

Silencing accused for whose benefit?

FROM PAGE 1
investigators, who were expected to protect him like a piece of glass. Found to be helpless in countering targeted attacks over months, the law enforcers were expected to get some vital clues and information from Faizullah. All it needed was some extensive, intelligent interrogation for long. He should have been kept alive at any cost so that he could be used as a priceless witness in trial of the masterminds after they are nabbed.

But the law enforcers acted just the opposite. Why on earth they let a track to masterminds of targeted killings go dead in so much of a hurry? Whose purpose their action served actually? Killings in crossfire or gunbattle are not at all acceptable. And this one in particular is far too shocking and shrouded in loads of question.

A typical version of law enforcers stated how they came under fire from accomplices of Faizullah and how the exchange of fire took the life of an HSC examinee from Dhaka on the first day of his 10-day police remand. But the government must not buy this half-baked story as this action has possibly ruined a golden opportunity to know who are out to kill innocent people.

Since the middle of March, a different type of terror has been sending chill down the spine of a secular Bangladesh. Thirteen people have been hacked to death in the last three months, with the Madaripur teacher being the only survivor with serious injuries. All the incidents were identical: attackers turned up in a group of three, machetes were used in attack and victims were

low-key individuals from minority communities or free-thinkers.

And what follows the attacks is also quite identical. Police would invariably fail to arrest culprits. If, hours into the attack, US-based SITE Intelligence writes: Islamic State claims responsibility, our home minister responds: IS does not exist in Bangladesh.

The law enforcers would soon make a few arrests of so-called Jama'at al Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) operatives to back up the government claim that local terror groups are responsible for the attacks. And then all are forgotten till the next strike.

But when Faizullah was captured Wednesday, an opportunity was created to make a breakthrough in the investigation. Faizullah might have been a lower-tier operative, but by grilling him the investigators could have eventually unearthed the militant web and its main players. His death struck off that chance.

A culprit caught red-handed is undoubtedly a gift for any investigator. With the prized arrestee in hand, why did the police rush him out at 7:00 in the morning in a remote area of Madaripur for what they said an "operation"? Faizullah was based in Dhaka and is understood to have travelled to Madaripur for executing the plan of killing a Hindu teacher. How credible is the police claim that his accomplices would wait for cops to pounce on at an ungodly hour and at an unlikely location. It certainly beats the most incredulous of cinema scripts.

The safety of an accused on remand is the sole responsibility of the relevant forces. In this case, the police failed to ensure that. Police had earlier taken the accused to court with remand prayers by dressing him up with bullet-proof vest and helmet. But where have those life-saving gears gone when they took him out for the "operation"? Funnily though, they anticipate an attack on way to the court but don't expect it during any of their so-called wee-hour operation.

If law enforcers are to go by law, they are not even allowed to take a person on remand out for any such operation. A 2003 HC verdict clearly states: "The Investigation Officer shall interrogate the accused, if necessary for the purpose of investigation in a room specially made for the purpose with glass wall and grill in one side, within the view but not within hearing of a close relation or lawyer of the accused."

However, Faizullah reportedly started to give revealing information at his brief custodial stint. With his "admission", the name of the banned militant outfit Hizb-ut Tahrir came up for the first time. What else had Faizullah said to the police? Did he say something that made some law enforcers or certain influential persons uncomfortable? Did some vested quarters in the power circle feel that they are at the risk of being exposed? Why law enforcers had to rush with their "operation"?

There are many questions in the air. And the government, which is regarded widely by the world for its anti-militancy role, must come forward to

Dhaka has the full support of Delhi

FROM PAGE 1
people have been arrested. Sheikh Hasina has taken strong steps and Islamic leaders have condemned the killings. It shows the mentality of the country's people," Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj told the media in New Delhi.

She was answering questions on the recent killings in Bangladesh, reports Our New Delhi Correspondent.

Suspected militants attacked and killed university professors, writers, publishers, secular bloggers, gay rights activists, foreigners, policemen and members of religious minorities in the last few months.

Swaraj's comments came days after West Bengal units of Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress party voiced concern over the recent killings in Bangladesh and asked Bangladesh to put a stop to it.

