

BNP can't deny Zia's involvement in 1975 carnage plot: PM

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said BNP couldn't deny the Ziaur Rahman's involvement in the August 15, 1975 carnage as the killers of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman confessed to have full support from Zia for the killing.

"BNP could not refuse that Ziaur Rahman was involved in the assassination of the Father of the Nation as the killers, (removed) Col Faruk and Rashid, in an interview with the BBC told that Zia was with them as he [Zia] instructed them to go ahead and he [Zia] extended all sorts of assistance in carrying out the August 15, 1975 carnage," she said.

The PM, who was speaking as the chief guest in a virtual discussion from Gono Bhaban through a video conference, said that truth can't be suppressed no matter how much BNP shouts defending their party leader.

The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) organised the discussion marking the National Mourning Day and the 45th martyrdom anniversary

of Bangabandhu at the AL's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue.

Hasina said Zia did everything that required to destroy a nation, adding, "Zia had destroyed the student community as he pushed many meritorious students to different tracks with giving them arms and money. He took the students to a pleasure trip in the ship 'Hilful Fujul' which Bangabandhu brought for conducting Hajj."

Following the footprints of her husband, Khaleida Zia did the same thing in terms of using students for personal gain.

The PM urged BCL leaders and workers to follow the ideals and philosophy of Bangabandhu, saying: "The Father of the Nation never thought of his own personal wellbeing, but rather the welfare of the people and the country."

She asked BCL leaders and activists to read the three books written by Bangabandhu, namely "Amar Dekha Naya Chin" "Asamapta Atmajiboni" and "Karagarer Rojnamcha," saying, "If you want to be leaders, you should read these books to learn about good politics."

Govt sits on UGC proposal

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classes since all the institutions were closed on March 17 to contain the spread of Covid-19 infection.

These institutions will remain closed till October 3.

As the universities are closed for a long time, students are facing immense academic losses. Many are fearing to face session jam if the situation continues for a few more months. The UGC has urged all universities to go for online classes to minimise the loss of the students.

Currently, private universities and most of the public universities are offering online classes.

Most of the major public universities are conducting online classes with only about half of the students as the rest cannot attend classes either due to poor internet coverage in their areas or their lack of access to the digital device.

The speed of mobile internet connection, while moderate in urban areas, is quite poor in most rural locations, where broadband providers have no presence.

Moreover, the additional Value Added Tax (VAT) on internet use has further increased the cost of the internet.

According to telecom insiders, students who used to pay Tk 1,000 for internet will now have to pay Tk 1,300-Tk1,400 for the same usage.

Vice-chancellors of most public universities demanded free internet packages for their students at a

meeting with the University Grants Commission on June 25.

Five days later, the UGC, in a letter to the education ministry, urged the government to introduce free internet packages for university students.

The regulatory body also sought grants or soft loans for students who would need to buy smartphones to get access to online classes, according to UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah.

Copies of the letter were sent to the posts and telecommunications division and the ICT division.

On July 6, Education Minister Dipu Moni said, "Many educational institutions are conducting online academic activities due to the pandemic, but it has become difficult for many students to bear the internet expenses."

"Negotiations are on with the mobile operators so that they consider providing free internet services or low-cost internet packages for students," she said, while attending a webinar organised by the ruling Awami League.

Education ministry officials said they were working on the issue.

"We are working on how students can easily get digital device and internet at the lowest price. We hope that we will be able to update the details regarding the matter during the first week of September," Dipu Moni said on Thursday.

Kuwait CID summons

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reported Kuwait Times on Sunday, quoting Arabic newspaper Al-Rai.

CID officials in Bangladesh said they are also looking for Badrul over similar charges.

Papul, who co-owns Marafie Kuwaitia Group with a Kuwaiti citizen, was arrested by Kuwait CID on June 6 and sent to jail after being interrogated by prosecutors.

