

Heroes away from home

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The first of the resistances occurred on the borders and when casualties occurred, the bodies were carted to safer grounds inside the Indian territory. Sometimes, the burials were done on Indian soil without knowing that the land was not Bangladesh, Sajjad explained.

The latest find of 282 graves were first made by Sajjad who had been talking to villagers in Akhaura about the war for a long time. It was then that the villagers had informed him about the graves -- 32 at one place and 250 a little away.

"We wrote three letters to India's external affairs ministry with requests to preserve the 32 graves of our freedom fighters in Indian territory which is very close to the BSF checkpoint in Agartala," Enamul Hoque Chowdhury, minister (press) for Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi, told The Daily Star by phone.

Enamul said Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi wrote the first letter in April, the second in October and the third last month.

India has been requested to preserve the graves and allow Bangladeshis to pay respect to the martyrs, he said.

"Some other historic places in Agartala, such as a hospital where the freedom fighters were treated, and a lichi garden where the fighters had camped should also be preserved for the next generations to visit," said Enamul.

Bangladesh High Commission is also pursuing the Indian government verbally, but has not received any response yet, he said.

Former army chief and freedom fighter Lt Gen (retd) Harun-Ar-Rashid Bir Pratik, who fought at the beginning of the war in Akhaura and Gangasagar of Bhamanbaria still recalls his memories about the graves in the Indian territory.

In 1971, the border was not demarcated and there was a customs checkpoint on Akhaura border, he told The Daily Star.

Many of the freedom fighters who died in Akhaura and Ujanishar battles with Pakistani forces in April 1971 had been buried in the Indian territory.

"At least 31 martyrs of Ujanishar and Gangasagar battle were buried in Indian territory near Akhaura. Besides, many freedom of fighters who died in the nine-month war in Kasba, Akhaura and Kharampur of Brahmanbaria were also buried in Indian territory," Harun said.

He said he is aware of the initiative of Lt Col (retd) Sajjad to shift the graves from the Indian territory to Bangladesh soil.

"If it is not possible to shift the large number of graves to our soil, at least India can allow Bangladeshis to visit the graves in its territory on special occasions," Sajjad said.

GANGASAGAR FLASHPOINT The freedom fighters now buried in India opposite Sonabadi village died in the early battles in Gangasagar, Ujanishar and Akhaura.

Just a day after the Pakistan army cracked down on the Bangalees on March 26, the 4 East Bengal Regiment consisting of Bangalee soldiers and officers revolted. To quell the revolt, the Pakistan army sent a strong fighting patrol from Comilla cantonment to Brahmanbaria through Ujanishar, a strategic place, on March 29. But the Pak army had retreated in the face of fierce defence from the 4 Bengal.

This time the Pak army sent its frontier force following the same route to Brahmanbaria. But by this time, EPR Subedar Razzak had laid out a defence line behind Ujanishar bridge between Akhaura-Brahmanbaria road. Civilians of the locality and some policemen joined him with whatever arms they could get hold of.

The Pak army failed to cross the bridge in the face of fierce counter attacks by the resistance force that lasted until April 10. It left a small pocket of soldiers near the bridge to contain Ujanishar and returned to Comilla.

Meantime, Captain ATM Haider (later a colonel) arrived in Ujanishar on the afternoon of April 12 and damaged the pillars of the bridge with bombs so that the Pak army cannot cross heavy vehicles and field guns.

Now the Pak army decided to advance towards Gangasagar, another strategic point close to the bordering Akhaura, following Comilla-Akhaura rail tracks.

From the Battalion Headquarters, Major Shafayet

Jamil (later Lt Col) moved to Brahmanbaria to take over. Lt Harun (later Lt Gen and chief of army staff) was ordered to move forward with his D Company and reinforce defence in Gangasagar and Ujanishar.

The 4 Bengal was split into two: one reached Akhaura checkpoint where battalion commander Major Khaled Mosharraf (later Brig General) had arrived and the other formed a defence line in Gangasagar beside Hawra river.

On April 13, the Pak army launched its offensive on Gangasagar with the help of air attack.

But the 4 Bengal was prepared here across the Hawra river and again the fight began. This time, the Pak army had the air support as Pakistan Sabre jets pounded Bengal positions.

