

Laden as I know

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me to spend each moment of my life in the shadow of death? No! I was merely discharging a religious obligation by waging Jihad against those attacked Muslims. It does not matter if I die in the course of fulfilling this responsibility, my death and the death of others like me will one day awaken millions of the Muslims from their apathy."

These were the words of Osama bin Laden which he addressed to me one morning during March 1997, in Cave of Tora Bora Mountains of Eastern Afghanistan. I was the first Pakistani journalist to interview Osama bin Laden. In May 1998 I encountered him for the second time in a hideout near Kandahar airport for many hours. He mentioned his possible death again and again to me in that long conversation and said, "Yes, I know that my enemy is very powerful but let me assure you, they can kill me but they cannot arrest me alive". I received his messenger within few hours after the 9/11 attacks and he praised all those who conducted these attacks but he never accepted the responsibility of 9/11 attacks. I confused me. I tried to meet him again. I took the risk of entering Afghanistan in November 2001 when American warplanes were targeting al-Qaeda and Taliban from Jalalabad to Kabul.

I was lucky enough and met him third time in the morning of November 8th 2001. I was first and last journalist to interview him after 9/11. Intense bombing was going on inside and outside the city of Kabul. He welcomed me with a smile on his face and said, "I told you last time that enemy can kill me but they cannot capture me alive I am still alive".

After the interview he again said, "Mark my words Hamid Mir, they can kill me anytime but they cannot capture me alive, they can claim a victory only if they get my alive but if they will just capture my dead body it will be a defeat, war against Americans will not be over even after my death I will fight till the last bullet in my gun, martyrdom is my biggest dream and my martyrdom will create more Osama bin Ladens."

Osama fulfilled his promise which he repeated in front of me many times. He never surrendered. US President Obama finally announced the death of Osama bin Laden yesterday through a pre-dawn operation.

It is learnt that Americans conducted that operation without informing Pakistani counterparts. Two American Chinook helicopters entered in Pakistani territory from Eastern Afghanistan. Pakistani government sources claim that "we were unaware because Americans jammed our radar system". On the other hand highly placed responsible sources in the government confirmed that Pakistan shared very important information regarding Osama bin Laden in May 2010 with CIA. Pakistani security forces intercepted a phone call made by some Arab from area between Taxila and Abbotabad. CIA was informed in August 2010 about the possible presence of an important al Qaeda leader in areas between Taxila and Abbotabad. Probably this phone call was made by bin Laden and that was his biggest blunder to talk on telephone. According to my knowledge he escaped death at least four times after 9/11 but hunted down fifth time.

Sometimes he dodged the world's most sophisticated satellite systems and dangerous missiles by his own cleverness, and at other times it was only luck which saved him from enemy strikes with only minutes to spare. US air strikes were started against the Taliban and al Qaeda on the 7th of October 2001, and bin Laden was spotted along with Dr Ayman al Zawahri, on November 8th 2001 in Kabul. They had come to Kabul from Jalalabad to attend an al Qaeda meeting, but also to pay tribute to their Uzbek comrade, Jumrah Khan Namangani who lost his life

in Afghanistan on November 6th.

It was the same day that I was granted an interview by the world's most wanted man in Kabul. I was not allowed to use my camera to take any pictures of bin Laden. One of his sons, Abdul Rehman, took my picture with his father and with Dr Zawahri. Abdul Rehman used his own camera and gave me the film. Despite all of these security measures, a female spy was able to notice the unusual movement of many important Arabs in Kabul.

I remember an incident that happened when I was having tea with bin Laden and Dr Zawahri after my interview. bin Laden reminded that this was the third interview I had with him. He informed me that I made some translation mistakes in the article published after my first interview in 1997, but said he had found no evidence of any misrepresentation. He was hopeful, he said, that I would not misrepresent him on this interview. More than 20 al Qaeda leaders were also present in the small room where they were taking tea. Conversation on that day proved that most of them were of the view that the US-backed Northern Alliance was moving close to Kabul due to the support of General Pervez Musharraf, who was providing air bases to Americans in Pakistan.

(Hamid Mir works for Geo TV. He interviewed Osama bin Laden three times. He was the last journalist to interview Laden after 9/11)

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Suddenly an Arab al Qaeda fighter entered the room and informed his leaders that they had arrested a woman in a blue burqa just a few meters away from the place where we were meeting. She had been spying under the cover of posing as a beggar. She begged money—even from some al Qaeda security guards posted outside of the place where I was interviewing bin Laden. But after a few minutes, one guard noticed that she seemed more interested in watching him than in begging.

