

How long will the UK harbour a mass murderer?

War criminal Chowdhury Mueen Uddin is suing the British Home Secretary after enjoying almost five decades of immunity



SHUPROVA TASNEEM

HOW does a country come to terms with a blot in its history as dark as the mass murder of intellectuals during the liberation struggle of

Bangladesh? No matter how fierce or intense a war is, how does anyone, anywhere, even begin to explain the level of cruelty that motivates one to knock on the doors of academics, journalists, writers and doctors—not soldiers or even politicians, but civilians who make up the moral backbone of a revolution and shape the hopes of a new nation—only to slaughter them in cold blood as the last act of cowardice before conceding defeat?

Perhaps the most suitable words to describe the war crimes committed at Rayer Bazaar on December 14, 1971, were used when the chairman of the International Crimes Tribunal-2 read out the punishment for war criminals Chowdhury Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman Khan for their complicity in the killing of martyred journalist and poet Selina Parveen. The brutal death by bayonet charge of Selina Parveen, who in her last moments begged for her life for the sake of her child, were described as “an impious butchery... a sacrilegious act... (and) a shame for human civilisation”. Both these men were also charged and convicted for the torture and killing of 17 other intellectuals, including the playwright professor Munier Chowdhury, novelist and journalist

Shahidullah Kaiser, and professor of Cardiology Mohammed Fazle Rabbee.

Yet, halfway across the world in the UK, the leader of the infamous Al-Badr and convicted war criminal Mueen Uddin, confidently claimed that the charges against him were completely false. Despite the testimony of the widow of eminent scholar professor Mufazzal Haider Chaudhury, who saw Mueen Uddin lead her husband away to his death; despite the testimony of the widow of journalist Sirajuddin Hussain, who saw a similar sight; despite testimonies from Mueen Uddin's colleagues at *Daily Purbodesh* of his intimate knowledge of the detention centres and his handing over of information to Pakistani officers in 1971; and despite hundreds of pages of harrowing testimonies that acted as evidence during the war crimes trials in Bangladesh—Mueen Uddin was able to casually dismiss decades of pain and denial of justice from the safety of his one million pound home in London.

How ironic that the country that has sheltered him since 1972, that allowed him to become a British citizen and even take up a role in its National Health Service as a director of Muslim Spiritual Care Provision, knowing full well the crimes he had committed—as early as January 1972, the *New York Times* identified him “as the head of a secret, commando—like organisation of fanatic Moslems that murdered several hundred prominent Bengali professors, doctors, lawyers and journalists in a Dacca brickyard”—is now facing a libel lawsuit for their efforts. Mueen Uddin is suing British Home Secretary Priti Patel for 60,000 pounds after she shared a report on Twitter linking him to war crimes during Bangladesh's Liberation War in

1971, according to the *Daily Mail*. The fact that a right-wing tabloid like the *Daily Mail* has taken up this story most enthusiastically is telling—historically, their tone has been decidedly anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim, and cases like these only add fire to the fodder while completely overlooking Britain's complicity in the matter.

Why is a man like Mueen Uddin still living an easy breezy life of luxury in the UK, when ordinary Bangladeshi



Chowdhury Mueen Uddin photographed in Britain where he fled to after the 1971 Liberation War.

immigrants live with the threat of deportation hanging over their heads due to the “hostile environment” created by the British Home Office? The death of Paulette Wilson on July 23, who was nearly deported after 50 years of living in the UK, has renewed focus on the 2018 Windrush scandal, where a huge number of British citizens of Caribbean origin were wrongfully detained and threatened with

deportation. Even in February this year, a young father who has lived in the UK since he was 12 years old was deported to Jamaica—it seems a two year conviction for non-violent burglary offences is enough to get you kicked out, but war crimes committed in your youth will be received with a blind eye and turning of the cheek.

So far, Bangladesh has not been able to negotiate an extradition treaty with the UK. The oft-repeated excuse for this is Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR), which stipulates that if a person “faces a real risk of being subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the requesting country”, he cannot be extradited. Given that Mueen Uddin has already been handed the death penalty by the International Crimes Tribunal, the UK cannot hand him over to us on moral grounds. As is often the case with our capricious (ex) colonisers, this strong moral compass seems to have disappeared in the case of Shamima Begum—after being groomed by extremists as a teenager, becoming an “ISIS bride” and losing her baby to pneumonia in the Syrian refugee camps, the UK has still revoked her British citizenship and has only recently allowed her permission to enter the country to fight for it.