He is accused of trafficking some 20,000 people, mostly Bangladeshis, in exchange for Tk 7-9 lakh each. Migrants alleged that many of them were not provided with jobs and wages as promised and were instead charged money for work permit renewal.

Papul also faces charges of bribing Kuwaiti officials for contracts for his company, the recruitment of foreign workers and laundering of millions of dollars.

Maj Gen Mazen Al-Jarrah, assistant undersecretary at Kuwait interior ministry, was suspended on June 30 for allegedly accepting bribes and making financial transactions linked to Papul's company.

Meanwhile, two Kuwaiti MPs -- Saadoun Hammad and Salah

Khorsheed -- who were detained and interrogated by prosecutors were released on Saturday on KD 10,000 (Tk 27.7 lakh) bail each, Al-Rai reported.

They were detained on allegations of their involvement with Shahid Islam Papul, but both the MPs denied abusing their power and knowing Papul or having any connections with him.

Bangladesh's CID, also probing human trafficking charges against Papul, has claimed to have gleaned important information from an employee of Job Bank International, a recruiting agency owned by Papul's brother Kazi Badrul Alam.

Golam Mostafa, accountant of the recruiting agency, was arrested on August 20 in a case filed by several trafficking victims with Motijheel Police Station on July 7. Mostafa on August 24 gave a confessional statement to a court.

"As Kazi Badrul's name has already surfaced in a confessional statement, we will bring trafficking charges against him," a CID official told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

3 accused appeal for retracting

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appealed to withdraw their statements while the hearing was underway.

The court, however, did not grant them bail and sent them to jail.

Later, lawyer Rokon said they would file another bail petition with the district judges' court on Wednesday.

On August 27, the court asked OC of Narayanganj Sadar Police Station Asaduzzaman and closed sub-inspector Shamim Ala Mamun, who was also investing officer (IO) of the case, to appear before the court and explain the incident by Tuesday.

The class-five girl student went missing on July 4. Her father filed a case with the police station on August 6 over abduction of his daughter.

Later, police arrested three accused -- Md Abdullah, 22, Md Rakib, 19, and Khalilur Rahman, 36.

On August 9, the accused testified under section 164 in separate courts of Narayanganj Senior Judicial Magistrate

and Judicial Magistrate. In their confessional statements, the accused said they had killed the girl after raping her and dumped her body into the Shitalakkhya river, said police.

After their confessional statements, the accused were sent to jail.

On August 24, a police team, however, found the girl alive in Kushiara area of Narayanganj's Bandar upazila, 49 days after she had gone missing.

Later, the girl and her family members said she had no links with the three accused. Rather, she eloped with one of her friends named Iqbal willingly.

Meanwhile, police yesterday produced Iqbal before Narayanganj Judicial Magistrate with a five-day remand prayer. But the court rejected the prayer and sent him to jail.

In another development, SI Shamim was suspended yesterday over the incident, Jayedul Alam, superintendent of police in Narayanganj, told the media at his office last night.



Former president Zillur Rahman hands Bangladesh Liberation War Honour to Pranab Mukherjee at the Bangabhaban on March 4, 2013 in recognition of his contribution to this nation during its birth in 1971. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present at the event.

FILE PHOTO

A champion of our liberation no more

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was one of the true selfless friends and his role during the Liberation War in 1971 was the biggest statement of someone who always fought for humanity and against oppression.

He was the first foreign national who proposed recognition of the Bangladesh government in exile.

It was on June 15, 1971 during the budget session when he initiated a discussion on the floor of the Rajya Sabha, suggesting that India accord diplomatic recognition to the Government of Bangladesh in exile in Mujibnagar.

It will be probably fitting to reflect on, in his own words, how he rallied behind the oppressed people of Bangladesh in those turbulent days.

"When a member sought my suggestion on how to tackle the problem, I responded by saying: 'I am talking of a political solution which means categorically recognising the sovereign democratic Government of Bangladesh. Political solution means giving material help to the democratic, sovereign Government of Bangladesh...'