The fight intensified on the morning of April 18 with heavy mortar shelling. The heavily armed Pakistan army planned to trap the 4 Bengal and started to drop troops from MI-8 helicopters behind the Bengal position.

Sensing the Pakistani plan, the 4 Bengal decided to retreat. Lt Harun ordered the withdrawal and Bangalee soldiers started marching towards Akhaura.

Those who died in the battles were carried across the border and buried. Their graves have now been detected.

MOSTAFA'S HEROIC DEATH But by that time, the Pakistan army was all around -- in front and also in the rear and firing with full force. The 4 Bengal had a light machinegun group located the railway line on the west giving coverage to the retreating Bengali soldiers.

Suddenly, a Pakistani rocket hit the gunners and both machinegun operators dropped dead. This put the retreating forces at great risk as the Pakistanis were firing from both sides.

A soldier, Sepoy Mohammad Mostafa Kamal was firing from another machinegun group about 75 metres away.

Sensing the great danger the whole platoon was in, he ran to the other machinegun position and started firing.

"You keep retreating. I am giving cover fire for you," he shouted at his co-fighters. "But you cannot fight alone," someone said. "You won't last long."

"Don't worry about me. If you live you can fight my war later." Mostafa's machinegun roared.

For half an hour, he kept the Pakistan army at bay and by that time the 4 Bengal had managed to reach Akhaura.

But then Mostafa's machinegun ran out of ammunition. As his gun fell silent, the Pak troops surrounded him form all around and bayoneted him to death. Mostafa was awarded Bir Shrestha, the highest gallantry award, for sacrificing his life to save his fellow fighters.

Today, a neglected, dilapidated brick foundation and an illegible plaque marks the place where Mostafa was killed.

BODIES TAKEN ACROSS BORDER In about 20 days of a battle, the bodies of the fallen soldiers were taken across the border and buried, said Sajjad.

"That was a high ground and safe from Pakistani bombing and gunfire," Sajjad explains. "That is why the villagers buried the bodies there. The dead were mostly from police and EPR. I don't think any army personnel were buried there."

Liberation War researchers Shahriar Kabir and Muntassir Mamoon said there are no accounts of the graves of Bangladeshi freedom fighters on Indian soil across the border. But it is certain that a countless number of freedom fighters were buried on Indian soil.

"Both Bangladesh and India must take steps to identify and preserve the graves of freedom fighters in the Indian territory," said Shariar Kabir.

"Two years back I spoke to Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar about preserving the graves in Agartala and some other historic places of the 71 war. He made a positive response. Now it's time for Bangladesh to make sure such history is preserved for the future generation," said Prof Mamoon.

THE LONELY GRAVE

Across a ten feet canal sits a lonely grave. No-one visits it, signs of neglect are etched over the once-white walls of the grave. Here lies Prof Wahab Talukdar, a freedom fighter and Islamic history teacher of Kurigram Government College, who ran a youth camp

for recruitment of freedom fighters.

On August 7, as he was briefing guerrillas at a camp the Pakistan army on secret information attacked. Wahab was running along the rail track in search of a safe place when he received bullets and fell down.

The Pakistan army caught him and bayoneted him to death. After the army left the village, the villagers collected his mutilated body from a pond and carried him over to Kalamati village in India. He was buried there.

As long as India did not draw a barbed wire fence, Wahab's relatives could visit the grave, offer prayers and clean it. But since the fence has been put in place, Wahab lies lonely on Indian soil.

It was on a morning in 2007 that Lt Col (Retd) Sajjad went to Bhurungamari and took some villagers to visit the grave. As they reached the canal, the BSF guards became alert. Sajjad raised his hands and showed that they had come to offer prayers.

As they were lining up to offer prayer, an old man came running.

He was crying and running. "Wait for me, please. Wait," he called out.

"Who are you?" Sajjad was surprised.

"I am Wahab's brother. He was my younger brother," the old man wept. "Since the fence was raised we could not come here. Please let me join you."

"You lead the prayer then. We will follow you."

The old man raised his hands and started praying. He was weeping loudly and tears rolled down his cheeks in mourning for his slain brother who had given his life for the country in 1971.

'CIA can derail Pak democracy'

ANI, Islamabad

The Pakistan Supreme Court has heard that the CIA and General Headquarters pose a threat to the current democratic government.

