

Ulfa thrived, thanks to BNP-led alliance

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Indian separatist group United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) had found refuge in Bangladesh during the last tenure of the BNP-led government.

This has been proven through exposure of several smuggling cases like Bogra ammunition haul and Chittagong 10-truck arms haul in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

The cases revealed that the state machinery of the then BNP-led government had been allowing Indian separatists to use the Bangladesh territory to smuggle in arms for waging war in eastern India.

In their court admissions in the 10-truck arms haul case, arrested former director general of National Security Intelligence (NSI) Brig Gen (ret'd) Md Abdur Rahim, and its former director (security) Wing Commander (ret'd) Sahabuddin Ahmed revealed that Bangladeshi players had been working alongside Pakistani intelligence to facilitate such arms smuggling.

Ulfa military commander Paresh Barua, who was then

based in Dhaka, had directly supervised the huge cache of weapons being brought into Bangladesh.

Paresh lived in Bangladesh for years upon protection from the BNP-Jamaat government and top brass of intelligence agencies, according to statements of the witnesses and accused in the arms haul case.

He used a pseudonym, Zaman, and went into hiding soon after the story of the 10-truck arms haul had started unravelling.

Sources said Ulfa had been allowed to set camps in Chittagong, Sylhet, Sherpur and some other bordering areas. Its members received arms training there and used to operate in India from the camps.

In July 2010, detained Ulfa leader Ranjan Chowdhury told interrogators that their activists had used the camps in Bangladesh between the BNP-Jamaat regime and early period of the last caretaker government. Injured activists had also received treatments there.

One of his interrogators,

wishing anonymity, told The Daily Star, "Ranjan told us that to his knowledge, Ulfa has no training camp in Bangladesh now."

Organising secretary of Dhubri unit, Ranjan was responsible for providing the soldiers from 109 Ulfa battalion of Meghalaya, one of the five battalions of the separatist group, with shelter.

According to experts, the then BNP-led government adopted the policy to give Pakistani intelligence ISI leverage to disrupt peace in India.

Ulfa was founded in 1979 aiming to establish a sovereign Assam through arms struggle. It started major violence in 1990 prompting India to begin military operations against it. Over the last two decades, around 18,000 people died in fights between the rebels and security forces.

In 2007, soon after the caretaker government had been installed, Bangladesh began a crackdown on Ulfa bases and the effort got stronger during the tenure of successive Awami

League government.

On December 5, 2009, different local and international media reported that some Ulfa bigwigs including its chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa, his deputy commander-in-chief Raju Barua, and top leaders Sashadhar Choudhury and Chitranab Hazarika had been detained by Bangladesh law enforcers and then pushed back only to be arrested by the Indian Border Security Force.

Both countries denied the incident.

Another senior Ulfa leader Anup Chetia has been languishing in a Bangladesh prison since his arrest here in 1997.

In January 2010, Ulfa shifted from its demand for independence to begin a dialogue with the Indian government.

On September 3, 2011, the Indian government, Assam government and the separatist group signed a tripartite agreement on suspension of operations against Ulfa.