I reminded the House of the many instances in world history when intervention on similar grounds had taken place," Pranab Mukherjee wrote in his book "The Dramatic Decade: The Indira Gandhi Years".

This particular statement is in the chapter titled "Muktijuddho: The Making of Bangladesh".

Pranab Mukherjee made a brief visit in March 2013.

Then Bangladesh President Zillur Rahman conferred the Bangladesh Liberation War Honour on Mukherjee at a special ceremony at Bangabhaban on the evening of March 4.

"As I stand here tonight, I am filled with memories of the events of 1971. I was 36 years old and an MP when the people of Bangladesh engaged themselves in their liberation struggle," the former Indian president told BSS at that time.

He also said that he had the privilege to initiate a discussion at Rajya Sabha when he suggested that India should accord recognition to the Bangladesh government in exile.

"Your support towards our Liberation War in 1971 was for the cause of

humanity and justice... your support gave us courage and motivation," President Zillur Rahman said after handing over a crest of the award to his Indian counterpart.

He leaves behind his son Abhijit and daughter Shamistha who is the head of the opposition Congress party's women wing. Pranab's wife for 58 years Suvra Mukherjee, who was born in Bangladesh's Narail and spent her initial years there before shifting to Kolkata, died in 2015.

His Journey in politics

Sitting on the verandah of his home in New Delhi in the early 1970s, a young Indian lawmaker saw horses from the Rashtrapati Bhavan gallop past. He jokingly told his sister that he would like to be a presidential horse in his next life. An indulgent Annapurna Banerjee, older to the lawmaker by a decade, had predicted that he would be the president one day.

When he did occupy India's highest constitutional office as the 13th president of India on July 25, 2012, becoming the first Bangalee to do so, he could not but recall during a TV interview what Annapurna had told him. He served till 2017.

In half a century in politics he donned several roles -- as a Congress party politician rising from the ranks, cabinet minister, a trouble-shooter for the party-led government and above all a statesman and a man for all seasons.

But behind all the accolades (Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award and epithets like elder statesman) for Pranab is his realisation that in the final analysis, he was a Bangalee to the core. "Aami Bangalee chilam, aachi o thaakbo (I was a Bangalee, am one and will remain so)," he once said at a felicitation function in Kolkata some years ago.

Born in Mirati village in Birbhum district of West Bengal to freedom fighters Kamada Kinkar Mukherjee and Rajlaksmi on December 11, 1935, it was Mukherjee's search for his quintessentially Bangalee roots that made him a key figure in shaping India's Bangladesh policy since the 1970s.

Pranab's political journey started when Indira Gandhi spotted him during a by-election campaign in Midnapore in West Bengal where he was former

Defence Minister V K Krishna Menon's poll agent.

Impressed with his political acumen, Indira inducted Pranab into the Congress central leadership and he began his parliamentary journey through the Rajya Sabha in 1969.

He became India's youngest Finance Minister in 1982 at the age of 47. From 2004, he went on to head three crucial ministries -- external affairs, defence and finance. He will also go down in history as the only non-prime minister who was the leader of the Lok Sabha for eight years.

A man of unparalleled experience in governance with the rare distinction of having served at different times as foreign, defence, commerce and finance minister, Pranab was elected to Rajya Sabha five times from 1969 and twice to Lok Sabha (from 2004). He was a member of the Congress Working Committee, the highest policy making body of the party, for 23 years.

The many awards and honours conferred on him include India's second highest civilian award, Padma Vibhushan in 2008, the Best Parliamentarian Award in 1997 and Best Administrator in India Award in 2011.

A few months before Pranab stepped down as president, he was asked what he would do. "I will melt into the masses," was his prompt response.

Tribute from president and PM

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock at the death of former Mukherjee.

The president said Pranab Mukherjee was a true friend of Bangladesh.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed deep shock and sorrow at his death, calling him a "true friend" of Bangladesh and guardian-like figure to her family.