What is really alarming is the level of influence that the UK has allowed a war criminal like Mueen Uddin to wield, while at the same time bullying others with far lesser crimes than his. In 2010, Channel 4 Dispatches investigated the extremist ideologies of the Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE)—of which Mueen Uddin is the founder—and how it was spreading across East London from East London Mosque with the ultimate aim of creating an Islamic

state with sharia law in Europe. Despite these revelations and the subsequent expulsion of Tower Hamlets' mayor Lutfur Rahman from the Labour Party—he was later found guilty of electoral fraud and corruption—Mueen Uddin was allowed to continue to work with Muslim Aid (he still remains a trustee) and be closely involved with the Muslim Council of Britain. Through these actions, Mueen Uddin has managed to become a self-styled “British Muslim leader” and use his influence and lobby to challenge the accusations against him—in 2009, *The Guardian* was forced to print an apology for publishing allegations of involvement in genocide against him because he “has never been prosecuted, charged nor even arrested in connection with these events”.

It is high time for the British government to stop looking the other way when it comes to Chowdhury Mueen Uddin. It is in their interests to stem the extremist ideologies coming from British-Bangladeshi “Muslim leaders” like Mueen Uddin and in the wake of Brexit, it is even more in their interest to build relations with Commonwealth countries like Bangladesh. On our end, we must pursue the establishment of an extradition treaty with the UK with renewed political will. If nothing else, the UK must apply the principle of universal jurisdiction (like they did with Pinochet), which allows states to claim criminal jurisdiction over an accused person regardless of where the alleged crime was committed, and arrange for trials themselves. We have already waited 49 years for justice.

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Choosing your child over 'family honour'

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THE injustice against Nusrat Jahan Rafi, who was sexually abused and later set ablaze on the terrace of her madrasa, shook the country. Yet, despite the cries, protests, and banners that read “Stop Sexual Abuse”, Bangladesh remains rooted in its poisonous conservative practice: ignoring the sexual violence against children when the abusers are family members. This unjustified stigma that silences victims from a very young age leads to re-victimisation—through victim-shaming or being sexually harassed again—and protects perpetrators for the sake of family honour. Children who have no knowledge of their experiences fail to describe it, and many remain silent about their experiences for fear of being re-victimised. This silence surrounding sexual abuse and the lack of action thereof permit the perpetrators to commit such crimes in broad daylight.

This silence is largely influenced by parental denial in children's accusations against a family member. Parental denial stems from a variety of reasons: the fear of jeopardising family honour, becoming detached from society in fear of shame, having to become financially segregated if the family is dependent on the accused member, and more. Yet the most significant reason is to protect one's child from re-victimisation. Victim-shaming is instilled in our society, whether it be toward a child or a woman. Thus the possibility of a child being re-victimised through scrutinising her flaws, independence, outfit, or even designating her as the reason for abuse, makes parents hesitant to raise their voices against perpetrators.

Victim-shaming, regardless of

socioeconomic status, primarily creates the cycle of abuse, escape, and re-victimisation that prevents parents from taking legal action against the perpetrators, especially if the perpetrator is a renowned and prominent figure in society. This further reinforces the economic and class divisions in our society and incentivise those in power to escape without a blemish on their



records and further silence victims through threats and other means.

In recent months, Bangladesh has witnessed an alarming rise in sexual abuse cases and violence against children. Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) published a report that estimated that in the first six months of 2019, there were 496 incidents of children being raped. However, BSAF claims that the numbers are likely to be

higher, as many victims do not report sex crimes in fear of being blamed, disowned, or ostracised.

Our society stigmatises “sex”, “menstruation”, and “rape” as taboo due to which sex education is uncommon in the country. The gaps in children's understanding of sexual health limit their interactions with others and suppress social skills. Parents

believe that limited information should be shared with children about sexual abuse as it can arouse curiosity among children, and push them to learn more about the topic through different means, such as inappropriate media content, sensitive images, etc.