On Friday, in a speech at the inaugural session of West Bengal Legislative Assembly, West Bengal Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi offered condolences to the families of the victims of "terrorist attacks" in Bangladesh, reports Our Kolkata Correspondent.

Yesterday, Swaraj said India had already taken up with the Hasina government the issue of the threat received by the Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka and asked the Bangladesh authorities to beef up security on the Mission premises in Gopibag.

On June 15, the head Hindu priest of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka got a threat to his life.

Asked if India accepts only Hindu refugees from other countries, Swaraj said, "Our refugee policy favours all persecuted minorities."

BJP, CONGRESS VOICE CONCERN
On Saturday, West Bengal Congress President Adhir Chowdhury said he had written to Swaraj, and also urged Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to use her cordial relationship with Hasina to address the issue.

His comments came after a special resolution was adopted at the BJP's state executive meeting in Siliguri on Friday condemning the attacks on minorities in Bangladesh.

"Communal forces in Bangladesh have been systematically targeting the minorities, including Hindu, Christian and Buddhists, and secular and liberal minded citizens. We came to know that the Hindu priest at Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka received a death threat. We are concerned about the present situation in Bangladesh," said Adhir Chowdhury.

The Congress leader, however, said he has full faith in Bangladesh government.

"Everyone knows the bond shared between West Bengal and Bangladesh. And the cordial relationship that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee shares with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. We have not heard about any active response from Banerjee so far," he said.

"Bengal being a neighbouring state [of Bangladesh] should be careful about the rise of communal forces in our state too. The state government is maintaining a complete silence on this matter. The state government remains unfazed on this matter," he alleged.

INDIAN ENVOY VISITS RK MISSION
India has expressed satisfaction over the increased security at the Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka after its head priest got a death threat.

The neighbouring country also conveyed the message that it was ready to extend all sorts of cooperation if Bangladesh wants it, reports Our Diplomatic Correspondent in Dhaka.

During his visit to the Mission yesterday, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Indian high commissioner in Dhaka, told journalists, "We have the fullest confidence that the authorities in Bangladesh are more than capable of providing safety and security for their own citizens.... The security arrangement around the mission cannot be better. We are quite satisfied with the arrangement. Although I am only a visitor here, I can only say things seem to be under control."

"We have to recognise that the responsibility of protecting the citizens of Bangladesh is the job of the government of Bangladesh.

"We do see that the government of Bangladesh has taken very very strong

measures to ensure that all people of the country including minority communities are provided security as much as possible," he added.

Shringla said they also understand that the magnitude of the challenges is quite significant.

"As a neighbour, as a friend of Bangladesh, as partner of Bangladesh, we can only offer our fullest support and assistance for anything where our support might be required, but otherwise we are fully confident about the capacity and the capabilities and also the resolution of the government to address the issue," said Shringla.

The Indian High Commission officials are in constant touch with the Ramakrishna Mission authorities and the Bangladesh government since the death threat was made, he added.

The Indian envoy was accompanied by First Secretary (Political & Information) Rajesh Uike, First Secretary (Consular) Ramakant Gupta and Press Attaché Ranjan Mondal.

SWARAJ ON TEESTA
Replying to a query on the Teesta water-sharing treaty, Sushma Swaraj said India is taking initiatives to conclude the deal.

"There are three parties in this. India, Bangladesh, West Bengal government. There were assembly elections in West Bengal. Now that elections are over and Mamata Banerjee is back as Chief Minister, the federal Indian government will begin talks with Mamata government to finalise the Teesta water sharing treaty."

Swaraj said no talks on the Teesta issue could be held with the West Bengal government for the last few months because the state was busy with the elections. But with the polls over, the process of talks would resume soon.

It is possible to solve the Teesta issue if the West Bengal government, New Delhi and Dhaka join hands with a firm resolve, she added.

There have been obstacles to the Teesta deal since September 2011 when Mamata, scheduled to visit Dhaka with the then Indian PM Manmohan Singh, opted out of the trip opposing the agreement.

Dhaka moves to strengthen ties

FROM PAGE 16
Dhaka has also offered to increase its engagement with Myanmar's apparently disadvantageous state of Arakan and support for its economic development through import of various agro-products from the state.

Diplomatic sources said the foreign ministry officials at a meeting with the Myanmar ambassador in Bangladesh last month conveyed Dhaka's eagerness to support Arakan for its economic development.