"The news of Mr Pranab Mukherjee's demise deeply saddened her. . . she became emotional and nostalgic as she reminisced her many memories with him," PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told BSS.

Sheikh Hasina, he said, also described Mukherjee as Bangladesh's "true friend" and recalled his "outstanding and unforgettable" contributions to the country's 1971 Liberation War as a politician and real well-wisher.

Curbs on public movement go

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Legal actions and operations of mobile courts will have to be ensured, it added.

The new decision coincides with the government move to allow the transport owners to carry passengers at capacity from today, reinstating the pre-pandemic fares.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Railway will start selling tickets for all local, mail and commuter trains at the stations from September 5 in a bid to normalise its service.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is, meanwhile, considering whether to allow ride-hailing services to use the motorcycle soon. Currently, only those cars that are registered with the government to provide ride-hailing services are allowed to operate.

The moves come at a time when the number of new infections and deaths from Covid-19 are showing no signs of falling. Public health experts fear that the full-fledged operation of public transport might worsen the Covid-19 situation.

Thirty-three people were reported dead from Covid-19 in the country yesterday, taking the death toll to 4,281. The overall positivity rate stood at 20.19 percent, which is much higher than the global average.

The positivity rate was 24.98 percent on August 1 while it was 17.46 yesterday. and the rate has been hovering over 15 to 18 percent in the last few days.

After around three months, life in the capital and other major cities got back to normalcy. Traffic jams returned on Dhaka streets amid the old cacophony of cars honking and jingling of rickshaw bells as workers returned to their jobs after months of restrictions that have battered the economy.

But there has been a growing

unwillingness among the people to follow the hygiene rules, which gives an impression that everything has returned to normalcy.

"Bangladesh is still among the countries where transmission rate is high," said Prof Muzaherul Huq, a former adviser of World Health Organization's South East Asia region.

"So, lifting restrictions from public transport is risky as transmission has not come under control in Bangladesh," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

It cannot be said the Covid-19 situation has come under control until the positivity rate comes below 10 percent. But, the positivity rate in Bangladesh is still above 20 percent, he added.

"Therefore, the health safety guidelines, particularly the physical distancing, applied for public transport should not be relaxed right now," he said, adding, "If the physical distancing is relaxed in public transport, virus transmission would definitely increase."

"Moreover, the temporary trend of decline in positivity rate would stumble..."

As it is, when many bus operators are not following the government's directives to keep 50 seats vacant and to follow health safety guidelines.

Since the decisions have been made, the government should now ensure all health safety guidelines, especially the wearing of masks and the use of hand sanitisers, are abided by all. Legal actions have to be taken if anyone violates the guidelines, he added.

BUSES TO OPERATE AT CAPACITY Public transport services, including buses and minibuses, resumed on June 1 after more than two months of suspension.

Following demands made by transport leaders, the government hiked

Russia keen to provide vaccine

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In the press briefing, the health minister said Bangladesh has been promised the vaccine by Oxford researchers.

A contract has been signed in this regard between India's Serum Institute and Beximco Pharmaceuticals, he said.

Replying to a question, the health minister said no other country except China has as yet applied for a trial of Covid-19 vaccine in Bangladesh.

On August 27, the government gave the nod to the icddr,b, to run the phase-III trial of the Chinese vaccine.

Yesterday, Director General of Directorate General of Health Services Prof Dr ABM Khurshid Alam said Bangladesh

would soon begin trial of novel coronavirus vaccine manufactured by China.

He said this at the inauguration of Breastfeeding Week-2020 at the 250-bed Sadar Hospital in Manikganj.

COVID-19 SITUATION

Thirty-three people died from Covid-19 in the country in 24 hours till 8:30am yesterday, according to a press release issued by the DGHS.

The total number of deaths from the highly transmissible virus has now reached 4,281.

Some 2,174 new infections were recorded in the meantime, taking the number of people infected to 3,12,996, reads the press release.

