

Huge yaba haul in Ctg

5 lakh tablets seized; 7 held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Rab members seized around 5 lakh yaba tablets, worth about Tk 20 crore, from a fishing trawler at the outer anchorage of Chittagong port on Wednesday night.

Seven people were also arrested in connection with the yaba smuggling from the trawler. They are Md Hannan, Md Lokman, Md Russell, Md Elias, Md Oliullah, Md Riaz and Md Osman.

Over 28 lakh yaba pills have been seized in the area since June 2014, sources said.

The trend shows that smugglers are using the Chittagong port area for smuggling yaba tablets as law enforcement agencies have increased vigilance at Cox's Bazar and Teknaf, said a top Rapid Action Battalion official, requesting anonymity.

All the major consignments of yaba pills were being smuggled into the country through waterways, said

Miftah Uddin Ahmed, commanding officer of Rab-7.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team challenged the fishing trawler at the port's outer anchorage around 11:50pm and found the yaba tablets kept in a water drum, said the Rab official at a press briefing in the Rab-7 headquarters in Patenga yesterday.

The trawler was loaded with the yaba pills from a place called "Sitar Mata", off St Martin's Island, near Myanmar. Those were supposed to be shifted to another trawler in Patenga, said Miftah.

Rab would file a case at Patenga Police Station after quizzing the arrestees, he said.

In response to a query, Miftah said they had arrested several key yaba smugglers in Cox's Bazar. Some "god-fathers" were killed in "gunfights" and others left Cox's Bazar.

They would identify and conduct drives to arrest the main culprits behind the smuggling, he added.



The seven arrested with about 5 lakh pieces of yaba are paraded before the media at the Rab-7 office in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Ananta isn't dead, we are

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we wake up one day to find ourselves in a place we don't know anymore.

Like Avijit Roy and Oyasiquir Rahman, who were hacked to death allegedly by religious fanatics in February and March, Ananta took up this pen and keyboard to denounce fundamentalism, superstition and unscientific ideas and to promote science, humanism and law of nature. He preferred logic to blind faith and believed that man must think freely, rationally and scientifically to find answers to his questions about life.

Is it possible that his writings and blog posts went against some people's take on religion, any religion, and hurt the feelings of some devout religious followers? Yes, but bullets and butchering knives can't be the answers in a debate of thoughts and ideas.

Still, that's how Ananta was answered. Four butchering knives came down hard on all over his body. At least 14 times. Somehow, he had this premonition, more so since the murder of Avijit, on whose Muktomona blog he used to write. And his survival instinct had prompted him to reach out to the international community. Recently, the Swedish PEN invited him to speak about the threats atheists face in Bangladesh, but the Swedish Embassy in Dhaka declined to give him a visa suspecting he might not return. Perhaps the embassy was right and we don't seek to question its decision. Only there are some ifs and buts here.

But what is the government doing to protect those facing death threats for simply having a different view on life, politics and religion? It was public knowledge that Ananta's life was in danger. In March 2013, Chittagong-

based Hefajat-e Islam made a list of 84 "anti-religious" bloggers, including Ananta, and handed the list over to the home ministry for action against them. Militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team put all the 84 on its hit list as reported in the media. As far as we know, the government's response has been stone cold.

In the first place, on what legal grounds can a religious organisation hand over a list and demand action against someone for writing a book or making a comment on social media? Since when have we lost our constitutional right to freedom of speech? And even if someone crosses the limit of decency, what should a responsible government do when it has information that extremist elements are out to kill him? Should it play the role of a silent observer and, worse still, justify its silence?

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's son

Sajeeb Wazed Joy would have us believe that "we are walking a fine line here." In his view he expressed in an interview with Reuters, the political situation in Bangladesh is too volatile for the PM to comment publicly on the murder of Avijit Roy because "we [the government] don't want to be seen as atheists."

For Joy, may we say there is no fine line between right and wrong, between life and death? By drawing these "fine lines," didn't he essentially portray the government as powerless before this "religious card"? We don't see our government as a weak one, nor do we want to.

And to those who believe in killing in the name of religion, we say: Man and his life is greater than dogmas. May we also remind them one of Islam's supreme teachings that to kill one innocent man is to kill the entire humanity?

New agenda

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post-2015 agenda. The Open Working Group (OWG), formed under the aegis of the UN General Assembly, is at the final stage of giving shape to a new agenda called Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs.

The Daily Star recently talked to Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow at Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), to know about the pros and cons of the SDGs. The eminent economist, who is also the chair of the Southern Voice on Post-MDGs, a forum of 49 think-tanks of Global South across three continents, also shed light on how Bangladesh should go forward with the new global agenda.

Bhattacharya said the MDGs were mainly about the poor in the low-income countries, but the SDGs are supposed to go far beyond with goals proposed for productive employment, urbanisation, infrastructure, standard of governance, income inequality and environmental conservation. The number of goals reflects the broadness of the vision. There are 17 overarching goals and 169 targets in the SDGs compared to only eight goals in the

MDGs.

