



A rickshaw, overloaded with containers and other materials, making its way on the busy DIT Road, amongst fast and heavy vehicles. Poor enforcement of traffic rules allows such non-motorised vehicles to ply Dhaka streets, often creating bottlenecks and sometimes causing accidents. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Anup Chetia sent to India

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Jail, Gazipur.

Two of his associates, Babul Sharma and Shakti Prasad Goswami, who were arrested with him in Dhaka, were also deported.

Hours after Chetia was received by a team of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in India, Modi spoke to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina over the phone thanking her for her cooperation in fighting terrorism.

During the conversation, Modi also wished Hasina on Diwali, according to a Twitter post of his office. Indian Home Affairs Minister Rajnath Singh on Twitter also thanked Bangladesh government for its active cooperation in sending Anup Chetia to India.

Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pankaj Saran was in Delhi for the last two days as details of the handover were being worked out, sources said.

After his arrest in Dhaka, Anup Chetia was charged with illegal trespassing without passport, illegally keeping foreign currencies and a satellite phone and subsequently was sentenced to seven years in jail. His two associates faced the same charges and punishment.

The Ulfa leader had sought political asylum in Bangladesh thrice -- in 2005, 2008 and 2011.

Despite the expiry of his prison term, he was in jail under a 2003 High Court directive asking the authorities to keep him in safe custody until a decision was made regarding the asylum plea.

Chetia, whose original name is Golap Baruah, is wanted for murder, abductions and extortions in India. Hailing from Jeraigaon in Tinsukia district, he is a neighbour of Ulfa's armed wing chief Paresh Baruah, now believed to have taken shelter in Myanmar.

Forty-eight-year-old Chetia is considered to be the only person in the insurgent group who can take on Paresh Baruah, who is against the peace talks.

Yesterday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) handed over the trio to the Border Security Force of India as their jail terms ended and Anup Chetia himself withdrew his petition he filed earlier with the High Court seeking political asylum.

Highly placed sources said they were deported through Dawki border in Sylhet.

The home boss primarily denied the handover, saying he was not aware of any such development. But around one and a half hours later, he said the government "freed" Chetia on completion of the jail term.

"Anup Chetia was detained under the law of this land and his jail term has completed. As he is a foreigner

and he expressed his interest to leave the country, we have freed him," the minister told reporters at his secretariat office at noon.

"If any foreigner completes his/her jail term, we always communicate with the embassy concerned. As Anup Chetia completed his jail term and wished to return to India, we communicated with the Indian High Commission and released him. It is the matter of Indian High Commission, how and when he crossed the border."

Although India and Bangladesh signed the extradition treaty on January 28, 2013, Chetia was not handed over under the treaty, he added.

The home boss quoted Chetia saying, "I am going back willingly and consciously and in good health."

Asked whether Chetia was handed over in exchange for prime accused of Naryanganj seven-murder Noor Hossain, now in a West Bengal prison, the minister said when the Indian government would say that Noor's jail term ended, he would be received by Bangladesh at the border.

Later in the day, Inspector General of Prisons Brig Gen Syed Iftekhar Uddin told reporters at the Department of Prisons that Chetia and his two aides served their term till 2004. But they still remained in jail as "released prisoners".

Foreigners, who complete their prison term but are kept in jails until having clearance from Bangladesh and their respective countries for deportation, are called "released prisoners".

He said Chetia applied twice for being sent back through the Indian mission instead of being deported through bordering area.

So the jail authorities handed him to an Indian embassy delegation at the jail gate on completion of all formalities.

After the latest release of the three, 80 more "released prisoners" of different countries are in jail in Bangladesh, Iftekhar Uddin said.

According to Indian home ministry sources, the process of Chetia's deportation has been going on for the last six months, added our New Delhi correspondent.

Earlier, Bangladesh sent back some other top Ulfa leaders, including Arabinda Rajkhowa, on December 2, 2009 through the border with northeastern Indian state of Assam. They have joined peace talks with Delhi.

Assam's Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi yesterday said Chetia hopefully would play an important role in the peace process. He added that the insurgent leader should be handed over to the state government because all cases against him are

registered in Assam.

"We believe that he will play an important role in the peace process. We have been demanding extradition of Chetia from Bangladesh for fruitful discussions between the government and pro-talks Ulfa faction," Gogoi said in a statement.

Gogoi said he expected the central government to release Chetia like the state government did in the case of other pro-talks Ulfa leaders like Arabinda Rajkhowa to "expedite the peace process".

