

Grisly days over, memory lives on

Kins of 1971 victims reminisce infamous Mirpur 'Jalladkhana'

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

"It has become tiresome for me. From March to December every year journalists come to me and I have to describe the painful incident -- how my husband was martyred in 1971. The story is published in newspapers. After these months are over, everyone forgets the issue," said Hamida Begum, the widow of Shaheed Kashabaddouza.

Kashabaddouza is one of the innocent Bangalees killed on

March 28, 1971 in Mirpur killing field known as the Jalladkhana (butchers' den).

"Everyone talks about punishing the war criminals. Policymakers and intellectuals give statements during this time of the year but no one does anything about it. It is a shame that we still have to fight for justice while the war criminals remain unpunished even after 36 years of independence," said a frustrated Hamida.

The widow was reminiscing

about the Liberation War at a gathering of schoolchildren in the Jalladkhana memorial in Mirpur. Every Saturday at 4:00pm the Liberation War Museum organises a special session at the memorial where members of martyr families share with the schoolchildren their memories of the war.

While Hamida was describing the gruesome day, some 20 schoolchildren from Dhaka Ahsania Mission School listened to her with keen attention to the

history that they know from books vaguely and in a distorted form. Through her haunting stories, the children came to know about the genocide that took place in 1971.

Mirpur was a predominately Bihari area before independence. The Biharis attacked their house along with Bangalee collaborators and Pakistani army on March 28.

"The same Biharis who had been our neighbours for years brought the military to my

house. They took my husband and his elder brother. A few hours later we heard the news that they were brutally killed with bayonets inside the Jalladkhana," said Hamida who gave birth to a baby girl 16 days after Kashabaddouza was martyred.

"I don't have memories of my father to remember him by. The memorial ground is now like a home to us. We feel the presence of our beloved father here," said 36-year-old Shahina Doza, who was born after the martyrdom of her father.

Suman, a class six student of Ahsania Mission School, was listening to Hamida's story very attentively. "I haven't seen the war. But hearing the stories today I almost visualised the massacre. Now I can feel the spirits of the martyrs."

"I always had a feelings that Liberation War is something we read about in the book as stories. But today I learned it was real with real people sacrificing their life," said Selina, another class six student at the gathering.

Mirpur was liberated on January 31, 1972, one and a half months after the victory on December 16, 1971. Total number of killing fields in Dhaka city and Tongi is around 27, of them the highest six are located in Mirpur area.

Shariful Islam Bablu, a teenager back then, who escaped the genocide of Jalladkhana miraculously, said, "My friends who played with me every day brought me to Jalladkhana on July 28, 1971 to kill me. However, one of them saved my life."

"I was already half dead with severe beating when they brought me here. They dragged me inside the pump house. I saw a sea of blood inside," he recalled.

"They thought, by hiding the bodies they would be able to hide their crime but it was uncovered along with the skulls and bones of the martyrs," Bablu added.

THE 'BUTCHERS' DEN' REVISITED

Shades of the shadowy souls



STAR PHOTO

Names of killing fields inscribed on marble stones at Mirpur 'Jalladkhana'.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Mirpur Jalladkhana (butchers' den) is witness to brutal killing of thousands. During the nine months of Liberation War many Bangalees were tortured, shot and beheaded inside Jalladkhana in a ceremonial manner by the Biharis and Pakistani army. The bodies were thrown into an underground water tank of a Wasp pump house.

The pump house remained abandoned for many years. In November 1999, based on eyewitness accounts, Liberation War Museum with the help of Bangladesh Armed Forces excavated the pump house and found 70 skeletons and 5,392 bones bearing the marks of torture, revealing the atrocities and gruesome killings.

Eight years after the excavation, the Liberation War Museum built a memorial at

the torture chamber and at the mass grave keeping the structure of the pump house intact.

The memorial compound is bordered with a triangular walkway. The names of 400 killing fields found across the country are engraved on marble rails. Pakistan army and their local collaborators killed thousands of people and dumped their bodies in the mass graves of those killing fields. More killing fields have been unearthed recently.

At the Mirpur memorial, soils collected from six important killing fields from six divisions are on display in clay pots as symbol of respect to the martyrs.

