



RIGHTING THE GRIEVOUS WRONG

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15 AUGUST -7 NOVEMBER 1975

When Caesar died ... and with him all the tribunes

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

It was a bizarre moment for the country, medieval in its dark dimensions. In the pre-dawn hours of 15 August 1975, tanks rolled down Sher-e-Banglanagar, right by the Rakkhi Bahini camp, and made their way towards Dhanmondi. In a matter of minutes, the soldiers, led by a group of majors and colonels, were storming the residence of the President of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. At around the same time, other soldiers were rampaging through the homes of Abdur Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni. At his residence on Dhanmondi Road 32, the Father of the Nation desperately worked the telephones as it became clear that the soldiers were on a mission to murder him and his family. General K.M. Shafiqullah, the army chief of staff, asked him if he could move out of his home. That was an impossibility. It was only the president's security chief, Brigadier Jamiluddin Ahmed, who rushed to Dhanmondi in a bid to save Bangabandhu. He would be stopped at the approach to Road 32 and murdered. But by that time Bangabandhu and his family had been killed, in a manner that

recalled the sinister colours of the Dark Ages.

On the radio

As dawn broke, the assassins had things under control. Some of them made their way to the radio station at Shahbagh, looking frantically for an announcer to broadcast news of their macabre deeds to the country and to the world. No one was around and so it fell on Shariful Haq Dalim, one of the killers, to go on air. The 'autocrat Mujib', he declared, had been overthrown. Bangladesh, his shrill voice told the country, had become an 'Islamic republic.' The chilling announcement would be repeated for sometime, until the voice of Sarkar Kabiruddin, who meanwhile had been nabbed by the soldiers even as he tried to move out of the vicinity of the radio station where he had arrived, unaware of the tragedy that had occurred, flowed over the waves. The new voice repeated the earlier Dalim announcement and also added the information that a new government had been formed under the leadership of Khondokar Moshtaq Ahmed. Suddenly, everything began to be clear. For the first

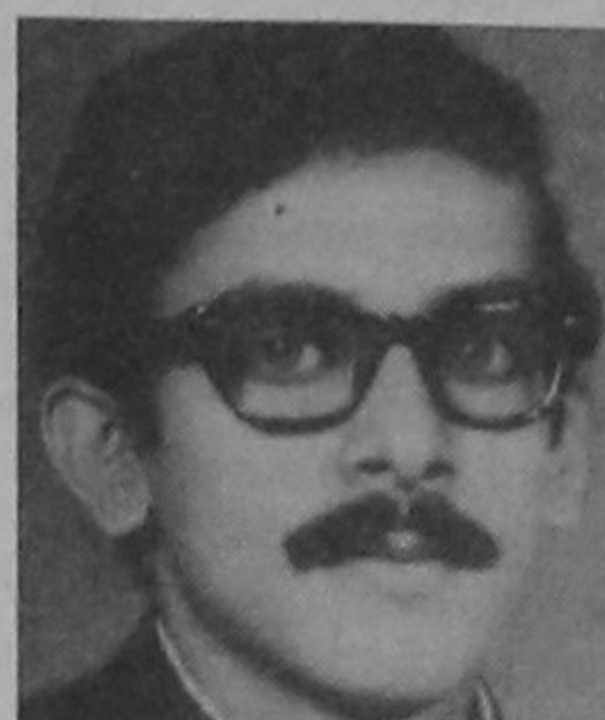
The new voice added the information that a new government had been formed under the leadership of Khondokar Moshtaq Ahmed. For the first time in the history of free Bangladesh, a coup d'etat had taken place.

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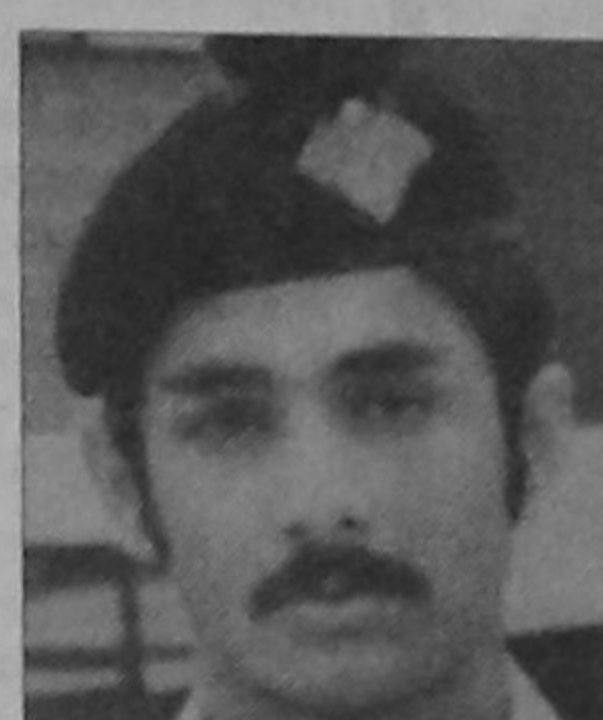
SOME OF THE AUGUST 15 VICTIMS



Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib



Sheikh Kamal



Sheikh Jamal



Sheikh Russell



Sultana Kamal



Parvin Jamal Rosy



Sheikh Abu Naser



Abdur Rab Serniabat



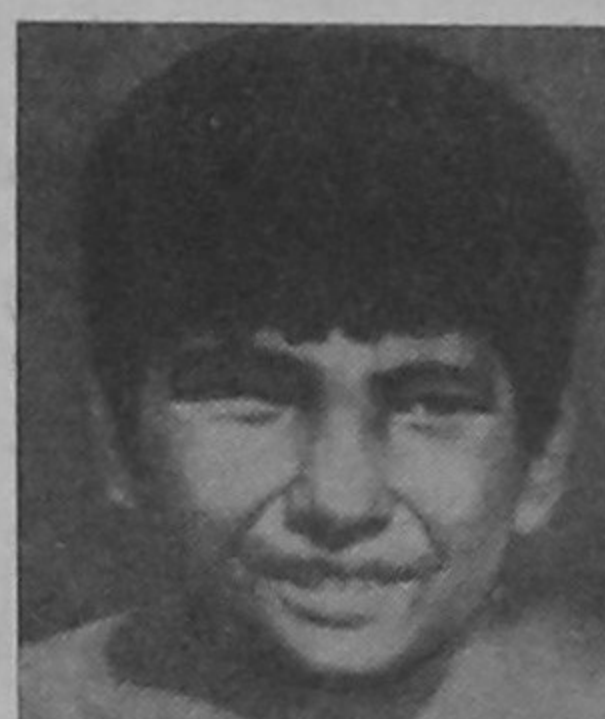
Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni



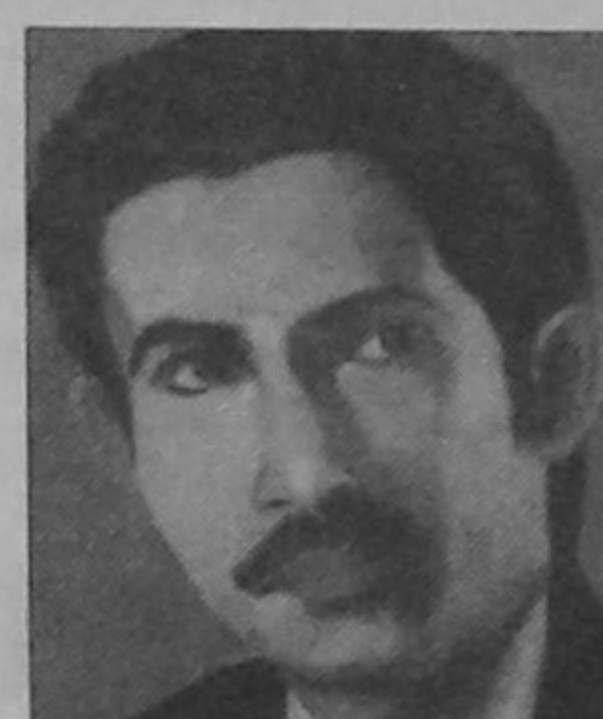
Begum Arzoo Moni



Baby Serniabat



Sukanto Abdullah



Shahid Serniabat



Abdul Nain Khan Rintu



Arif Serniabat

Unceremonious burial of Father of the Nation

REAZ AHMAD

Following the killing of Bangabandhu, the killers waited more than 24 hours to bury him and made sure the funeral was done in secret.

Only a handful of people participated in the namaz-e-janaza at Bangabandhu's ancestral home Tungipara as the brave Imam of the local mosque Moulvi Abdul Halim Sheikh successfully thwarted the army personnel's insistence on burying the body without even a janaza. In some counts only 18 people took part in the janaza.

In his testimony before the court, one of the witnesses of Bangabandhu murder case, Havildar (retd) Md Quddus Sikder narrated that Maj Huda gave him the charge of looking after all dead bodies at Bangabandhu's residence after the killing. He and seven others were on

duty.

On that night Huda took him along to a carpenter shop on Sher Shah Shuri Road in the capital's Mohammadpur area to order 10 wooden coffins, and asked the carpenter to deliver those to Dhanmondi Road 32.