So the al Qaeda fighter started observing her movements. He soon caught her red-handed when she was overheard talking to someone about "Sheikh" on a Thoraya Satellite telephone. This news was broken to the meeting in Arabic, but I also understood the gist. bin Laden immediately ordered one of his close associates that his "guest" must not be harmed. The associate, whose name was Muhammad told me that he would be taking me to Jalalabad.

In the ensuing rush, I said goodbye to Osama bin Laden and I departed with Muhammad in a private car. We were arrested by some Taliban guards outside of Kabul because I was without a beard and I also had a camera, in my possession, which had not been used in the interview. Muhammad never informed the Taliban that he was from al Qaeda. He told them instead that he worked for Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Raze Ached. The Taliban verified this information from the Interior Minister and released us after three hours.

It was late in the evening when we reached Allahabad. Muhammad dropped me in a big house and disappeared. He came back after two hours with some star-

ting news. He claimed that the place in Kabul where I met his "Sheikh" had been bombed just 15 minutes after our departure, but luckily "Sheikh" and others also left that place immediately after us and nobody was harmed. Muhammad smilingly told me: "Brother, you missed Martyrdom with us". I was unaware of the exact location of the earlier interview. Muhammad told me that it was in the Weir Akbar Khan area of Kabul, where I had met the World's MostWanted Man.

I spent that night in Jalalabad, surviving intense US bombing on my right and left. Next morning, in Jalalabad Muhammad said goodbye to me and I left for Pakistan by road. We were to meet again in 2004 in Kunar when I was covering Presidential Elections in Afghanistan. It was then that he told me the whole story of how he and his "Sheikh" had survived the carpet-bombing of the US Air Force for many days running in the Tora Bora Mountains of Eastern Afghanistan.

It wasn't until the third week of December 2001 when bin Laden and his fighters broke the circle created by Americans with the help of Haji Zahir, Haji Zaman and Hazrat Ali. The strategy of al Qaeda sometimes resembles that of the hunted in American western movies. A huge number of al Qaeda fighters entered into the Kurram tribal area of Pakistan from Tora Bora—but Osama bin Laden headed off in a different direction with a small group. Eyewitness Muhammad was also part of that group. Some Chechen and Saudi fighters provided them a cover of gunfire and they walked the whole night towards the safety of Paktia.

A top Afghan security official, Lutfullah Mashal confirmed to me later that Osama bin Laden escaped to Paktia from Tora Bora in December 2001. Mashal followed him secretly. He claimed that Osama bin Laden entered North Waziristan from Paktia. He spent some time there in Shawal area and then moved to the mountains of Eastern Afghanistan, province of Khost. Mashal is now working with President Hamid Karzai and he is sure that the Americans missed the capture of bin Laden in Tora Bora because they were not ready to deploy their own forces on the ground. Americans depended more on a Northern Alliance commander, Hazrat Ali—but this man betrayed them. According to highly reliable Afghan sources, Hazrat Ali provided safe passage to al Qaeda after getting lots of money from them.

Osama bin Laden remained underground throughout the entire year of 2002. He and his colleagues were always on the run. They kept changing their hide-outs again and again. They were determined to save their lives, and because of that, during this chapter they were not fighting.

It was until April of 2003 that the World's Most Wanted man was to surface again in Afghanistan, after the US invasion of Iraq. He called a meeting in the Pech Valley of Kunar province and delivered a hard-hitting speech, in which he announced his plans to resist America in Iraq. He said: "Get Americans in Iraq before they get us in Afghanistan". He declared that Saif ul Adil would be in charge for organizing resistance in Iraq, and advised him to contact Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, who was hiding in Iran at the time. Bin Laden started addressing small gatherings of his comrades in Kunar, as well as in Paktia. One of his daughters-in-law died during childbirth in the Kunar Mountains.

There was a big gathering at the funeral of his daughter-in-law. Local Afghans came to know about the death and started visiting the homes of some al Qaeda fighters, who had married in Kunar. The news of these events reached the ears of the Americans. The Americans launched an operation in Kunar, but once again Osama bin Laden escaped towards the south before the bombing had started in Pech Valley.