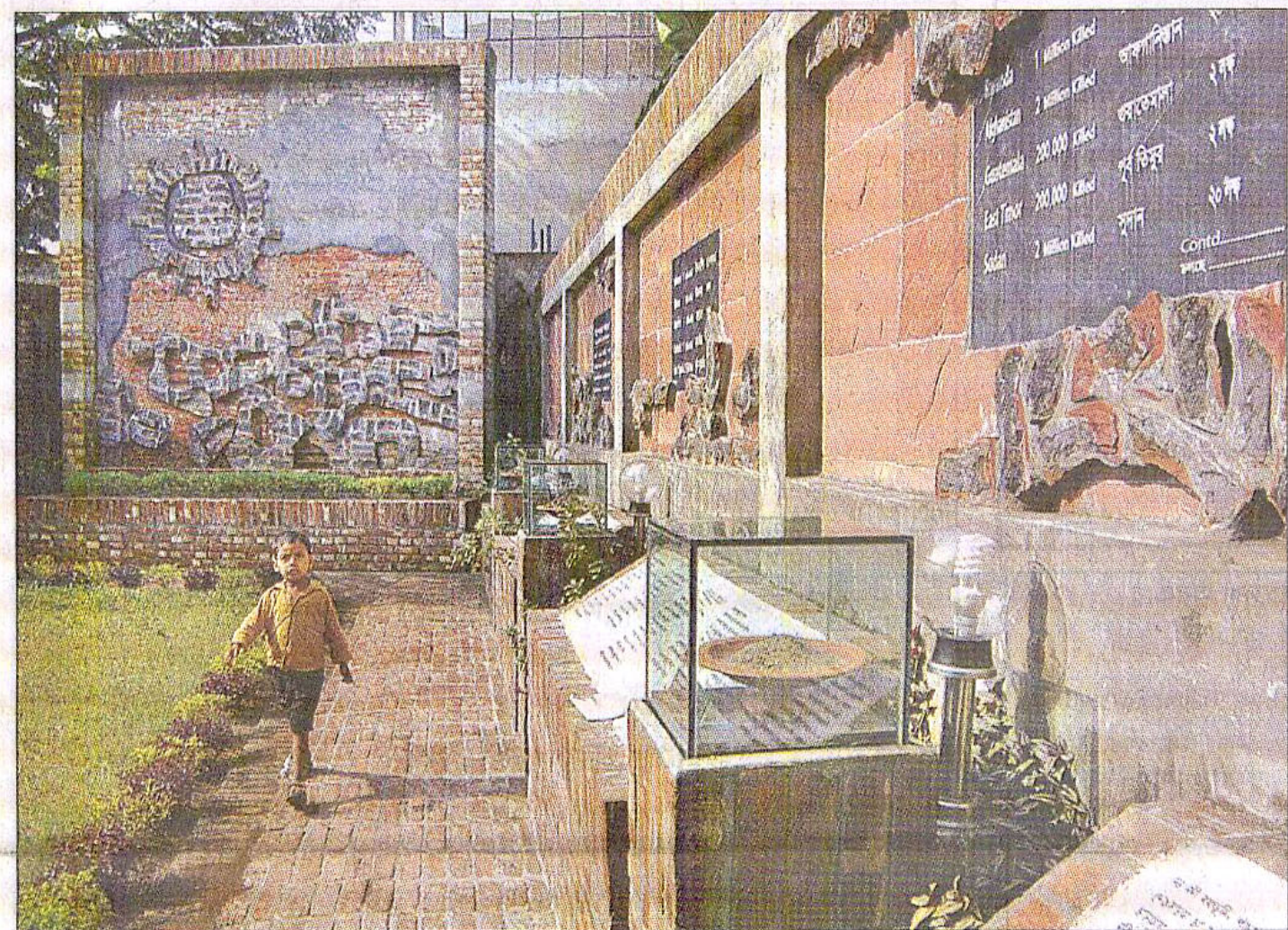
At the centre of the memorial is a mural by artist Rafiqunnabi titled 'Jibon Abinashwar' (life is immortal). The mural made of burnt bricks depicts the mutilated bodies of the martyrs speaking of the stories of their sacrifice.

The two ends of the triangular walkway meets in front of the pump house with a bell hanging at the entrance. It is called the 'sentiment bell'. Visitors ring the bell before entering the pit. Then comes the 20 feet deep water-tank of death from where the skulls and bones of the martyrs were recovered.

Visitors need to bow their head in order to see the inside of the tank covered by thick glass with the engraving -- "We bow our heads in deep respect to all martyrs."