On return from Mohammadpur, Huda dropped Quddus at Dhanmondi and then before the August 16 dawn the carpenter delivered the coffins. Then after the azan for fazar prayers, Huda along with a team of the army's Supply Transport Company reached Bangabandhu's house and took away all dead bodies except Bangabandhu's. Sometime between 9 and 10 in the morning, Huda came back and took Bangabandhu's body away on a pick-up truck, rushing to the airport.

While the top military brasses were busy in the cantonment to

catch a piece of the coup's spoil, the father of the nation's dead body was kept in a coffin in his garage under guard by troops of the army's artillery and armored corps.

In the afternoon, Maj Mohiuddin and Lt Sekandar took Bangabandhu's body to Tungipara by an airforce helicopter.

Initially the body was kept in the local district office rest house while Mohiuddin kept insisting on a hurried funeral to avoid public viewing.

But the local Imam did not give in to the pressure from the armed band. He told the major in his face that the dead body of a Muslim could not be buried without a proper bath. The major gave him ten minutes for the bath and later another ten to complete the funeral.

Mujib's last bath was with a locally manufactured cheap 570 brand

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Killers politically rehabilitated

RASHIDUL HASAN

All the subsequent military and civil governments coming to power after the coup of August 15 awarded and rehabilitated the coup leaders politically instead of punishing the self-declared killers of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

General Ziaur Rahman-turned president, General Ershad-turned military ruler and former prime minister Khaleda Zia created various opportunities for the killers and politically rehabilitated them.

They directly or indirectly assisted the killers not only through rehabilitation but also in getting them into positions of power and authority.

Zia who came to power after the Aug 15 mayhem awarded the accused with prize postings in government jobs and paved the way for the killers to go out of the country instead of punishing them.

Syed Farooq Rahman ran against military ruler Ershad in the

presidential race in 1986.

With the support and blessings of Ershad, the coup leaders of Aug 15 -- Farooq, Khandaker Abdur Rashid and Bazul Huda -- floated a political party styled "Freedom Party" on November 7, 1987.

The armed cadres of the party opened fire on the very first day of the launch of the party at the Jatiya Press Club leaving one dead. It was

Abdur Rashid was elected uncontested from Chandina in Comilla. With the blessings of the BNP high-ups, this self-declared killer was made the leader of the opposition in parliament.

Another self-declared killer Syed Farooq Rahman also contested the February 15 elections from the then Dhaka-5 constituency. Rashid and several other leaders of

General Ziaur Rahman-turned president, General Ershad-turned military ruler and former prime minister Khaleda Zia created various opportunities for the killers and politically rehabilitated them.