It was late in 2004 when

bin Laden found himself surrounded by British troops in the Southern Afghan province of Helmand. bin Laden had been hiding in a mountain area with three defense lines. Highly placed diplomatic sources revealed to this writer recently in Kabul that the British forces were very close to taking Osama bin Laden—dead or alive. He was besieged for more than 24 hours only to manage to dodge one of the world's best equipped armies - escaping with his life yet again. According to details gathered from some Taliban sources in Helmand, the British forces broke two defense lines of al Qaeda in an area of five kilometers.

One-to-one fighting was about to start, but daylight ended and the darkness of night provided some welcome relief to al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden wanted to fight on the frontline, but his colleagues stopped him. Hot arguments were exchanged. bin Laden was angry, but Abu Hamza Aljazeerai convinced him to make a try for escape. They placed many rockets with timers, aimed at two different directions, as a deception. They decided to break the enemy encirclement, heading in the third direction with a group of foot fighters. That group was providing cover to bin Laden. Most of the fighters lost their lives, but the escape plan succeeded.

Osama bin Laden slipped from British hands with Abu Hamza Al Jazeera and some other fighters. These sources denied some reports that bin Laden had ordered his guards to shoot him if he were near arrest. The al Qaeda sources claimed that he does not believe in suicide, it is easier for him to sacrifice his life in battle against the enemy till the last bullet and his last drop of his blood have been spent. After that escape he was very careful. He stopped moving in Afghanistan and chose Pakistani tribal areas for an underground life. His big family was scattered after 9/11. Some of his children spent life in Iran and one of his son reportedly spent time in Karachi for a brief period but nobody expected that he will be nabbed in Abbotabad. He was hiding in Abbotabad with one of his wife, son and a daughter. When Americans attacked his hideout he immediately started fighting. His wife got bullet injury in her feet. According to his injured wife, Osama rushed to the rooftop and joined his guards who were resisting the attack. His 10 years old daughter Safia watched American commandos entering the house and they took away the dead body of her father. She confirmed later that "Americans dragged the dead body of my father through the stairs".

Osama bin Laden is dead but al Qaeda and its allies are not dead. Osama bin Laden always exploited flaws in American policies. His real strength was hatred against America; Islam was never ever his real strength. Physical elimination of Osama bin Laden is only big news for Americans but many people outside America want the elimination of the policies which may produce some more Osama bin Ladins. America came into Afghanistan in search of Osama bin Laden. No doubt that he was responsible for the killing of many innocent people but Americans cannot justify the killing of innocent people through their drone attacks just because Osama killed some innocents. Both Osama bin Laden and Americans violated the sovereignty of Pakistan. It must be stopped now. Osama is dead. If America will not leave Afghanistan after the death of Osama bin Laden then this war will not end soon and world will remain an unsafe place.

(Hamid Mir works for Geo TV. He interviewed Osama bin Laden three times. He was the last journalist to interview OBL after 9/11. Hamid Mir is also writing the biography of OBL)

Bin Laden dead

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confirmed that Bin Laden was dead, US officials said.

Bin Laden is believed to have ordered the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 and a number of others. He was on top of the US' "most wanted" list.

On Sunday, US forces said to be from the elite Navy Seal Team Six undertook the operation in Abbottabad, 100km (62 miles) north-east of Islamabad.

US officials said bin Laden was shot in the head after resisting and "no Americans were harmed".

US media reports said that the body was buried at sea to conform with Islamic practice of a burial within 24 hours and to prevent any grave becoming a shrine.

Giving more details of the raid, one senior US official said a small US team conducted the attack in about 40 minutes.

According to The New York Times, the al-Qaeda leader's body was flown to Afghanistan, the country where he made his fame fighting and killing Soviet troops during the 1980s.

From there, American officials said, the body was buried at sea.

Announcing the success of the operation, Mr Obama said it was "the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat al-Qaeda".

The US has put its embassies around the world on alert, warning Americans of the possibility of al-Qaeda reprisal attacks for Bin Laden's killing.

CIA director Leon Panetta said al-Qaeda would "almost certainly" try to avenge the death of Bin Laden.

Crowds gathered outside the White House in Washington DC, chanting "USA, USA" after the news broke.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the operation sent a signal to the Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"You cannot wait us out, you cannot defeat us, but you can make the choice to

DU professor

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colleague of Nasreen, said she had always been very sincere in the classroom and vocal for the cause of students.

Prof Nasreen was one of those leading women, who have done well in the field of economics, he said.

She had adopted a pro-people and social welfare approach in her research, Akash said.

AL plans

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Secretary, Hasina asked the ministers and state ministers to organise the rallies.