Today the memorial tells the stories of men, women and children who were thrown into this pit after being butchered throughout the nine months of the Liberation War.

Earlier in 1974, around two truck full of skeletons of martyrs were excavated, which are now resting underneath the National Memorial at Savar.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

A child visits Jalladkhana: Time to know the past.

Students come in aid of distressed

DU campus buzzing with massive cyclone relief activities

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Students have always been among the first to respond to any natural catastrophe in the country.

Thousands of enthusiastic students of Dhaka University (DU), dedicated to stand by millions of affected people in the cyclone-battered southern region of the country, have once again come forward and joined in a massive relief effort.

Students affiliated with 'all sorts of organisations -- cultural, educational, athletic and student wings of progressive political parties -- are now working hand in hand in the relief operations being organised at Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) and the Dhaka University Central Student Union (DUCSU) cafeteria at Kalabhaban on the DU campus.

Shamsud Doza, a relief volunteer and a 3rd year student of Department of International Relations, said, "Southern part of the country has always been a regular victim of natural disasters. After seeing the horrific pictures [of devastation] in newspapers, we felt the need to do something. We cannot just sit back and watch millions of people suffer."

Several student relief teams under the banners of Durgato Shohojogita Kendro, Shangkritik Union and Progotir Poribrajok Dal have already visited and distributed aid in the devastated area.

These three organisations are currently working on in the DUCSU cafeteria to prepare more aid packages that contain ready-to-eat food. Each package contains 1 kg flattened rice (Chira), 250 gm of molasses, 1 kg rice, 1 kg salt, water purifying tablets and oral saline.

Cheerful and bright faces of volunteers are seen busy preparing the aid packages inside the DUCSU cafeteria from 10 in the morning till 1 in the afternoon. They are preparing oral

rehydration saline on the second floor of the cafeteria.

"We visited ICDDR, B [International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh] to learn more about how to make oral saline properly," said Doza.

Hundreds of students, in between their classes, have been preparing saline and collecting donations at public places or on buses all over the city.

"Anyone can participate in the relief work by contributing money, clothes or even by preparing saline or the food packages," Doza added.

A fund-raising concert and a two-day film festival was recently organised by Pirojpur District Students Union.

M Shafwan, a 2nd year Law student, said, "My relatives and neighbours are suffering. My house was knocked down by the cyclone. We are trying to do some-

thing for our home district Pirojpur."

Charon Shangkritik Goshthi, stationed in TSC games room, is collecting textbooks along with winter clothes and money. A total of 13.87 lakh students were affected by the November 15 cyclone and tidal surge that claimed around 4,000 lives and displaced around 9 million others.

The students of Fine Arts Institute are doing what they do best -- they are putting their artwork and paintings on sale to raise funds for the victims of Sidr. They are also collecting clothes donations.

A second year student of Paintings Department of the institute, Tuhin Kumar Roy, said, "Most of the paintings are landscapes in water colour. Students and teachers are working together to create the artwork."

So far, the budding artists

collected around Tk 22,000 through the sale of their paintings -- each generally priced between Tk 500 and Tk 1500. A few of the paintings done by teachers of the institute were sold at Tk 3000 apiece.

Shishir Bhattacharya, renowned cartoonist and a teacher of the Paintings Department, said, "Passion of the students can help them can achieve a lot. They are full of strong spirit and vigour. The source of their power is their youth."

"During the language movement, the liberation war and the movement against autocracy in the 90s, students of Dhaka University proved what they can accomplish," he added.

"During natural disasters, they come forward and work together to help out the needy. This is what they do best," said Shishir.



STAR PHOTO

Relief goods collected by students for Sidr victims stored at the TSC of Dhaka University.

US Marines tell their tales

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The US Marines before winding up their humanitarian mission in the Sidr-affected areas praised Bangladeshis highly for their friendly spirit.

Before returning to their base in Okinawa, Japan, the Marines last week shared their experience with the press at American Club at Gulshan in the capital. The government of Bangladesh bid them farewell on December 7.

Staff Sergeant Maria Gonzales, a member of the medical team, said, "...the people here are really friendly. We received support from everyone here."

Speaking on the difficulties they had encountered during the mission, she said it was a problem for them to buy all essential supplies from the local market as they had to find different vendors for each item.

