

RABs special achievement has been in fighting terrorists and militants since their spectacular takedown of the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) leader Bangla Bhai and his associates.

less allegations of torture. The moderate success of the drive prompted the government to create a new unit of the police force called the Rapid Action Team (RAT). RAT proved to be a colossal failure and within months it was disbanded and thus paved the way for the Rapid Action Battalion. The problem with RAT was that it was disorganised, corrupt and there was a serious shortage of trained professionals. The government realised that their only previous success was with the army and Operation Clean Heart and decided to form a new taskforce that would be made up of members of the armed forces as well as the police. This new taskforce was seen as the best way at the time to tackle the unlawful elements in the country as the Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Moudud Ahmed said, "Our police are inadequate. They do not have sophisticated weapons nor do they have sufficient training." And with the stroke of a pen a new force was created to tackle crime. While at first they garnered strong public support, even that started to wane as stories of excessive use of force and 'encounter' killings made their way into the headlines.

RAB never had a problem getting a job done; their real problem was how they went about achieving their goals and the lives they destroyed in the process. The history of RAB could also be divided into two distinct phases, one under the BNP led government and the other under the Caretaker Government. From June 2004 till the end of the BNP government in late 2006 RAB went about cleansing the country of its evils. Murderers, rapists, absconding criminals and others were caught and brought to justice, RAB style. The official line continued to be that the particular individual died in a crossfire between RAB officials and the criminals gang members. In the beginning people celebrated that known criminals were being taken to task, yet soon those celebrations turned sour as the same story of their deaths were being repeated around the country on an almost daily basis. Something was up, why was it that so many people had been captured alive and mysteriously died during crossfire while they were leading the RAB to a stash of arms or towards other members of their groups.

Sources close to RAB even went so far as to say that lists of people to be eliminated were compiled and may have even been checked by the Home Ministry before they were picked up and ended up being casualties of crossfire. Chillingly not one but two governments have remained silent over the crossfire issue. In light of this information a few brave people in the media chose to highlight the issue as it steadily started to build momentum in the public sphere. Yet even in the face of large-scale public disapproval, the deaths continued and interestingly not many people from the bereaved families even went so far as to lodge a complaint. Why was that?