



PHOTO: STAR

The golden ticket receivers from Birshreshtha Munshi Abdur Rouf Public School flash victory sign as they move on to the Divisional Round of The Daily Star Spelling Bee yesterday.

Quality rivals

FROM PAGE 20

The qualifiers from Dhaka Residential Model College are Nafis Irteesham Arif (class 10), Samin Yasar Haque (class 9) and Aryan Zabee Rhyme (class 10). Twenty students participated in the competition and it took 3 rounds and one tie breaker to find the best three spellers.

From Agrani School the qualifiers are Rezina Arfin (class 8), Nazia Nur (class 10) and Jesima Rizwana (class 9). They battled for three rounds to find the top three from among 20 students.

Qualifiers from Birshreshtha Munshi Abdur Rouf Public School are Begum Rokeya Mou (class 10), Sharmin Akter (class 9) and Kaniz Fatema (class 9). The competition started with 30 spellers. The best three were selected after three rounds and one tie breaker.

"It is great to see the students so excited and serious at the same time about spelling. Spelling and penmanship are a dying art, especially with technology being at the forefront of communication. It's great to see at least one of them being focused on," said Sharmin Ara Ahmed, mother of one of the participants at Dhaka Residential Model College.

Alongside school participation, students from class six to ten can also qualify for the Divisional Round by registering and playing the online Spelling Bee game at www.champs21.com. They can play multiple times as only their best score is recorded. The Online round will be open till February 28.

For more information about the Spelling Bee visit www.champs21.com, the first e-learning portal of Bangladesh.

Spotlight on Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1

against Abul Kalam Azad.

"The perpetrators of the crimes could not be brought to book, and this left a deep wound on the country's political psyche and the whole nation. The impunity they enjoyed held back political stability, saw the ascend of militancy, and destroyed the nation's constitution," the verdict added.

The then Pakistan government and the military setup a number of auxiliary forces such as Razakars, Al-Badr, Al-Shams and Peace Committee, according to the verdict delivered by the tribunal Chairman Justice Obaidul Hassan.

These forces were formed to collaborate with the Pakistani military in identifying and eliminating all those who sympathised with the liberation of Bangladesh, individuals belonging to minority religious groups, especially the Hindus, political groups belonging to the Awami League and other pro-liberation political parties, Bangalee intellectuals and innocent civilians.

People of the then East Pakistan wholeheartedly supported the war and participated in the call to free Bangladesh, said the verdict.

"But a small number of Bangalees, Biharis, other pro-Pakistanis, as well as members of a number of different religion-based political parties, particularly Jamaat and its student wing Islami Chhatra Sangha (ICS) joined and/or collaborated with the Pakistan military to actively oppose the creation of independent Bangladesh.

"And most of them committed and facilitated the commission of atrocities in violation of customary international law in the territory of Bangladesh."

As a result, three million people were killed, near about a quarter million women raped, about 10 million people forced to flee to India and million others internally displaced, said the 112-page judgment.

Atrocious crimes were committed during the nine-month war, which resulted in the birth of Bangladesh.

The verdict said women were tortured, raped and killed. With the help of its local collaborators, the Pakistan military kept numerous Bangalee women as sex slaves inside their camps and cantonments. Susan Brownmiller, a US feminist, journalist and author who conducted a detailed study, has estimated the number of raped women at over 400,000.

The massacre began with Operation Searchlight, which was designed to disarm and liquidate Bangalee policemen, soldiers and military officers and to arrest and kill nationalist Bangalee politicians.

The operation was also aimed at arresting and killing professionals, intellectuals, and students. The Pak military actions in collaboration with Razakar, Al-badr and Jamaat were intended to stamp out the liberation movement and crush the aspiration of the Bangalee people.

The partition of British India based on the two-nation theory in August 1947 gave birth to two new states, one a secular state named India and the other the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The western part was eventually named West Pakistan and the eastern part East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh.

In 1952 the Pakistani authorities attempted to impose Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan ignoring Bangla, the language of the majority population of the then Pakistan. The people of the then East Pakistan launched a movement demanding that Pakistan's military government recognise Bangla as one of the state languages.

This language movement later turned into the movement for greater autonomy and eventually independence, the verdict reads.

In the general election of 1970, the Awami League under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won majority of the seats. But despite this overwhelming majority, the Pakistan government did not hand over power to the elected leader as democratic norms would require.