Hearing into petitions against the legality of the National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO), federal government's lawyer, Kamal Azfar told a 17-member bench headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry that the both the Army Headquarter and the CIA were conspiring against the government and were a threat to democracy.

It is worth mentioning here that Azfar had filed a statement saying that the court should not derail the democratic system while deciding the NRO cases.

Replying to the apex court's question that who had asked him to file the application, Azfar said he did so on behalf of the Law Ministry.

"There are 'extra-constitutional forces within and outside the country' that could derail the democratic set up," The Daily Times quoted Azfar, as saying.

Obama phones

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The US president assured Hasina of his government's support in getting the adequate climate change adaptation fund, Hanif said.

Obama said he would try to convince two neighbouring countries of Bangladesh--India and China--so that they would talk in favour of Bangladesh in the Copenhagen summit, the AL man added.

Hasina, also the AL chief, left Dhaka around 11:00pm for Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, to attend the ongoing UN Climate Change Conference.

She is leading a high-profile Bangladesh delegation to the conference. Apart from joining of different events of the conference, the Bangladesh premier will hold bilateral talks with world leaders on the sidelines of the conference.

Hasina will leave Copenhagen on December 20 and return home on December 21.

The PM's delegation includes Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque, State Minister for Environment and Forest Hasan Mahmud, Ambassador-at-Large M Ziauddin, PM's Principal Secretary MA Karim and Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad.



The old man with tears in his eyes, third from left, leads a prayer for his martyred brother Prof Wahab Talukdar buried in Indian territory near Bhurungamari border, Kurigram. Right, A dilapidated brick structure marks the place at Gangasagar, close to Akhaura, where Bir Shrestha Mohammad Mostafa Kamal was martyred.

PHOTO COURTESY: Q SAJJAD A ZAHIR

Grabbers over 8,000

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The last couple of days. The HC had asked them to do the job by the November 30 deadline as part of its directive to save the rivers.

Noted activist of the river protection campaign Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said the figure of river encroachers must be many times higher if estimated as per the CS records.

"On a general observation, the number of encroachers cannot be what has been mentioned," he said. "It is vital to know whether the survey was carried out properly."

The structures illegally built in the rivers include concrete, semi-concrete, paramagnet and makeshift buildings, factories, boundary and guide walls, jetties, warehouses and temporary religious structures.

The deputy commissioners of the four districts carried out separate surveys to prepare the reports.

Dhaka DC Zillar Rahman said in his report that his office has prepared a list of 4,021 land grabbers that have illegally occupied areas in the Buriganga, Turag and Balu.

Three technical committees were formed to conduct the surveys in 134 mouzas and made 430 sketch maps of 69.5km stretch of areas in the three rivers.

DC of Munshiganj Md Mosharraf Hossain said there are 174 grabbers in Munshiganj sadar upazila and 746 in Sirajdikhan upazila and 224 in the Dhaleshwari and Shitalakkhya rivers in the district.

DC of Narayanganj Md Shamsur Rahman said there are 3,010 illegal structures on 1,158 acres of land in the Balu, Buriganga and Shitalakkhya as per CS records.

The amount of grabbed land as per the CS records is six times higher than the

Jewellery

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jewelry shop, when he tried to catch one of the robbers.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Tajul Islam told The Daily Star a gang of seven armed muggers entered the shop while he was having lunch with three of his colleagues inside the shop at around 3:30pm.

Four of the muggers held them at gunpoint while the rest started looting the gold ornaments displayed in the showcases.

When contacted, Ali Ahmed Hasmi, officer-in-charge (OC) of Rampura Police Station, said the robbers made off after exploding one handmade bomb and they (police) have recovered another bomb from the spot that did not explode.

He said that although the gold shop was under the jurisdiction of his police station, it was within 500 yards of Khilgaon Police Station.

When contacted, duty officer of Khilgaon Police Station asked this correspondent to talk to Rampura Police Station for any information regarding the robbery.

Shop owners and employees of the market expressed their grievances over the role played by the Khilgaon Police Station.

Rampura police said no case was filed yet but they were trying to nab the robbers.

grabbed land as per the Revisional Survey report while the number of illegal structures as per the CS records is 10 times higher than the number in the RS report, the survey report says.

The main cause of land having been grabbed is the change in the course of the rivers.

