

Lest we forget



A case for justice

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 ministry," Munshi Atiqur Rahman, investigation officer of the case, told The Daily Star last night. "The file was sent to the law ministry. I don't know what happened to it."

Prof. Farida accused two Al-Badr members -- Chowdhury Mainuddin and Ashrafuzzaman, now living in London -- for the killing of her brother.

The CID conducted an intensive probe during which it talked to the families of the martyred teachers of Dhaka University, other teachers and students of that time and watched the sensational British Channel 4 programme, War Crimes File, to get cues on more links.

The CID also sought Interpol's help and the British government assured it of help in the investigation.

The CID made 40 persons as witnesses to the case.

According to the witnesses, Chowdhury Mainuddin, who then worked at The Pakistan Observer, and Ashrafuzzaman, a student of

Dhaka University, picked up eight university teachers -- Dr Murtaza, Dr Fayedul Mohi, Dr Abul Khayer, Prof. Rashidul Hasan, Prof. Anwar Pasa, Prof. Serajul Haq, Dr Santosh Bhattacharya and Dr. Gias Uddin -- on December 14.

Mainuddin and Ashrafuzzaman, armed with rifles, came to the campus by a East Pakistan Road Transport Corporation bus and took the teachers to an unspecified place. Their mutilated bodies were found on January 5 at Mirpur killing field.

While the investigation was going on, a former top criminal lawyer late Serajul Haque said "a fruitful result cannot be expected if the trial of the case is conducted under the existing law of the land". Therefore, the trial of the case should be conducted under the International War Crimes Act, he felt.

Under the act, a complaint may be lodged or trial may be conducted regarding all crimes against humanity such as murder, exter-

mination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, confinement, torture, rape or other inhuman acts committed against any civilian population on political, racial, ethnic or religious grounds.

The government may, by an official gazette notification, set up one or more tribunals each consisting of a chairman and not less than two and not more than four other members, Haque noted.

It is not the only time that a probe into the killings has run out of steam.

After the independence, the government ordered an inquiry into the killings and a deputy superintendent of police started investigation. But he could not complete the probe after the August 1975 killings and change of government.

Police

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 UNDP," said State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, who received the 'Project Support Document' from Jorgen Lissner, the resident representative of the UNDP in Dhaka.

"We're very much hopeful that we'll be able to bring a total change to the police administration."

In November, the UNDP submitted a 100-page need assessment report, Strengthening of Bangladesh Police, prepared by national and foreign experts.

The UNDP proposed to develop the existing police force, giving new assignments to constables.

It said the 1.9 lakh-member police force had 80,000 constables and lacked in investigation officers that leads to a stack of non-probed cases.

"The quality of investigation is also suffering for want of investigation officers," the UN agency observed.

According to sources, the World Bank expressed its readiness to provide loan for the project.

The UNDP report also asked to cut political pressure on the force and promote efficient people as officers.

Every officer-in-charge should be trained to deal with media professionals, the report said, asking the police to do homework before any arrest.

Home Secretary Muhammad Omar Farooq, Inspector General of Police Shahidul Haque, UNDP Programme Officer Manjurul Kabir and senior Special Branch officials were present at the document handover event.

Sources said the document would be discussed at a workshop on police reforms and criminal justice at the Prime Minister's Office on December 19.

Hasina demands

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 Addressing the meeting, Hasina strongly condemned police action on activists of the 11-Party Alliance, including Rashed Khan Menon, during yesterday's hartal.

She said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government could give nothing to the people but terrorism, corruption, politicisation and nepotism.

"They have made the country a safe haven for the communal groups... People are burnt to death, angry mobs lynch people and human rights are violated in every sphere of the society," she said.

People are now fed up as the coalition government has been "misusing" its power and has failed to establish good governance.

Referring to lynching incidents in Noakhali, Hasina asked why people in the constituency of the law minister would take the law in their hand. "People have lost their faith in the government and that's the cause of such brutal incidents," she said.

She said the previous Awami League government had planned to set up Swadhinata Stambha at Suhrawardy Udyan but works on the project were stopped after the BNP-Jamaat coalition came to power.

Benazir

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 with "everyone" and this indicated that a meeting between Musharraf, the man who wields the "real power" in Pakistan, and the Indian Prime Minister would take place.