RECOVERED ARMS & AMMO



Different types of sophisticated firearms

4,930

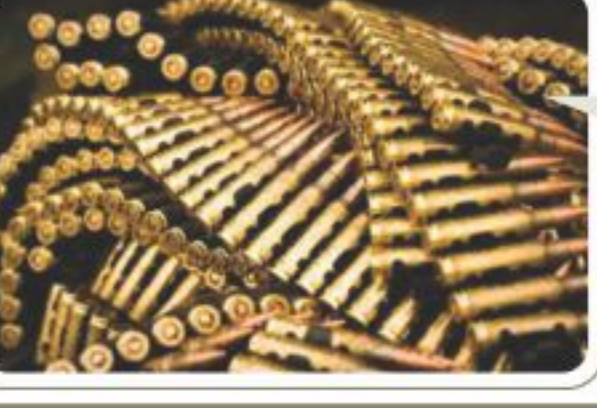
Grenades
27,020
Grenade launchers
2,000



Rockets
300

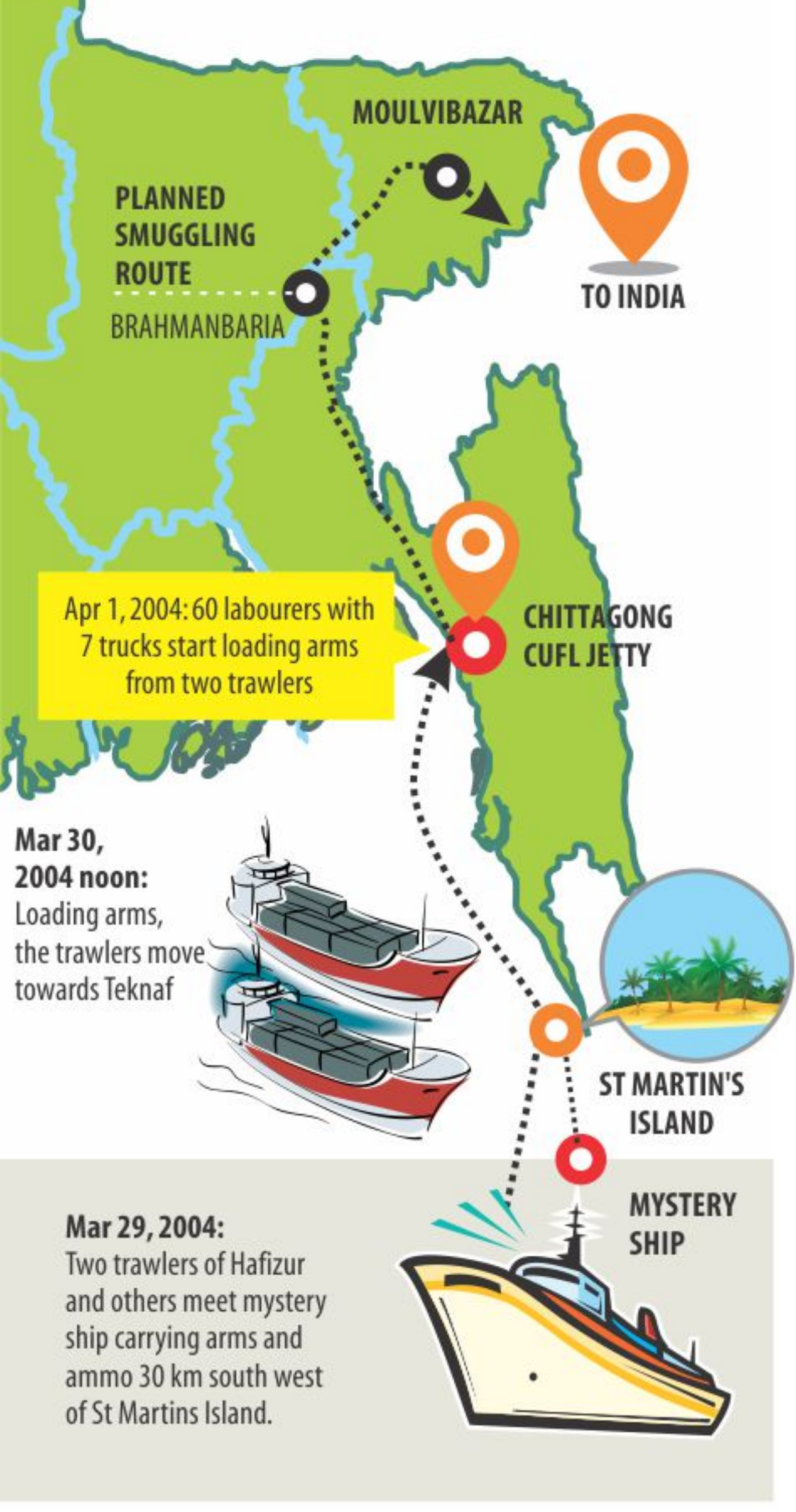
Rocket launchers
840

Magazines
6,392



Bullets
11,40,520

ARMS HAUL THE LOCAL ROUTE



TUHN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY & WASIM BIN HABIB

As involvement of the bigwigs of the then government and intelligence agencies started to surface with the 10 trucks arms haul cases unfolding, it came as no surprise when the name of former industries minister Motiur Rahman Nizami popped up.

Nizami's name was widely discussed soon after the seizure of the 10 truckloads of arms at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd (CUFL) jetty in the early hours of April 2, 2004, as the CUFL falls under the industries ministry.

Moreover, the presence of an additional secretary of the ministry, Nurul Amin, at CUFL rest house that night raised eyebrows among many, hinting at the involvement of the ministry in the incident.

Interestingly, Nizami was not implicated in the cases in the charge-sheets prepared earlier during the tenure of the BNP-led four-party alliance government, of which his party -- Jamaat-e-

Islami -- was a key ally.

However, the last investigator detected the minister's 'involvement' while digging deeper into the cases. The investigator himself was made an accused in the cases in 2011.

Soon after the seizure of the biggest ever arms cache, top officials of the industries ministry sat up, going into the job of gathering information about the haul of the illegal weapons. But Nizami was nonchalant. The earth-shattering event did not seem to touch him.

When senior officials approached him with proposals to investigate the seizure, he poured cold water on their suggestions, saying his ministry did not need to do anything individually since the home ministry was looking into the matter.

"He [the minister] said his ministry had nothing to do independently even after I had informed him about several news reports implicating the ministry, the minister and the prime minister," Shoeb Ahmed,

the then industries secretary, said in his testimony.

"When he [Nizami] replied [like] this, it came to my mind that the industries minister was well aware of the arms smuggling beforehand," added Shoeb, also an adviser to the caretaker government in 2006. Maj Gen (ret'd) Mohammad Imamuzzaman, former chairman of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), also gave almost similar testimony about Nizami's reluctance to investigate the matter.

Nizami, also the ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, denied the allegations.

Two cases -- one under the Arms Act for illegal possession of firearms and another under the Special Powers Act, 1974, for smuggling illegal firearms -- were filed in connection with the seizure of the huge cache of arms meant for the Indian separatist organisation United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa).