The DCs of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Munshiganj submitted the reports to the HC on Monday. The DC of Gazipur and the chairman Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) submitted their reports on Sunday.

All of them submitted maps of the surveyed areas along with the reports.

The DC of Gazipur mentioned the names of those involved in building illegal structures and encroaching on river land. They are AK Azad, managing director of Sajid Washing Ltd (Hamim Group) at Nishadnagar, Tongi in Gazipur, the secretary on behalf of the Tongi Bazar Jame Mosque in Gazipur, and others.

The authorities of Tongi municipality fish market and Sree Sree Durga Temple of Tongi are also on the list.

The report submitted by the BIWTA chairman states that sewage and garbage are dumped in the rivers, which contribute to their pollution.

Following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, an environmental and human rights organisation, the HC in June directed deputy commissioners of the four districts to survey and demarcate the four rivers and place reports to it by November 30.

Talking to The Daily Star, advocate Manzill Murshid of the organisation appreciated the government officials for having done "a difficult job".

4 world leaders assess climate talks progress

AFP, Paris

Nicolas Sarkozy, Barack Obama, Angela Merkel and Gordon Brown held a 50-minute joint telephone call yesterday to discuss progress at UN climate talks in Denmark, the French presidency said.

The four leaders covered the main areas that are currently being negotiated at the conference in Copenhagen, said a statement that provided no details on their discussions.

The French statement came as Europe turned up the heat on China and the United States at the talks, demanding the world's two biggest carbon polluters give ground to unlock a pact to tame the monster of climate change.

Sarkozy said earlier Tuesday that France and African countries had drawn up a joint statement backing targets to limit the rise in global temperatures to two degrees Celsius and financial aid to help poor countries adapt.

He said he wanted the United States' support for 10 billion euros (14.5 billion dollars) of financial aid per year between 2010 and 2012, a proposal agreed by Sarkozy and Brown last month.

Tafazzul

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Division Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim.

Justice Tafazzul will replace the present Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin, who is going into retirement on December 22.

Justice MM Ruhul Amin will, however, discharge his responsibility as chief justice for 47 days, since he will go into retirement on February 8 next year.

Justice Tafazzul headed the five-member special bench of the SC Appellate Division that pronounced the landmark verdict in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assassination case on November 19.

He was elevated as judge of the High Court in 1994 and Appellate Division in 2003.

He was the chairman of the enrolment committee of Bangladesh Bar Council and member of the Corporate Law Commission. He is now the chairman of Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission.

Justice Tafazzul attended the Commonwealth Judges Conference held in Sydney, Australia in 2003, 7th Saarc Law Conference held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1998 and chaired the session on "Intellectual property issues in the Saarc region" and Conference of "Judicial Heads of Muslim Countries" held in Tehran, Iran in 2007.

Born in 1943, Tafazzul obtained Bachelor of Honours and Masters' degree in History and LLB from the University of Dhaka.

The SC Bar Association is going to arrange a farewell ceremony tomorrow at the apex court for the judges who will go into retirement by the end of this year. Two other SC judges -- Justice Md Joydul Abedin and Md Abdul Aziz -- will go into retirement on December 31.

Mugging

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Deputy Commissioner of police Khandaker Mahid Uddin of Motijheel zone said Mainul disclosed the names of two other policemen -- SI Rowshan Ali of Kotwali police and constable Sajju of detective branch.

ASI Mainul claimed that they stopped the two employees as they did not return the money taken from his (Mainul) brother for sending him abroad.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner AKM Shahidul Hoque told The Daily Star that they are investigating the matter and action would be taken against them if they are found guilty.

Shop owner SM Saqlain of Motabell Plaza told police that a gang intercepted his two employees at Calvert Road near Bijoynagar Water Tank around 3:00pm while they were on the way to Kakrail by a rickshaw after withdrawing the money from Mutual Trust Bank at Motijheel.

Hearing their cry for help, pedestrians rushed in and caught ASI Mainul and gave him a thrashing. But other members of the gang managed to flee, witnesses said.

DC Khandaker Mahid said the two employees were carrying the money hiding it under their shirt without taking police escort.

"It is not clear why the money owner did not take any police help for carrying the money," he said adding, "We always request people to take police help but they often do it risking their lives and valuables," he added.