"This is just as well as the Pakistani Premier's position is presently ceremonial and will remain so until power is transferred to parliament," Benazir, who was dismissed as prime minister in 1996, said.

Poura chairman

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 appeal. The High Court rejected his appeal and directed him to surrender before the special tribunal within a month.

At this, he filed a petition seeking leave to appeal with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court but it was also rejected.

Absar has been absent from the pourasava for the last three months. Official sources said more than a dozen corruption cases against him are now either under trial or investigation.

Coastguard

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 Saber Majhi brought the boys to Dublar Char from Chittagong promising lucrative jobs. Then they were forced to do hard work like fishing in the Bay.

The victims alleged they went half-fed every day, were tortured for expressing inability to do hard jobs and given no pay. People guarding them also subjected them to sodomy, the boys alleged.

Meanwhile, a combing operation by coast guards is going on in Dublar Char to unearth such hideouts maintained by fish traders.

Martyred Intellectuals Day

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 ties were hand-picked from the city and were massacred at Rayerbazar and other killing fields.

Political, cultural and civil society organisations will reminisce about the great tragedy that took place only two days before the fall of the Pakistani army in Bangladesh at the end of a nine-month war.

To mark the day, different socio-cultural and political organisations have planned elaborate programmes, including discussions and wreath-laying at Mirpur and Rayerbazar monuments.

The Awami League, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) will hold discussion meetings on the occasion.

Bangladesh Udichi Shilpi Gosthi will hold discussion meeting and cultural function to mark

the day.
 President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages on the eve of the Martyred Intellectuals Day.

In his message, the president described the brutal killing of the country's intellectuals by the occupation forces with the help of local collaborators on the eve of victory as a black chapter in our national history.

"The nation will never forget the evil design of the killers, and the supreme sacrifice of the intellectuals will inspire all to be imbued with patriotism," the president said.

He paid homage to the martyred intellectuals and prayed for eternal peace of their souls.

Khaleda in her message said,

"The supreme sacrifice of the intellectuals will be meaningful only if we can work together for the welfare of the country, sinking all differences."

She conveyed sympathy to the members of the martyred intellectuals' families.

Sheikh Hasina called upon the people to build a vigorous movement against "unholy forces" to uphold the spirit of the War of Independence to pave the way for a democratic and non-communal society.

Hasina paid tribute to the martyred intellectuals and conveyed sympathy to their families.

Former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury in a statement yesterday also paid tributes to the martyred intellectuals.

Rajuk's plot

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 ment as it found its capacity below the marks.

Members of the committee, from both treasury and opposition benches, came down heavily on Rajuk staff's corruption and irregularities.

The CAG's office raised 10 objections to Rajuk between FY 1998-99 and 2000-2001, saying the low point was the plot allocation to the Society at a rate of Tk 3 lakh an acre, much below the market prices of Tk 10.70 lakh a katha in 1994 and Tk 15 lakh a katha in 1998.

The CAG's office earlier raised objections to the cut-price sales and asked the secretary of the ministry to explain reasons for such actions, but the ministry is yet to reply.

At the committee meeting yesterday, Housing and Public Works Secretary Aminur Rahman and Rajuk Chairman Iqbal Uddin Chowdhury defended the allotments, saying the moves were aimed at welfare of the Society.

"As the Society does not work for the welfare of people, there is no need to allocate them government plots," said Sultan Mahmud Babu, a committee member. Other members of the committee echoed his view.

Responding to a query of the CAG's office, the secretary said about 200 kathas of the Gulshan-Banani lake fell to grabbers hands. Of the land, 142 kathas have been recovered, he added.

BB fines

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 among banks of taking deposits at high rates, which pushes up lending rates as well.

Earlier, the central bank instructed the banks that they cannot take deposits at rates higher than the declared ones. On the other hand, many bankers had complained to the central bank that they cannot cut rates as some banks secretly pay more than the declared rates on deposits.

Banking sources put down such practices to managers often scurrying to fulfil their deposit target by paying high rates. Sometimes, high rates are offered to bank insiders.

The BB has found that the six banks had even offered 3 percentage point more than their declared rates.

BB inspection teams had visited 37 branches of 26 banks to reveal the anomalies.

Sources said the central bank will also warn the chief executive officers of the banks to avoid such practices in future.

Block 9 drilling

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 drilling programme ahead that was originally scheduled to begin from October 14, then shifted to mid-November, late November and early December.