Meanwhile, the opposition BNP will stage country-wide demonstrations on May 9 demanding resignation of the government and mid-term election.

AL acting General Secretary Mahabubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star "The leader [Hasina] will start touring different districts probably at the end of this month or early next month. She will address people focusing on development activities which the government has already carried out, and which are going on." She will try to keep her programme in the districts every Friday and Saturday.

Hanif, also a special assistant to the premier, said a number of party leaders are already holding rallies in districts to counter the opposition campaign against the government.

AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader, who visited different districts including Sylhet, Sunamganj, Feni, Noakhali, Laxmipur and Gazipur in the last few days, told this correspondent he exchanged views with his partymen as well as others. He learnt that the opposition's anti-government propaganda is very strong, Obaidul Quader said.

"So our party should immediately let people know through holding rallies that development activities are going on as we promised before the elections," Obaidul Quader said.

abandon al-Qaeda and participate in a peaceful political process," she said.

And she said there was "no better rebuke to al-Qaeda and its heinous ideology" than the peaceful uprisings across the Arab world against authoritarian governments.

On the other hand, a top al-Qaeda ideologue vowed revenge Monday for the killing of Osama Bin Laden by US forces, in the first jihadist admission of the militant leader's death, reports AP.

The prominent commentator, going by the online name "Assad al-Jihad2," posted on extremist websites a long eulogy for bin Laden and said the Islamic holy war against the West was far from over.

"Woe to his enemies. By God, we will avenge the killing of the Sheik of Islam," he wrote. "Those who wish that jihad has ended or weakened, I tell them: Let us wait a little bit."

Militant websites with links to al-Qaeda regularly post long interviews with al-Jihad2 on the protocols of waging holy war. He is also often used to resolve questions of doctrine.

Some justice

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"The long wait is finally over."

-- Kristen Breitweiser whose husband also died in the terror attack.

"I think everyone is shocked. We still have to be vigilant, but I am relieved he is no longer alive to create the fear of another attack."

-- Mary Fetchet whose 24-year-old son Brad died in the attacks.

"I feel relief. I feel a closure that I thought I would never get. I just had to come here now. People are taking pictures of me with the photo of my husband. They are all very sweet."

-- Diane Massaroli, wife of Michael, a worker at the Cantor Fitzgerald brokerage who could not escape from his office on the 101st floor.

"(My) son still isn't coming home." (There's) no closure, but at last, at least some justice for the murder of 3,000 Americans, finally."

-- Jim Riches who lost his firefighter son Jimmy when the World Trade Center's north tower collapsed.

Six hours

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Kazi Mohammad Soleyman Alam, managing committee president, said the school got academic permission in 2001, two years after its establishment. Since then, seven people have been volunteering as teachers in the school.

"For the nationalisation of the school, we invited the state minister. The minister was late due to other programmes at Durgapur union," he added.

The school headmaster, Sirajul Islam, said local AL leaders confirmed that the minister would come to visit the school by 12:00noon.

"We had to wait, as the minister was late," he added. Aminul Islam, secretary of Durgapur union parishad Awami League unit, said "We did not ask the kids to wait on the road."

It was not a scheduled programme. "We told them [school authorities] that the minister would visit the school on his way to the district town after attending functions at Durgapur," he added.

The headmaster said the state minister did not make any promise regarding the nationalisation issue. "The minister did not even enter the school and talked for less than five minutes on the road."

Nod to farming

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In giving the go-ahead to the proposal mooted by the commerce ministry, the prime minister asked the other ministries concerned, especially the foreign ministry, to take effective measures to deal with the legal or other issues in renting foreign land for farming. She asked amending rules, if necessary, in leasing farm land overseas, said the sources.

Commerce Minister Faruk Khan told The Daily Star some African countries have already agreed to lease out farming land to Bangladesh. Commerce ministers of some African countries including Tanzania last year assured him of giving all out support if Bangladesh wants to lease land for cultivation.

Terming the premier's approval a landmark, he said, "We have been working on the concept for long, and primarily we have targeted leasing land in those countries where Bangladesh has attained good reputation through its UN peacekeepers."

He went on, "I have already talked to the army chief and some other officers concerned in this regard." Countries like Congo, Sierra Leon and Tanzania will be among the first choices.

Faruk Khan said Bangla has virtually become the

Spl body

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the parliament secretariat said.

They said they sent invitations to the intellectuals on the directives of the special committee.