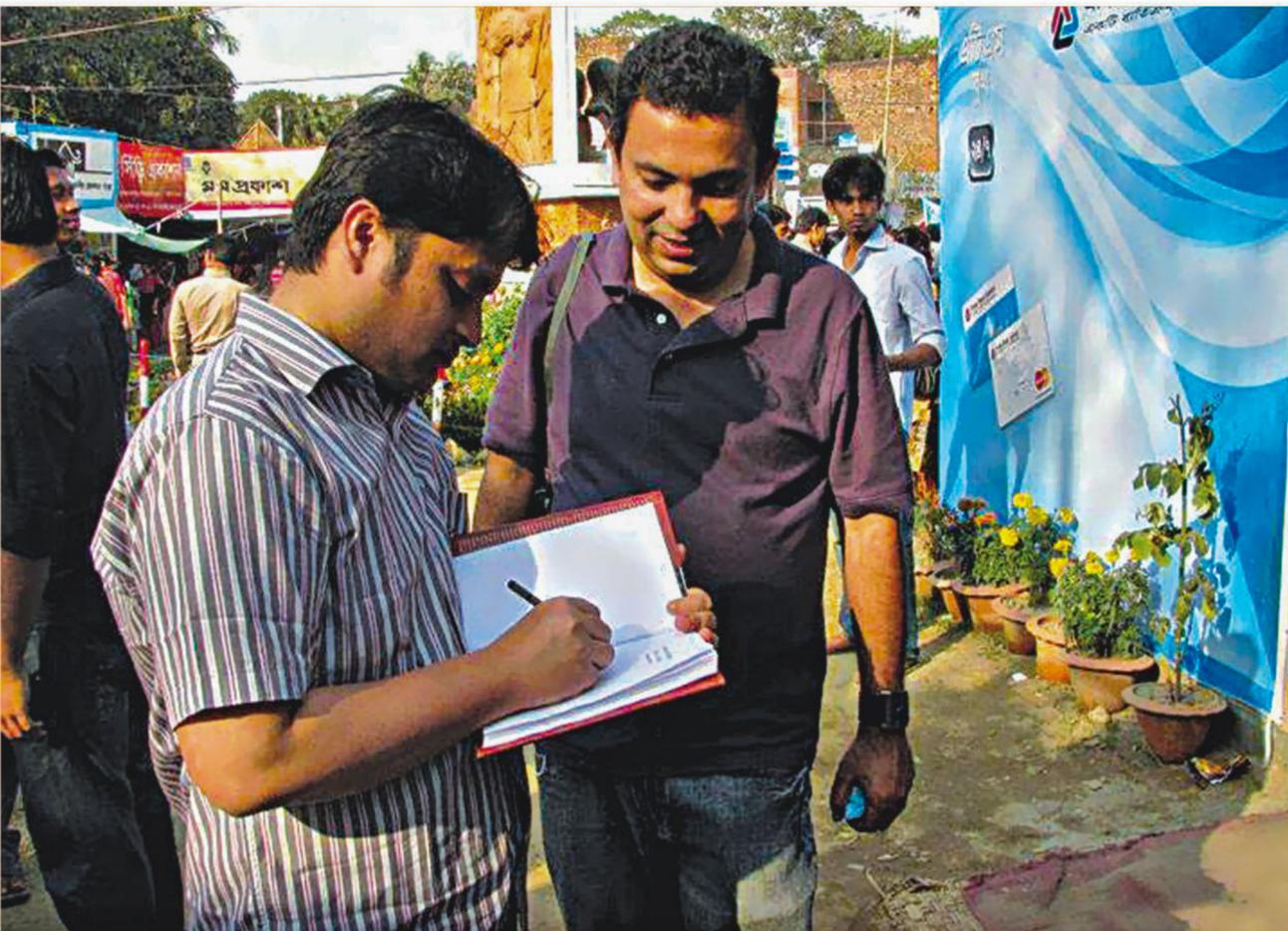
"SDGs are multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional and the role of the line ministries, such as education, health, planning etc will be supreme. Each ministry will be the leader in its own field. So coordination among ministries and agencies will be an extraordinary challenge," said Debapriya.

The issue of financing the goals forms another major difference between the MDGs and the SDGs. Talks have already surfaced about how the SDGs will be financed, he said.

The economist also hailed Bangladesh for its success in achieving many MDGs far ahead of many other countries. In fact, Bangladesh now stands above the average countries in the global landscape as its reporting, which was regular, gave good inputs. In many ways, many countries look upon Bangladesh as a leader now.

Yet, the country will face a lot of challenges in implementing the SDGs. Proper coordination among the ministries, data availability and weak governance, among others, were the challenges he highlighted.

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Writers Avijit Roy, right, and Ananta Bijoy Das at Ekushey Book Fair in 2012. Known for championing the cause of secularism, they were killed in the span of less than three months this year by suspected religious fanatics.

PHOTO: RANADIPAM BASU

Local among the killers

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Investigators said the gang members from outside must have stayed in Sylhet for at least a couple of months to follow Ananta and finalise the killing plan.

"This can't be done without supports from local mentors," said the official.