Parental concerns about sexual education in our country should be given the utmost importance while remaining aware of the repercussions

of not having a structured discussion on the topic. Sexual education is perceived as identifying reproductive organs and sexual abstinence, which disregards the holistic education that is quite necessary in our institutions. A holistic sexual education course would entail: learning about age of consent, emotional relations and responsibilities, reproductive health, and more.

The holistic approach of sexual education, either taught in educational institutions or by parents, firmly distinguishes affection from sexual abuse and harassment maliciously imposed on children by some family members. This validates accusations made by children against their perpetrators, disproving doubtful parents. Hence, parents are spurred to action that can stop the heinous trend of sexual abuse in the family, as well as save children who silently accept severe pain and violation of their human rights.

Parents need to break the silence around sexual abuse and harassment. Parental neglect and a continuation of abuse result in several psychological issues that develop throughout childhood. Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, fear, poor nutrition, and low self-esteem are a few psychological hazards that affect the victims for their entire lives. The emotional bond between parents and children is destroyed through neglect and disbelief, the consequence of which is a child's development without love, trust, and support.

When a child experiences discomfort from affection by a family member, he or she cannot readily justify their feelings. However, a strong bond between parents and the child, which fosters a supportive environment,

encourages the child to voice his/her experiences. After all, if children do not open up about their experiences, how would the parents become aware of their child being sexually violated?

The first step to breaking the silence around sexual abuse is to acknowledge sexual violence as a topic of discussion. Talk with your child and ask them about their interactions with family members. Ask them how their day at school was or if any problems arose at home while you were away at work. If your child is attended to by a caretaker, ask your child about their interactions with them. Be conscious about whom your child is associating with, whom your child is sleeping next to or sharing a room with, and the people in your child's surroundings. Good parenting requires strong communication between parents and children so that there is never hesitation in confiding in each other.

Bangladesh has now become a breeding ground for perpetrators even in the presence of law and order. Thus, sexual abuse should not be a controversial topic for discussion in our country, where 2-year-olds are maliciously raped and mercilessly killed. Children who have been victims of sexual abuse need safe and nurturing relationships to recover from the traumatising experiences that they perchance cannot stave off. It is the responsibility of parents to form this healthy and positive relationship with their children. Saving your children from sexual predators who are family members is far more important than, if not equivalent to, saving family honour. As parents, it is your duty to provide the safe childhood every child deserves.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



JULY 26, 1956
Suez Canal seized

On this day in 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser seized control of the Suez Canal and nationalised it, sparking a crisis that later resulted in French, British, and Israeli forces briefly occupying parts of Egypt.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Optimal
- 5 Compare
- 11 Director
- 12 Call it a day
- 13 Realty unit
- 14 Threw a party
- 15 Pi follower
- 16 Poll numbers
- 17 Nary a soul
- 19 “You there!”
- 22 Oliver Twist's mentor
- 24 Boosted
- 26 Persia, today
- 27 “Frozen” queen
- 28 Annoying folks
- 30 Bars on cars
- 31 Descartes's conclusion

DOWN

- 1 Sow's mate
- 2 Engrave
- 3 Use force on
- 4 Sock part
- 5 Patriot Allen
- 6 Brokers' numbers
- 7 Bear in the air
- 8 Wee worker
- 9 Even score

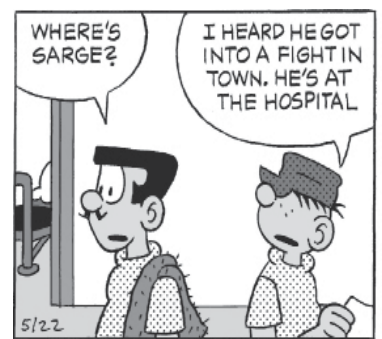
- 10 Break off
- 16 Singer Henley
- 18 Sty cry
- 19 Ability to drink a lot
- 20 Different
- 21 Some votes
- 22 Pacific nation
- 23 Vicinity
- 25 Phone message
- 29 Dishwashing aid
- 30 Penguin's cousin
- 33 Took it easy
- 34 Broadcast
- 36 In addition
- 37 “Shucks!”
- 38 Depressed
- 39 Bauxite, e.g.
- 40 Operated
- 41 Time of planning



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.