This exploratory well drilling that fell under the second round block bidding two years back also marked the maiden venture for any Bangladeshi company to operate alongside foreign oil giants with a share of 10 percent.

The block partners will drill a second well in the Gumti river area a month after the Kashimpur operation. As per the PSC, which was signed on April 11, 2001, they are scheduled to drill another well before April 2004.

The oil companies would spend about 6 million dollars for each of these wells.

Considered as a highly prospective zone, Block 9 is situated at the heart of country's gas pipeline network, a location that gives a built-in advantage to explorers to mobilise equipment as well as the access to the national gas grid.

Jamal's son

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 before. So he cannot die just because he was 'scared' while on police remand or during questioning. No-one will believe that Amar died a natural death," the source added.

Meanwhile, a three-men committee headed by Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police's Riot Control Division Noor Mohammad yesterday started probing Amar's death.

2 more flyovers

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 posal involving Tk 3.43 crore.

Official sources said the government would soon award contract to the selected firm for carrying a detailed feasibility study.

A high-profile meeting held yesterday with Local Government Division Secretary AYBI Siddiqui in the chair agreed to expedite the construction of the flyovers.

Official sources said the KFAED is expected to provide loan for the project, as well.

Beneficiaries

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 will determine the number of senior citizens to be eligible for the benefits.

The previous Awami League government introduced the scheme in July 1997 with an initial fund of Tk 26 crore and a monthly allowance of Tk 100 each.

The BNP government put further emphasis on the scheme by including it in its Poverty Reduction Programme. The allocation for old-age allowance this fiscal is Tk 180 crore.

At present, a committee of two locally reputed persons headed by a ward member or ward commissioner selects persons for the allowance.

Noted researcher of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies Binayak Sen said Gram Sarkar cannot be fully entrusted with the selection job. "Gram Sarkar bodies were formed hastily and if they prepare a list, there is a great chance that it will have political preference. It will not be desirable at the present stage of formation of Gram Sarkar to hand over the responsibility to it," he pointed out.

Sen said he also proposed to the cabinet committee to give more emphasis on areas like Rangpur, where poverty is severe.

But Saifur said it might not be possible to do so right now. He however added it could be possible to divert more funds to the poorest districts from budgets of the old district level or A-grade municipalities.

Left-alliance hartal

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 was treated at the DMCH.

Rashed Khan Menon, co-ordinator of the 11-party left alliance and president of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh, also came under police attack when he along with other senior leaders tried to rescue fellow workers. During the police swoop Menon fell on the street. However, he did not receive serious injury.

Police were seen clubbing and kicking the pro-hartal pickets indiscriminately during the attack. Some of the pickets lay on the street to prevent traffic movement.

Left-wing leaders blamed police for attacking the hartal pickets, specially women, without any provocation. But Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Ashraful Huda at a press briefing refuted the allegation and said policemen were compelled to chase the pro-hartal pickets as they were pelting stones at vehicles.

Addressing a post-hartal rally at city's Muktangan, 11-party alliance leaders announced a fresh action programme including two-hour rail and road blockade from 12:00 noon to 2:00pm on January 8 as part of their continuous anti-government agitation programme.

The hartal hours in Dhaka were marked by the movement of few motorised vehicles on the roads, closure of business establishments, shopping malls and educational institutions. Inter-district buses stayed off the road. Activities in government offices and banks went on with poor staff attendance.

Armed policemen stood guard at various points to crack down on troublemakers.

Movement of rickshaws yesterday, unlike other hartal days, was thin on city streets as a strike called by Rickshaw Malik Oikya Jote (an alliance of rickshaw owners) coincided with the 11-party alliance hartal call. The rickshaw owners called the strike to protest government measures making different city roads off-limit to rickshaws and demanding renewal of rickshaw licences.

At Muktangan rally the left-wing leaders said people have expressed their no-confidence in the present government by observing the hartal spontaneously.

They announced a demonstration in the city tomorrow in protest of yesterday's police 'atrocities.'

Iraqi army

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 40,000 members of light infantry battalions by next October. That contradicts reports that the U.S. military had scaled back that goal.

EU adopts

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 ired by plans -- championed by Paris and Berlin at the height of strains over Iraq -- to establish a separate military headquarters, branding them "the most serious threat" to NATO's future.