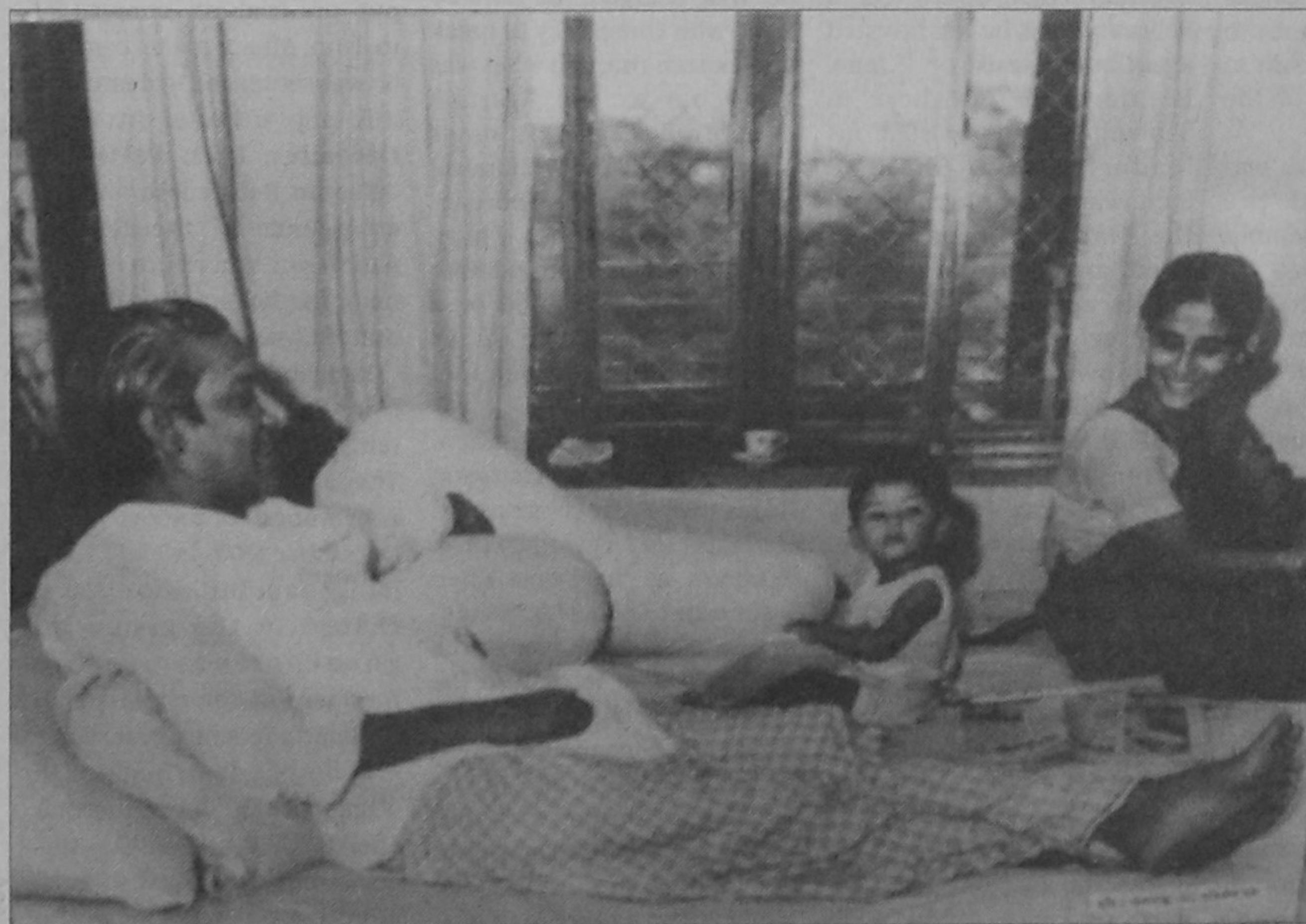
reported in newspapers and magazines that the Freedom Party later emerged as something tantamount to a "terror party".

The killers, who once gave birth to the political party, now got registered with the Election Commission.

In the controversial national elections of February 15, 1996, one of the self-declared killers Khandaker

Freedom Party also contested the national elections held in 1988. Rashid's daughter Mehnaz said she contested the last two parliamentary polls from Comilla-7 constituency on Freedom Party ticket.

Source: Weekly Jajalidin, September 22, 1992, Bangladesher Nirbachon [Election of Bangladesh] edited by ASM Shamsul Arefin.



Bangabandhu shares a rare moment with his daughter Sheikh Hasina and grandson Sajib Wazed Joy.

Too embarrassed to hear

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Over a 10-year period, four High Court and three Appellate Division judges said that they were unable to hear appeal petitions relating to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assassination case.

This, along with the BNP government's refusal between 2002 and 2007 to appoint ad hoc judges to the Appellate Division, has been the main reason for the delays in bringing this historic case to an end.

In November 1998, the Dhaka sessions judge convicted 15 out of the 19 original accused defendants to the murder of Bangabandhu and sentenced each of them to death. Since no person can be hanged without the agreement of the High Court, and the government was keen for the death penalty to be carried out, the government speedily referred the matter to the court for hearing.

However, four judges involving three different benches said they could not hear the case. Justice MM Ruhul Amin, Justice MA Matin, and Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury all said they felt 'embarrassed' to hear the cases, and Justice Nurul Islam simply refused. The judges never publicly gave their reasons.

In June 2000, the case was finally heard by a bench of two judges. Since these judges disagreed on whether five

of the defendants should be acquitted, the chief justice then appointed a third judge to hear the case and in April 2001, he ruled that three of the 15 convicted defendants should be acquitted.

Following the court's decision, five defendants then appealed to the Appellate Division. At that time there were only five Appellate Division judges, which was increased to seven when the BNP came to power in October 2001.

Of the seven Appellate Division judges, four of them had recently been promoted from the HC and they were in fact the same four judges who had already refused to hear the case. Three more judges -- Justice Mohammad Gholam Rabbani, Justice Abu Syed Ahmed and Justice Syed JR Mudassir Hussain -- also told the court in 2002, when the matter came before them, that they felt 'embarrassed'. As a result, there were no judges available to hear the appeal.

The then Chief Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury then made a request to the government for judges to be appointed on ad hoc basis to hear the appeal. But the government did not take any action.

The then law minister, Moudud Ahmed, stated that the government was not able to do so due to "legal complexities."

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