The consultation that began on April 24 is expected to conclude tomorrow through holding talks with prominent journalists.

Twenty-four editors and journalists were invited to join the talks, officials told The Daily Star.

Earlier, the special committee held talks with eminent jurists in addition to the political parties representing the current parliament.

But the main opposition BNP boycotted the talks terming the invitation "conspiratorial".

The special committee was formed in July last year to propose necessary changes to the constitution. Before opening the ongoing national dialogue, the special committee held a series of meetings and discussed prospective changes to the country's charter.

On completion of the national dialogue, the special committee will review all the proposals placed by political parties, eminent jurists and dignitaries and prepare its report to be placed in the House.

3 factories

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Khulshi Police Station, said a DoE release.

It found around twenty workers cutting hill for a project named "Doctors' Home." Seeing the enforcement team, they fled the scene.

Two trucks and some hill-cutting equipment were seized from the site.

DoE officials noticed levelling of hills at Paharika Residential Area in South Khulshi. Impulse Properties Ltd, a real estate company, was found involved in the illegal act.

The enforcement team issued notice on both the companies asking their owners to be present at DoE office in Dhaka today. The department will take legal action if they fail to appear at the office.

The team conducted another drive in Nasirabad industrial area under Bayezid Police Station and found two factories polluting the environment by emitting harmful gas, according to the release.

The DoE officials fined Saleh Steel Mills Ltd and Islam Steel Industry Tk 5 lakh each. They also asked the factory authorities to stop production and install fume extraction systems immediately.

Delhi Aluminium Industry, another factory in the same area, was fined Tk 3 lakh for discharging toxic effluent.

The team directed its owners to install an effluent treatment plant.

second language in Sierra Leon, and Bangladesh's armed forces are very popular and respected there. So, it will be easy for Bangladeshi farmers to work there. "We can produce cotton in Sierra Leon to meet our needs," he added.

He said food grains can also be grown there, and a portion of the produce can be sold to earn foreign currency. He mentioned that there are good lands for producing rice in Tanzania.

"We have already opened a cell at our ministry, headed by a deputy secretary, to deal with issues relating to lease of foreign land and find out people interested in farming there," said the commerce minister. Primarily two to three private farms will be allowed to lease foreign land, he added.

Farm land has been shrinking in Bangladesh due to heavy population growth and climate change that affects land. Dhaka has been looking for renting land overseas considering these aspects.

US was ready to take Laden alive

Says US official

AFP, Washington

The United States would have taken Osama bin Laden alive if he had given himself up, an American official said yesterday after US special forces shot dead the Al-Qaeda leader in Pakistan.

"He resisted during the firefight. As a result, the operators on the ground killed him. They were prepared to take him alive," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

An elite team of US Navy SEALs helicoptered into bin Laden's compound at Abbottabad, near Islamabad overnight Sunday, killing the Al-Qaeda leader and a small number of confidants.

Babar

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had arrested five people from the spot but the arrestees were released as per the direction of Lutfuzzaman Babar, then state minister for home.

The witnesses are Sergeant Md Alauddin, then officer-in-charge (OC) of Bandar Police Outpost, and Sergeant Helal Uddin Bhuiyan, then OC of Kolar Depot Police Outpost.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Mahabubur Rahman recorded Sgt Alauddin's 12-page and Sgt Helal's 8-page statements till 7:07pm.

Alauddin said on April 1, 2004 around 10:00pm, Havidler Golam Rasul informed him about something illegal being unloaded from trawlers at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd (CUFL) jetty. Sgt Alauddin and the havidler went to the spot and notified the event to Deputy Commissioner (Port) Abdullalhel Baki.

As per the DC's direction Sgt Alauddin called for night patrol party who were on duty near Marine Academy ghat and deployed them at the entrances of the jetty.

Sgt Helal then reached the jetty along with petrol police. The sergeants found two persons, who identified themselves as Hafizur Rahman and Abul Hossain, claiming to be the owners of the consignment.

Meanwhile, Sgt Helal arrested five people from the jetty as they were trying to flee.

When DC (Portzone) Baki reached the spot Alauddin informed him about the disrespectful attitude of the two who claimed themselves the owners of the goods.

But the two were let go and were never seen later. The other five arrestees were sent to Bandar Police Outpost in three-wheelers.

Alauddin stated that when he reached his outpost he did not find the five arrestees.

He contacted DC Baki who told him that the arrestees were released with the order from the Commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police as per the direction of the then state minister for home.