The foreign ministry officials said Bangladesh has decided to handle Myanmar "very softly" and would not raise any issues that may irk the neighbouring country.

To remove irritants, Bangladesh last

month suggested that Myanmar should not register Rohingya Muslims in their country as Bangalees or term them "illegal migrants from Bangladesh."

On the Rohingya issue, the foreign ministry officials said Dhaka would go soft in handling the issue considering sensitivity of the matter. Dhaka has recently made a formal offer for financial assistance and expertise to Myanmar to assist it in resolving the Rohingya problem.

During the meeting with the Myanmar ambassador in Dhaka, officials said Bangladesh has expressed its readiness to allow Myanmar vessels use its inland ports as both the countries have already marked Chittagong,

Mongla, Narayanganj and Teknaf ports in Bangladesh and Yangon, Patheingyi, Sittwe and Maungdaw ports in Myanmar for each other's use.

The two countries have re-established Dhaka-Yangon air connectivity and is now working on road and marine connectivity.

To reduce tension between the border guards of the two nations, Dhaka has also suggested signing a Memorandum of Understanding to hold regular dialogues on security matters.

Besides, the foreign ministry has been trying to convince Myanmar for more than a couple of years to create space for dialogues to build trust between the two nations.

China's

FROM PAGE 16
businessman interested in investing in the novel tourist attraction arrived in Xianfeng.

It wasn't long before the small village transformed into the tourist magnet people had envisioned when they came up with the idea of drawing in wild macaques. For years, it attracted both curious visitors and wealthy investors, and villagers felt like they had built their very own goldmine.

But everything changed two years ago, when main investor Zhou Zhenggui passed away, and his tourism company collapsed. The relatively small number of macaques originally attracted to Xianfeng had multiplied to a population of over 600, and they all relied on their human neighbours for food. Only without the support of Zhenggui's company, villagers couldn't afford to pay for it.

Having accepted the demise of their once great tourism project, villagers expected the now starving macaques to leave Xianfeng in search of food, but the monkeys had other plans. They had grown so fond of their home that they decided to stay indefinitely and do anything in their power to survive. That meant terrorizing the villagers, damaging their crops and homes, and fighting among themselves for food.

Residents of Xianfeng had only considered the positive effect of their monkey village idea, but had failed to foresee the negative consequences. And since macaques are a Class II national protected species, they had limited options of dealing with the animals. Over the last few years, animal experts have been placing traps around the village and have managed to trap and send away about 300 monkeys, but the remaining 300 are still terrorizing the locals and multiplying at an alarming rate.

Try as they might, Xianfeng villagers can't seem to get rid of the macaques they once worked so hard to attract. Experts say the animals are determined to stay in the mountain village and locals will just have to learn to co-exist with them until they decide to leave of their own accord. Whether that will ever happen, nobody really knows.

The story of China's monkey village and its problems has recently gone viral in national media, and everyone seems to agree that it teaches us a valuable lesson -- there is a clear boundary between man and nature, and attempting to exploit wildlife in search of economic gain clearly never ends well for any of the parties involved.

First consignment reaches

FROM PAGE 1
completing the source-to-destination cycle in 16 days. It takes about a month if trucks travel the existing route covering a distance of about 1,600km inside India.

The vehicles did not face any problem on the road, said Maksud Hossain, an official of Anbis Development Ltd, a Bangladeshi operator that hired ships and trucks to supply goods from Kolkata to Tripura's capital via Bangladesh.

However, the goods had to be unloaded at the warehouses manually since there was no modern facility in place, said Maksud who travelled with the trucks.

Customs officials escorted the trucks from Ashuganj to Akhaura on the Bangladesh side, he said, adding that police instead should have accompanied the vehicles since customs officials would not be able to deal with any unexpected situation or trouble.

According to the bilateral agreement, the National Board of Revenue is responsible for ensuring safety of Indian goods to be transhipped and customs is under the authority of the NBR.

On June 16, Ashuganj port witnessed the official launching of transhipment by unloading goods from the first consignment in the presence of ministers, lawmakers, senior government officials and top diplomats of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka.

Transhipment began amid a lack of proper infrastructure. To provide the facility, the port is now operating with a small makeshift jetty and a warehouse and a makeshift customs office.