Peace parleys is believed to be in advanced stage and the government may sign a pact with Ulfa leaders before the next year's assembly elections in Assam where India's ruling BJP is aspiring for power for the first time.

Chetia's wife and children have already returned to Assam from Bangladesh.

Apart from Rajkhowa, Ulfa's self-styled general secretary Chitranab Hazarika, deputy commander-in-chief Raju Baruah, foreign secretary Sasha Choudhary, vice-chairman Pradip Gogoi and two other leaders Mithinga Daimary and Bhimakanta Burhagohain (now deceased) were out on bail after their brief incarceration.

TIB never intends

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second to sixth sessions between June 2014 and July this year.

It also concluded that the main opposition Jatiya Party failed to play its due role in the sessions.

In the statement, TIB said criticism and media reports following its report drew the attention of its board of trustees.

The Parliament Watch report is objective, fact-based and research-oriented, the TIB statement says, as believed by the TIB board.

The report was based on information collected from the parliament secretariat, direct examination of parliament and the live broadcasts of the sittings on state-run Bangladesh Television, it adds.

"The report reflected the reality," However, if any part of the report or any comment of the TIB executive director hurt any honourable member of parliament, that is only because of misunderstandings, TIB said.

Meanwhile, several lawmakers of the treasury and opposition benches on Monday demanded that the Speaker summon TIB officials immediately to the House to question them over the "derogatory remarks" on parliament.

Suranjit Sengupta, chief of the parliamentary standing committee on law, the next day asked TIB to apologise for "humiliating" the House, constitution and the state, and said legal action would be taken otherwise.

Radicalism growing freely

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to systematically train law enforcers on counterterrorism.

Many of them cannot even distinguish religion from its twisted versions propagated by fundamentalists. Typically, many cops consider Islamists as "pious".

"During interrogations, police show sympathy to militants, treat them softly and in some cases get motivated by them," said an officer with direct knowledge of such interrogations.

Giving an example, he said that about a year ago a militant leader asked for some water during questioning. Two officers jumped off their seats together and rushed to bring water as the person was a so-called *hujur*, therefore, pious in their eyes.

"This tendency is high among lower-tier police members," he noted.

As a result, arrested militants enjoy a special status in prison, meet visitors freely, use cell phones and operate from jails, multiple investigators told The Daily Star.

"Counter-motivation and interrogation language training for interrogators can put a stop to their wrong perceptions and prevent them from being misguided or motivated by militants in custody," one investigator said.

But the worry is only the officers with the rank of assistant superintendent of police are given primary training on techniques to quiz militants during a yearlong programme at the Police Academy. There is no such training for sub-inspectors, assistant sub-inspectors and constables who as field-level cops have a vital role to play in fighting religious fundamentalism.

Security experts say the government treats the terrorism cases like ordinary criminal cases, as fighting extremism is not on its priority list. Police members are witnesses in many of the cases filed for terrorism over the past few years, but many of them do not appear in court to testify.

At least 154 militants have been sentenced to death over the last several years, but the verdicts are yet to be executed, sources said.

COMPETITION BETWEEN AGENCIES

Coordination among law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and sharing of intelligence are crucial for high-profile crime investigation.

But Bangladesh has a different practice. An unhealthy competition between agencies is on, and various agencies work separately and try to showcase their successes and discredit each other by capturing suspected militants, fake or real, according to insiders.

There are numerous examples where the arrest of some suspected militants by one agency led to the capture of more suspects by another.

"The fact is, they arrested some petty criminals and branded them as militants to get credit," said a senior officer of a law enforcement agency on the recent arrests of a group of suspects by another agency.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) are credited with capturing most of the militant suspects in recent years.

Formed as a special counterterrorism force, the Rab is well-equipped and makes regular arrests of suspected militants and criminals. However, the elite force is not playing a proactive role in combating extremism due to its "rivalry" with another agency, according to sources in both the agencies.

"A breakthrough in the investigation of the repeated attacks and killings of freethinkers could be made if all the

logistics, expertise and intelligence could be utilised in coordination," observed one officer.

In 2009, the counterterrorism unit of police was put on hold because an intelligence agency of a force wanted to be a part of it but the police and the government did not want it to be.

POOR POLITICAL WILL

The AL government rode to power seven years ago promising, among other things, to go tough on terrorism. But almost halfway through its second consecutive term, it failed to translate its words into action.

Worse, a nationwide sociopolitical and religious campaign involving imams and teachers initiated by the caretaker government in 2007-08 has gradually fizzled out under Sheikh Hasina's watch.

