignments and would inform the IG about it through the DIG. Enraged, Masud Miah then ordered to close Kibria although only the DIG had such authority. This order was withdrawn only after the change of government.

LOCAL ADMIN MADE SPECTATOR

The Daily Star investigation reveals that the Rajshahi civil administration did not have any power to act tough on Bangla bhai. They played the role of silent spectators, just like the general public.

When this correspondent visited the region to investigate Bangla bhai's activities in May 2004, he found that the fear factor was so intense that the local administration refused even to talk about outlaws. "I don't want to say anything about it," was the reply of the then Rajshahi Deputy Commissioner Aziz Hasan.

Many officers kept their fingers crossed for an early transfer amid such a suffocating situation. "We were even afraid to ask others what was going on," said an officer. "Once I asked the Bagmara thana OC about what's going on. He said, 'I can't tell you sir."

This environment also seriously hampered the administrative and local government activities at the field level. Generally, people meet the UNO or UP chairman to resolve social issues and small crimes. The UNO would forward matters to UP chairman to take action. But during the Bangla bhai's phase, the local people stopped going to the UNO or UP chairman.

"We noticed that the rural people have stopped going to UNO to resolve small crimes. When we asked union parishad chairmen how they were handling trials and punishment, they said 'all the people were going to Bangla bhai,'" said an official.

"We have got names of persons who were involved with the JMB and made area-wise lists, interrogating arrested militants," he said.

Some victims of Bangla bhai filed several cases since March this year, accusing Aminul, Dulu, Nadin and many others JMB goons. Police pressed charges in two cases so far accusing the three of patronising militants.

A Hindu man, who joined Bangla bhai to save his life, told this correspondent, "One day, I heard that someone lodged a complaint against me to Bangla bhai. I was so afraid that I went to the police for help. The police asked me to see Bangla bhai."

"Neither the police nor the administration was offering us any security. So, I chose to go to Bangla bhai."

In an attempt to distance itself from the JMB, the Rajshahi civil administration tried to make an impression that the local police was at the helm.

"When journalists asked us for any news, we would tell them that we don't have any information as this

was a matter of law and order. The police is working freely, so talk to them," said an official.

The then Rajshahi divisional commissioner Moslehdin and DC Aziz Hasan unofficially ordered all officials that the administration cadre must not involve with any illegal activities.

After each of formal meetings with the UNOs of nine Upazilas of Rajshahi, DC Aziz Hasan would tell them, "Be careful not to involve anyone of the administration cadre with this illegal activity."

LOCAL BNP-JAMAAT MEN HELPED JMB

The local government representatives were also helpless. The Bagmara upazila, which has two municipalities (Pourashava) and 16 unions, became the headquarters of Bangla bhai. Almost all the field level political leaders, all union chairmen, except for a female representative from Taherpur Pourashava, had to extend their support to Bangla bhai.

Among the collaborators, a large section of BNP-Jamaat activists supported militants spontaneously. Some chairmen and leaders who were harmed by the Sarbarahars took this opportunity to exact revenge.

Chairmen and activists of other political parties including the Awami League were also forced to help Bangla bhai. Those who refused became targets of repression. Even some Hindu locals had to join Bangla bhai's operation and establish rule of sharia laws and Islamic society there.

The victims of Bangla bhai's atrocities did not get justice.

For instance, Bangla bhai gang shot Sripur Union chairman and Awami League leader Mokbul Mridha in 2005. He could survive through a long treatment but that terrible incident made him so afraid that he does not come out of his home till today.

Makbul became a target because he won union parishad (council) election by beating his rival BNP Sripur union president Akram, who had the blessings of Aminul Haque.

Akram allegedly got Bangla bhai cadres to kill Makbul, who was very popular.

Villagers rushed out to catch three attackers red handed as soon as the gunshots fired on Makbul. The three, who introduced themselves as Bangla bhai men, were beaten to death.

Makbul's brother then filed an attempt-to-murder case with the Bagmara thana. But thanks to Aminul's clouts, the police pressed charge sheet in 2006, dropping the names of culprits including main accused Akram.

Makbul's brother lodged objection and the Detective Branch is now reinvestigating this case.

In November 2004, terrorists slit the throat of Bangladesh Sharajitak Dal (BSD) leader Ali Akbar near Taherpur Pourashava playing ground in front of his wife and daughter. Initially, it was claimed that the Sarbarahars killed him.

An official told this correspondent that upon investigation, it came out that Bangla bhai's men had killed him. Unfortunately, no action could be taken against them.

JMB KINGPINS HANGED, PATRONS ONLY SUED

Days after the execution of six JMB linchpins on March 29, the caretaker government hinted that it is now the turn of the patrons and masterminds of the militants to face trial. Law Adviser Mainul Hosein said that the patrons will face the same punishment if they are found guilty.

IGP Nur Mohammad told press after country's first execution for militancy, "We have already tentatively identified the patrons of the organisation [JMB]."

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On April 8, a sedition complaint was filed against Mayor Minu for patronising militants and the police authorities are still waiting for the home ministry's approval to get it accepted as a case.