Officials of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) said the port lacks space to keep containers or materials upon unloading from ships.

Some loose goods can be transported through the port and it will be done with the help of the temporary set-up.

Moreover, the road from Ashuganj to Akhaura is narrow.

During a visit to the multi-modal transit system over 52 kilometres from Ashuganj port to Akhaura land port, it was found that infrastructure is not ready yet for large scale transhipment of Indian cargoes.

A modern inland container depot is still at its initial phase at Ashuganj port, which would facilitate transhipment upon completion. The widening of a 30km stretch up to Akhaura is yet to start.

Transhipment takes the relations between Dhaka and New Delhi to a greater height.

After the Awami League-led government came to power in 2009, India began persuading Bangladesh to provide the transit facility.

India's aim was to use Angthara, the last checkpoint on its maritime border with Bangladesh, to carry goods to Ashuganj through the river route.

In 2010, Ashuganj was announced a Port of Call for transhipment.

That same year, a move was made to build a modern inland container depot with Indian credit on 28 acres of land on the banks of the Meghna river adjacent to Ashuganj food silo.

India would provide Tk 250 crore for building the container terminal but there has been little progress till now.

The land belongs to the railways and food ministries, Ashuganj fertilizer factory and private landowners.

Apart from the individuals, the authorities refused to give their land even after the government passed its approval, said Shipping Secretary Ashok Madhav Roy.

Locals said they could neither sell their land nor use it for other purposes since it was earmarked for acquisition.

The government has decided to make the depot on a separate piece of land, not owned by the ministries and the fertilizer factory, Ashok said, adding that the construction would begin soon.

A temporary terminal has been built by the side of the existing terminal for loading and unloading of local goods. As an interim arrangement, office buildings, parking yards and a small jetty have been built.

A private crane has been temporarily attached to the jetty for unloading Indian goods.

A paved road of half a kilometre connects the Ashuganj port with the highway. On both sides of the road trucks are parked always for carrying local goods. Transportation of heavy goods may cause severe traffic jam.

Trucks have to ply the Dhaka-Sylhet highway for 11km on their way to Akhaura checkpoint. That part is in good shape.

A distance of 18km to Sultanpur via Brahmanbaria remains very busy since goods trucks from Chittagong and Comilla ply the two-lane road. The road might not be fit for a huge number of trucks.

From Sultanpur to Akhaura, the road covering 10km has been improved with Indian finance in the last one year. It is in good condition now.

The road is narrow and has several dangerous turnings. The culverts are narrow too. Some 200 trucks ply the road each day for carrying goods of Bangladeshi exporters.

The authorities have sent a project proposal to the planning commission to turn the road into four lanes with loans from India. A vast area of land will have to be acquired to widen the road.

Uncertainty looms over the implementation of the project as locals oppose it.

The government is well aware of the infrastructure deficit.

Speaking with The Daily Star, Mashiur Rahman, economic affairs adviser to the prime minister, said, "If we want to expand trade with India, we need better infrastructure."

Key suspect killed

FROM PAGE 1
Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

It was only then that police found the dead was Sharif, the very man for whom detectives launched the drive early yesterday.

"We identified him through photographs released by police earlier," said Abdul Baten, joint commissioner of Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

Sharif alias Saleh alias Arif topped a list of six Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) members. Police a month ago announced award for information leading to their arrest.

His killing came a day after another suspected militant, Golam Faizullah Fahim, died in a similar "gunfight" in Madaripur, sparking widespread criticism by right activists and social media users as the suspects might have had some vital information about recent secret killings.

Faizullah was on a 10-day remand when the "shootout" took place. Locals caught him and handed him over to the police when he was fleeing after hacking college teacher Ripon Chakraborty on June 14.

With Sharif and Faizullah, at least 20, including seven suspected militants, were killed in "shootouts" since police launched a special crackdown against militants after the murder of a top police officer's wife in Chittagong.

According to police, six out of the seven suspected militants were involved in the killing of Rajshahi University teacher Prof Rezaul Karim

Siddique and attacks on Bogra Shia Mosque, Ahmadiyya mosque at Bagmara in Rajshahi and Kantaji Temple in Dinajpur.