As many as 50 and 52 people were accused in the cases respectively. Nizami is an accused in both the cases. Shoeb Ahmed and Imamuzzaman were among the witnesses the prosecution produced to prove the charges.

Imamuzzaman testified before the Chittagong Metropolitan Special Tribunal-1 on February 16, 2012. He first came to know about the fact from a journalist and later informed Shoeb Ahmed.

He said he met Shoeb on April 4, the first office day after the incident, and came to know that the then additional industries secretary Nurul Amin was staying at the rest house of CUFL during the smuggling.

Amin, who has been on the run, is also an accused in the case.

"Shoeb Ahmed didn't instruct me on anything and told me that he had informed the matter to the minister, who said the ministry had nothing to do about it. The industries secretary rather urged me to talk to the minister directly," Imamuzzaman said.

"As soon as I went there and

raised the matter, the minister told me that he knew everything. He told me that since the law-enforcement agencies had seized the arms, the home ministry was taking necessary steps. So, the industries ministry didn't need to do anything about it," he stated.

"I thought that he [Nizami] was avoiding the matter. I asked him to form a probe committee. But he didn't make an answer and was totally silent. He was seen very worried at that time," Imamuzzaman recalled.

While testifying on February 15, 2012, Shoeb said he had informed the matter to Nizami after knowing it from Imamuzzaman.

Nizami had told him that law enforcers were taking action and the "higher authorities" of the country were also aware of the incident, Shoeb stated. "Do you think I didn't talk to the home minister and the prime minister in this regard?" said Shoeb, quoting Nizami.

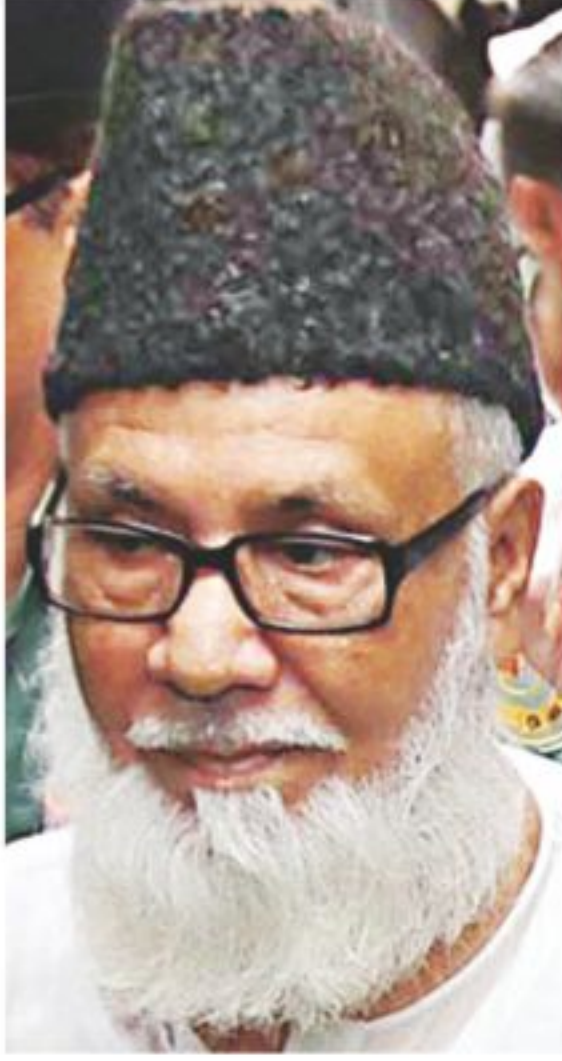
He also wanted to know why Nurul Amin had not informed anybody about the matter despite his presence at the CUFL rest house and rather had gone to Cox's Bazar with his family on a holiday.

"It's a personal matter of Nurul Amin," the then minister was quoted as replying.

Nizami's defence team said their client had been implicated in the cases with a political intention as the Awami League-led government was trying to 'eliminate' Jamaat and its chief.

Nizami was agriculture minister until May 2003 before he was appointed industries minister. He was shown arrested in the arms haul cases on May 4, 2011 as he had been in jail since June 29, 2010 in connection with another case.

Currently, the Jamaat chief is facing 16 charges of crimes against humanity and genocide committed during the Liberation War of 1971. The verdict in this case awaits delivery at the International Crimes Tribunal-1.



APRIL 1 2004

10 pm to 11 pm: Arms and ammo were being loaded into seven trucks, under supervision of Hafizur and Haji Sobhan

11-11:30 pm: Two police officers intervened and sought papers from the cargo loaders. They locked into a debate with Hafiz and Abul Hossain, who was actually NSI officer Maj Liakat Hossain

Midnight: Another police sergeant joined two cops. Hafiz-Liakat told them these were arms for Ulfa and government high-ups were well aware.

4 am (April 2): As more cops reached the spot, the smugglers fled; most of them later got arrested.



Police, army and BDR personnel sorting out the huge cache of arms and ammunition captured at the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd jetty in the early hours of April 2, 2004.

PHOTO: FILE