Under the campaign, anti-militancy sermons in mosques and statements at schools, screening plays and documentaries on TV and in public places to educate people about the evils of extremism were considered effective tools to fighting terrorism, but it did not continue.

"Misguiding and motivating people into the destructive path of extremism is easy," a home ministry official told this correspondent.

Speaking at a counterterrorism seminar in Dhaka last week, Indian security expert Syed Ata Hasnain said, "Fight against terrorism can't be won without engaging people."

But there is no such engagement of people in Bangladesh. And the government's commitment to this end is in question, as it sits on a proposal to establish a counterterrorism unit, which many countries have already developed to fight the growing danger.

There is another big concern. While on the one hand there is nothing -- no campaign, no publicity -- in place for deradicalisation, there are all elements of radicalisation on the other.

Religious sermons and teachings in hundreds of Qawmi madrasas across the country often promote fundamentalism and spread religious intolerance and hatred, security experts say, adding that Qawmi madrasas are the "hub of radicalisation".

Also, the arrested militants who are under trial or awaiting trial meet followers in courts and use this opportunity to radicalise them further. Inside the prison, they motivate inmates, creating new followers.

NO CAPACITY-BUILDING

Alleged corruption and political favouritism in recruitment are the reasons why the standard training for cops is compromised, leaving the recruits unfit for efficient policing against extremism.

Those who received training over the years at home were not allowed to develop expertise and enhance their ability to fight the evil force. And most of those who took advanced training and studied counterterrorism abroad are not engaged in counterterrorism.

One such police officer -- who took specialised training in various countries during his four-year engagement in combating militancy and is considered one of the few experts in the field -- was transferred to a district recently to look after overall law and order.

Similarly, a female officer who completed a higher degree on counterterrorism abroad is now posted at the Police Staff College.

"This is a total waste of expertise and resources," said an officer with knowledge of these developments.

On the other hand, in some cases the extremists are better trained and technologically more advanced than law enforcers, added the officer, asking

not to be named as the matter is sensitive.

Nur Mohammad, former inspector general of police who is now secretary to the youth and sports ministry, said officers should be assigned on consideration of their ability and expertise.

"Desired results will not come if the right officers are not placed at the right positions," he told The Daily Star.

ALL PARTIES ARE TO BLAME

Religious extremism emerged and took root under political governments as both the parties in power and in the opposition used the religion card to win support of the Islamists.

Terrorism thrived during the BNP-Jamaat rule in 2001-06. When the now banned militant outfits JMB and HuJ emerged as a serious threat, the BNP-Jamaat government at first denied their existence, but was eventually compelled to arrest some top militant leaders, including Bangla Bhai and Shaikh Abdur Rahman.

However, though the arrests of some top militants and their trial began back then, it was the nonparty caretaker government that successfully clamped down on militancy, capturing all top militant leaders and quickly punishing them in 2007-08. In 2007, six top militants, including Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai, were executed.

To keep the momentum, the caretaker government initiated a socio-cultural and religious campaign against extremism. A National Integrity Strategy was also formulated, implementation of which could have made people aware against radicalism, injustice and corruption.

Both initiatives lost their way after the AL took office in 2009, though on papers the party has a "zero-tolerance" policy for terrorism.

People's doubt about AL's "anti-militancy stance" is furthered by the party's silence about its ally Awami Ulama League's radical statements, the latter's demand for a law with provisions for death penalty for demeaning Islam, cancellation of "anti-Islamic" education policy, and confiscation of textbooks containing write-ups of "anti-Islamic and atheist" writers.

On the other hand, majority of the BNP's allies are in religion-based politics. Many leaders of these Islamist parties were directly involved in militant activities. Still, the BNP heavily relies on them to topple the government and return to power.

Party leaders would not go on record, but on condition of anonymity both the camps said they would not do anything that might "hurt even a single person and cost even a single vote".

Khadem killed

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organise religious lectures on his father's death anniversary. Preparations for this year's lectures were going on, they said.

Police officials suspected that Rahmat was killed by extremists who oppose majras and peers. They said the attack on Rahmat was largely similar to those of other peers and khadems including ex-PDB chairman Khajir Khan.

Having recovered the body, police sent it to Rangpur Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

ABM Zahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kaunia Police Station, said the body bore several injury marks of sharp weapons on the neck and the head.

He said police arrested Shahidul Islam, 35, and Morshed Ali, 32, of the same village for their suspected involvement in the killing.

"He might have been killed over previous enmity," the OC added.

No case was lodged in this connection till filing of the report at 4:00pm yesterday.

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