PDP chairman FA Qureshi passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Progressive Democratic Party Chairman Ferdous Ahmed Qureshi died yesterday at the age of 79.

He was suffering from different ailments since suffering a stroke in 2015, said MA Hossain, secretary general of PDP.

He breathed his last at his residence in the capital on Monday afternoon, Hossain said.

Ferdous left behind his wife, two daughters, a son and a host of relatives and well-wishers.

His first namaz-e-janaza will be held at the Jatiya Press Club at 10:00am today. He will be buried at his family graveyard in Feni's Dagonbhuiyan upazila following another namaz-e-janaza after Asr prayers.

Ferdous Ahmed Qureshi was a former Dhaka University Central Students' Union (DUCSU) vice-president and Chhatra League president. He was one of the important student leaders at the forefront of the Six-point Movement in 1966 and the Mass Uprising in 1969.

He was also an organiser during the 1971 Liberation War and a journalist. He was the founding joint secretary-general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and founded PDP during the caretaker government of 2007.

Govt yet to decide

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an application seeking extension of Khaleida Zia's release has been sent to the law ministry by the home ministry. The application has not yet reached me. I will make decision on the application when I get it," he said.

The minister did not give further details on this issue.

Khaleida, who has been convicted in two corruption cases, was freed from prison on March 25 after she had been spending there for 776 days.

The government through an executive order released her for six months on conditions that she will stay home in the capital and not leave the country. It suspended her sentence as per section 401 of the Criminal Code of Procedure on "humanitarian grounds".

Recently, family members of the BNP chief sought a six months' extension on the government order.

Her younger brother Shamim Iskandar applied to the home ministry seeking the extension, said the former prime minister's family members.

Seeking anonymity, a lawyer, who prepared the documents, said the letter that helped secure Khaleida's release earlier was submitted again this time from her family members.

On Friday, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said they received an application of Khaleida and it was forwarded to the law ministry. In the letter, it was mentioned that Khaleida could not take proper treatment because she had to stay home amid the pandemic.

The 75-year-old former prime minister has been suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and ophthalmological and dental ailments, said Khaleida's physicians.

Separate registration

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Anwarul Islam said at a briefing at the secretariat after the meeting.

"Newspapers are usually doing this [changing contents in the online version from the printed one]," he said.

"Televisions and radios will also have to get registered if they want to run their online portals going beyond their 'own media character'," he said.

The cabinet secretary said there was no clear guideline on the registration criteria for such online news portals, their registration fees, running news portals by licensed television channels and radio, IPTV and Internet Radio in the previous policy.

"So, the draft amendment of the policy was placed at the cabinet meeting, incorporating these issues," he said.

Noting that there is a provision in the existing policy to form a commission for regulating online media, the cabinet secretary said the information ministry would choose an authority in this regard until the formation of the commission.

He said amendments were brought in nine sections of the existing online policy while five new sections were added to the draft of the National Online Media Policy, 2017 (amendment 2020).

Replying to a query, he said, "The licensed television channels and radios would have to take prior permission or get registered to operate their online news portals as those are not entitled to run news portals as per their license."

SHEIKH KAMAL'S BIRTHDAY

The cabinet cleared a proposal on celebrating August 5 every year as the birthday of Shaheed Captain Sheikh Kamal, the eldest son of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, at the state-level and include the day in the Ka Serial (list) of a gazette notification issued by the Cabinet Division.

The cabinet yesterday also gave its final nod to the draft Narcotics Control (Amendment) Bill, 2020, dropping a provision for forming a separate narcotic control tribunal to pave the way for competent courts to try drug-related cases and reduce the backlog of such cases.

Besides, it approved in principle the draft of Medical College (Governing Bodies) (Repeal) Bill, 2020.

It also granted a proposal to repeal the cabinet's decision taken on January 2, 2012 approving in principle the draft of Sonadia Deep Seaport Authority Bill 2012.