Police have started a drive to arrest the policemen along with another person who is yet to be identified, he said.

BENAZIR MURDER CASE

Commission likely to extend

PTI, Washington

The United Nations is "positively considering" a three month extension to the commission probing into the assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, UN chief Ban Ki-moon has said.

The mandate of the Commission expires by the end of this month.

Ban said he has received an official request from Ambassador Heraldo Munoz, who is the chairman of this inquiry Commission investigating

into the death of Bhutto to extend it for another three months, because of limited time.

"They need more time to continue their investigation. I think this is reasonable. And I am positively considering extending it for another three months," Ban told reporters at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Bhutto was killed on December 27, 2007, in a gun-and-suicide-bomb attack as she was leaving an election rally in the garrison town of Rawalpindi.

Loan, bill defaulter

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As per the judgement, the CEC has to declare Mahmudul elected for the constituency within seven days of receiving the certified copy of the verdict, said Mahmudul's lawyer Md Rakan Uddin.

The High Court bench of Justice Md Emdadul Huq came up with the verdict upon an election petition filed by Mahmudul challenging the Election Commission's decision of declaring Kashem a valid candidate for the elections.

Rakan Uddin said Abul Kashem was a loan defaulter of Tk 15.44 crore of Sonali Bank, Bangabandhu Avenue branch, Dhaka and a telephone bill defaulter of Tk 32,000 till November 30, 2008.

The officials concerned of the bank and telephone office formally informed it to the Returning Officer (RO) of Tangail before December 4, 2008. However, the RO, on December 4, 2008, declared the candidature of Abul Kashem valid and accepted his nomination paper for December 29 parliamentary elections, said Rakan.

He said Abul Kashem's rival BNP candidate Mahmudul Hasan filed an appeal with the EC against the RO's decision and the EC's decision to uphold that.

On February 8, Mahmudul filed an election petition with the High Court challenging the EC's decision and candidacy of Abul Kashem.

Delwar

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want to admit this. It's not fair," he continued, "There is no scope for controversy, as history would reveal everyone's contribution."

Delwar said the government would never be able to remove Ziaur Rahman from the people's heart.

The Pakistani military violated human rights before the independence but the Rakkhibahini, created by Sheikh Mujib, violated human rights committing extra judicial killings after the liberation, said the BNP leader adding, "The present government is now killing people in pretence of crossfire only to suppress the opposition."

He also alleged that the Awami League-led government wants to remain in power forever by developing relation with a "certain country".

Party's standing committee members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Tariqul Islam, Nazrul Islam Khan, Brig Gen (retd) Hannan Shah and Mirza Abbas, among others, spoke at the discussion.

After hearing the petition, the High Court delivered the verdict yesterday.

Advocate Shah Manjurul Huq appeared for Abul Kashem.

With yesterday's incident, parliamentary membership of two elected candidates in December 29 elections have been declared void. Earlier, the Supreme Court, on October 18 this year, upheld the High Court verdict and declared Maj (retd) Jasim Uddin's parliamentary membership illegal. He was elected from Bhola-3 constituency on Awami League nomination.

Victory Day

FROM PAGE 1

The celebration calls for inspirations among young generations as they can bring positive changes to the nation with a hope of a prosperous country enlightened by the spirit of independence.

The whole country put on a festive look ahead of the day. The national flag will be hoisted atop all government, semi-government and other important establishments.

Today is a public holiday. On this day in 1971, the nation under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won a victory over Pakistani occupation forces with a vision of establishing a democratic and secular country.

General AAK Niazi, who commanded the Pakistani occupation forces, surrendered to the allied forces of Bangladeshi freedom fighters and Indian forces at Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka on December 16 with 93,000 soldiers following a miserable defeat in the war that broke out in March 1971.

President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia in separate messages have greeted the nation on the auspicious occasion.

The government and various socio-political organisations have taken up elaborate programmes to mark the day. Special prayers will be offered at mosques, temples, churches and other religious institutions seeking divine blessings for peace and progress of the country.

Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar along with private TV channels and radio stations will broadcast special programmes while the newspapers will bring out special supplements on the occasion.

The day will be heralded by a 31-gun salute at dawn.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police have beefed up security measures for the day by deploying around 10,000 additional police personnel at various points in the capital.