He spoke on condition of anonymity because it was too early to comment. "We are going to each hotel and mess of the city to know about boarders. Especially, we are trying to learn who rented rooms for one or two months and left recently," he added.

Rahmat Ullah, additional deputy commissioner (media) of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP), said the

lone witness to the killing, tea vendor Abdus Sobhan, heard one of the killers shout at him in local dialect as he tried to approach them.

"But it does not mean that the rest are outsiders," Rahmat, also the SMP spokesperson, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Rahmat and some other police officers suspect Islamist militants behind Ananta's murder, like in the murders of bloggers Avijit Roy and Oyasiquir Rahman in Dhaka.

Law enforcers in the capital on several occasions said Ansarullah Bangla Team, an active militant outfit, were behind their murders.

Sylhet once was a hub of different militant outfits. A number of top militants have been arrested there since 2007, including the chief of banned

militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh Shaikh Abdur Rahman. He was executed in 2008, a year after his arrest.

There has been hardly any visible militant activity in the area in the last few years. But investigators say militants might have changed their locations to operate secretly.

"The operation to kill Ananta is a proof of their clandestine activity," said another police officer of SMP.

Immediately after the murder, police put check posts at every entry and exit points of the city to nab the killers. Police and intelligence agencies have been conducting raids in the city but are yet to arrest or identify anyone.

Police are also looking for the machetes and masks used by the kill-

ers.

Yesterday, police collected video footage of the Pubali Bank branch where Ananta worked as an assistant development officer for about two years.

Police suspect the killers visited him at the bank posing as clients.

Ratneshwar Das, elder brother of Ananta, said they had no idea about the killers. "But we are sure he was killed for his writings and we want justice."

Meanwhile, demonstrations continued in the city demanding the arrest and punishment of the killers.

Udichi Sylhet unit organised a protest rally in the city's Chaohatta area in the afternoon where speakers accused law enforcers of failing to protect free thinkers and bloggers.

Taken to Shillong by car

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Finding him "mentally unbalanced", law enforcers later sent him to Meghalaya Institute of Health & Neurological Science and then to Shillong Civil Hospital, according to local police.

He was arrested on charges of trespassing under the Foreigners Act since he had no valid papers, police said.

Immediately after his arrest, Salahuddin told the Meghalaya police that a group of people claiming to be detectives picked him up from his Uttara residence in Dhaka on March 10, according to multiple sources in Shillong.

He also told police that was kept confined for nearly two months before his landing in Shillong, the sources added.

Hasina Ahmed, wife of the BNP leader, on Tuesday told the media that her husband phoned her from Meghalaya Institute of Mental Health & Neurological Science.

In a latest development, Interpol's National Central Bureau in Dhaka yesterday sent a "letter of request" to its New Delhi bureau to arrest Salahuddin.

"The Interpol's National Central Bureau in Delhi has forwarded the letter to us this morning with a request to arrest the Bangladesh political leader [Salahuddin]," Vivek Syiem, superintendent of police (city) of East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya, told The Daily Star around 5:00pm yesterday over the phone.

In reply, the Meghalaya police said they already arrested the BNP joint secretary general.

In the Interpol's letter, Salahuddin was identified as a fugitive with several criminal cases against him in Bangladesh. It was sent upon request from the Bangladesh government.

Meghalaya police on completion of the court procedures might hand over Salahuddin to Interpol's Dhaka wing through New Delhi.

Salahuddin seems well enough to be produced before the court, but the hospital authority is yet to release him, Vivek said.

He added it might take around one to two weeks to submit the charge sheet against Salahuddin and around three months to complete the court

proceedings.

Replying to a query, Vivek said Meghalaya police and special branch officials started quizzing Salahuddin in the hospital's prison cell without hampering his treatment.

Another official, Royal S Mawlong, deputy police superintendent of East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, said the Interpol letter was not something like the "red alert" but a kind of request.

In Dhaka, State Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday told reporters that he was not aware of the Interpol letter.

He, however, said Bangladesh government started the process to bring back Salahuddin.

Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque yesterday told reporters that he already communicated with his Indian counterpart seeking information on the BNP leader.

Talking to reporters at his office, he also said the home and foreign ministries would formally write to India for handing over Salahuddin to Bangladesh.

BNP URGES GOVT

After maintaining silence over Salahuddin being traced in Shillong, the BNP yesterday urged the government to ensure Salahuddin's safe return.

The party also said they should not make further comments on the issue until they get the real picture.

"We're not silent. Salahuddin is now in a place of Indian northern state Meghalaya with which Bangladesh has no good communications," BNP spokesman Asaduzzaman Ripon said at a press briefing at the party's Nayapalton central office.

"Before talking about him, we need to know his actual condition. We still could not contact him."

As his attention was drawn to the Interpol letter, Ripon said, it reflected Bangladesh government's attitude towards Salahuddin.

Meanwhile, Salahuddin's family sources said his wife, though prepared to leave Dhaka for Shillong, was yet to get an Indian visa.

Talking to The Daily Star over telephone yesterday, she said a BNP assistant office secretary, Abdul Latif Jony, had reached Shillong on Wednesday to meet her husband.