Lieutenant Elizabeth Skorey from USS Tarawa, a medical planner, said, "My job is to find out where the immediate medical need is and to send out help. Right now the medical assistance for cyclone related trauma and immediate injury is over."

Skorey added that two US medical teams had worked in two locations in the disaster areas in the southern region where around 9 million people are affected by the cyclone.

The US medical team does not speculate any possibilities of epidemic in the area, she said adding that most of the people there have been suffering from chronic ailments which they had developed before the cyclone -- mainly due to unavailability of medical assistance for long.

First Lieutenant Adrian Rankiso Galloway said, "The biggest challenge was that the most prioritised locations were in remote locations without easy access."

Soon after Cyclone Sidr lashed out on the southern coast of Bangladesh, two American warships -- USS Kearsarge and USS Tarawa -- anchored off the coast of Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal, took part in emergency relief operations codenamed "Operation Sea Angel II" in two phases from November 23.

ANOTHER ROUND OF PRICE HIKE

Milk going out of menu of most city dwellers

TAWFIQUE ALI

Cow milk is going out of reach of the city's middle and low-income groups due to dearth of supply and consistent rise in price, said general consumers.

The price of Milk Vita, the most popular brand of packaged milk, has seen a 33 percent rise in one year, with the latest hike by Tk 4 per litre on November 1.

Per litre liquid milk of Milk Vita brand now sells at Tk 40, which was Tk 30 a little more than a year ago. The price was raised by Tk 10 per litre in several instalments.

The authorities increased the price by Tk 2 weeks before Ramadan last year. A couple months later, it was raised again by Tk 2 to fix at Tk 34 per litre.

The price was increased by Tk 2 on July 3 this year, two and half a months before Ramadan when the demand for milk increases significantly.

Finally on November 1, Milk Vita price was raised by Tk 4 to fix at Tk 40 per litre.

Rehana Begum, a housewife in the city's Badda area, said the escalating price of milk is perplexing and unaffordable. "This is really a difficult situation for me, as I need to buy liquid milk regularly to feed my three-year-old daughter."

Milk Vita is the trade name for dairy products of Bangladesh Milk Producers Co-operative Union Limited (BMPCUL), which is regulated under the Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives. Any increase in milk price requires approval of the ministry.

Abdul Muhit, manager (marketing) of Milk Vita, said that price was increased due to rise in cost of cattle fodder and veterinary treatment.

Widening difference between high demand and low supply of liquid milk has been a recurrent phenomenon usually during Ramadan and Eid festivals. But supply of Milk Vita's liquid milk fell drastically low for a week even after Eid-ul-Fitr was over this year.

Muhit said that it happened due to shortfall in production.

According to him, the daily minimum demand for liquid milk of Milk Vita in Dhaka metropolitan

area alone is around 2.25 lakh litres. Daily demand across the country is between 2.50 to 3 lakh litres, Muhit said.

Sudhir Chandra Das, DGM (Society) of Milk Vita, said increased price has enabled the union to pay some more money to the farmers so that they can procure cattle fodder and increase milk production.

According to Das, farmers are now getting Tk 25 per litre of milk from November 1, which was Tk 22 earlier.

Sources said some private entrepreneurs marketing liquid milk offer a higher rate than that of Milk Vita to take away a portion of raw milk produce from the farmers. As a result, Milk Vita's procurement faces shortfall.

BMPCUL is the central union of a total of 345 primary milk producer's co-operatives and has a membership of about 40,000 milk-producing farmers.

The union provides the members with cattle semen for cross breeding and veterinary services free of cost.

Experts said consumers' milk intake is decreasing due to higher price. The consistent low intake of milk leads to malnutrition and deficiency of calcium.

Prof Nazmul Hasan, director of the Institute of Nutrition and Food Sciences, Dhaka University, said dearth of milk and intake of impure milk are crucial concerns for public health. There is no system to ensure quality of milk.

According to him, deficiency of calcium causes diseases like ricket for children and osteoporosis for adults. He attributed widespread prevalence of ricket among children in Chokoria in Cox's Bazar to deficiency of calcium.

"In fact, milk intake has not only been declining but vanishing fast over the time," he said, citing findings of various surveys. Each of the national nutrition surveys indicates consistent decline in milk intake, he said.

He attributed gradual fall in milk production to dearth of cattle feed and fodder due to steady loss of grazing field over time, coupled with rising price of fodder.