WHO IS SHARIF?
"Sharif was among the men who directly took part in the Avijit killing. He hacked Avijit," Abdul Baten said at a press briefing at the DMP media Centre.

"He was clearly identified by experts in the CCTV footage."

On February 26, 2015, Avijit Roy was hacked to death and his wife Bonya Ahmed badly injured on Dhaka University campus after the couple came out of the Ekushey Boi Mela.

Prof Ajoy Roy, father of Avijit, came down hard on law enforcers for the killing of the murder suspect in the so-called shootout.

"It is unfortunate that the killers are being murdered in crossfire. The actual mystery behind the killings will not be unearthed if the killers are eliminated in the name of crossfire," he said.

"Not only fundamentalists, but also some in the police administration might have wanted it [elimination of killers] because if the killers speak, many things will come to light," he told The Daily Star.

He added "crossfire" is always condemnable and it is nothing but a way of covering up things.

Prof Ajoy, however, said he doesn't know whether Sharif was actually among the killers of Avijit and if he was identified properly.

Over the last three years, suspected militants have attacked and killed

university professors, writers, publishers, secular bloggers, gay rights activists, foreigners, policemen and members of religious minorities, including Shia and Sufi Muslims, Christians and Hindus.

About 50 people have become victims of such targeted killings since February 2013.

Abdul Baten said Sharif was also involved in the killings of blogger Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy, publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan inside his Jagriti Prokashani office in Shahbagh, Jagannath University student Nazim Uddin and LGBT activist Xulhaz Mannan and his friend Tonoy.

Sharif, who was from Satkhira, was a top organiser of ABT. He played a key role in recruiting ABT operatives, planning killings and coordinating many attacks, police also say.

Sometimes he took part in operations directly and sometimes remained in the backup team. According to the DMP website, Sharif used to train ABT men on firearms use and information technology.

Replying to a query from this correspondent whether police will face problems in probe as "suspected killers" are being killed in shootouts, Baten said, "If an accused remains in our custody and we get his or her confessional statement, it [the case] becomes strong."

"We don't think that the investigation will be hampered. We will be able to nab other accused and get statements from them."

He is considered by many as the main financier of the anti-liberation party.

Quasem allegedly paid \$25 million to an American lobbyist firm to carry out a smear campaign to make the war crimes trial controversial, the then law minister Shafique Ahmed told parliament on April 28, 2013.

In its full verdict, the apex court said Quasem is a very resourceful person and "is capable of engaging lobbyist firm by spending \$25 million to frustrate the trial of offences of crimes against humanity."

Mir Quasem

FROM PAGE 16
The lawyer said the ICT-2 convicted Quasem as an abettor of criminals, but the SC has upheld his death penalty considering him as the principal offender.

He expressed the hope that Quasem would get justice from the SC in his review petition.

In the 86-page petition, 14 grounds have been mentioned based on which the SC may consider the review petition, the lawyer added.

He said the SC knows very well when it would fix a date for hearing the

review petition of the member of Jamaat's central executive council.

The International Crimes Tribunal on June 6 issued a death warrant for Quasem Ali hours after the SC had released the full text of its verdict upholding his death penalty.

Earlier on November 2, 2014, the ICT-2 handed down capital punishment on 63-year-old Quasem, chief of Chittagong Al-Badr force, for committing crimes against humanity in 1971.

On March 8 this year, the Appellate Division upheld the ICT-2 verdict.

Obama immigration win at SC could benefit Trump

REUTERS, Washington

If the U.S. Supreme Court in the coming days decides a high-profile immigration case in favor of the Obama administration, the ruling could have an unexpected beneficiary: Republican presidential contender Donald Trump.

The Obama administration is asking

the high court to revive its 2014 proposal to protect up to 4 million people from deportation, a plan that was blocked by lower courts. The court could rule that a president has broad authority to interpret and enforce federal immigration law.

Such a ruling would allow Obama to implement his signature executive action on immigration, aimed at the parents of U.S. citizens' children, before he leaves

office. It could also help Trump, who has put forth his own sweeping and controversial plans on immigration ahead of the Nov. 8 election.

"To the extent the court has language about the president's wide authority in immigration law generally, that would certainly strengthen Trump's hand," said Stephen Yale-Loehr, an immigration law expert at