As a result, a movement started in the then East Pakistan and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his historic speech on March 7, 1971, called on the people of Bangladesh to strive for independence if people's verdict is not respected and power is not handed over to him, the verdict adds.

In the early hours of March 26, 1971, following the onslaught of Operation Searchlight by the Pakistani military on March 25, Bangabandhu declared Bangladesh independent immediately before he was arrested by the Pakistani authorities.

A renowned researcher on genocide, RJ Rummel, in his book "Statistics of Democide: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900" says: "In East Pakistan [General Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan and his top generals] also planned to murder its Bengali intellectual, cultural, and political elite. They also planned to indiscriminately murder hundreds of thousands of its Hindus and drive the rest into India. And they planned to destroy its economic base to insure that it would be subordinate to West Pakistan for at least a generation to come."

Death for Bachchu Razakar

FROM PAGE 1

The long-cherished International Crimes Tribunal-1 was formed in March 2010, but it was the Tribunal-2, formed only in March 2012, that delivered the first verdict.

The tribunals formed to prosecute, try and punish the perpetrators of crimes are seen by many as a courageous endeavour to come out of the culture of impunity in Bangladesh.

The prosecution had stacked eight charges against the expelled Jamaat-e-Islami leader for crimes he committed four decades ago in Faridpur.

But Tribunal-2 Chairman Justice Obaidul Hassan and members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Judge M Shahinur Islam unanimously held Azad guilty in six charges related to crimes against humanity and one for genocide.

The only charge, which the prosecution failed to prove, was based on the abduction, torture and confining of freedom fighter Abu Yusuf Pakhi in Faridpur.

"In dealing with the charges we have found that the accused Abul Kalam Azad alias Bachchu himself had physically participated being accompanied by his armed accomplices to the commission of crimes and as such he held criminally responsible for the direct commission of crimes proved," the judges said in the verdict.

Azad was sentenced to death for four of the charges, although found "guilty beyond doubt" in seven.

The tribunal noted that he deserved imprisonment for the other three offences but the court decided not to award separate sentences as he had already received the death sentence.

For the four offences, he will be sentenced to death and be "hanged by the neck till he is dead" under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973, the tribunal said.

"Since the convicted accused has been absconding the 'sentence of death' as awarded above shall be executed after causing his arrest or when he surrenders before the Tribunal, whichever is earlier."

Azad went into hiding seven hours before Tribunal-2 issued an arrest warrant against him on April 3, 2012. His trial was held in his absence and a tribunal-appointed lawyer moved for him.

Since the tribunals enjoy the status of High Court, a convict has the right to file an appeal only with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court within 30 days of the judgment delivery by the tribunal.

Azad will not have the right to appeal unless he surrenders or is arrested within 30 days, as a convict cannot appeal in absentia, some legal experts said.

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spectrum of society took out celebratory processions.

A three-tier security measure was in place in and around the old high court building where the tribunals are situated.

After the verdict, many were seen unable to control happy tears.

Considering the huge gathering and the tiny size of its courtroom, the Tribunal-2 judges sat in the larger courtroom of Tribunal-1 to deliver the judgment.

Justice Obaidul Hassan, chief of Tribunal-2, started reading out a 24-page summary of the verdict around 10:45am. It took him an hour to finish.

The full judgment comes in 336 paragraphs on 112 pages.

"It has been proved from testimony of witnesses that the accused had directly participated to the commission of crimes as an armed member of the Razakar force," the tribunal said in its conclusion.

"Besides, we have found that for the reason of his atrocious acts in the locality, the accused was widely known as 'Razakar'."

As per the law, the tribunal said, "An individual incurs criminal liability for the direct commission of a crime, whether as an individual or jointly."

On November 4, 2012, the tribunal indicted Azad, who used to regularly preach on a couple of private TV channels.

Since November 26, a total of 22 prosecution witnesses, including victims and family members of victims, and the investigation officer of the case, testified against him.

The tribunal-appointed defence counsel failed to produce any witnesses due to "non-cooperation" of Azad's family members.

Sahidur Rahman, conducting prosecutor of the case, expressed his satisfaction over the verdict.

Defence counsel Abdus Shukur Khan said the accused did not get justice. "The accused will be benefited if he goes to the apex court against the verdict," he said, adding that the tribunal-appointed counsel does not have authority to file an appeal against the verdict.

Azad was charged with the killing of Chitta Ranjan Das in Faridpur in 1971. In an instant reaction to The Daily Star, his son Gopal Das said: "My father's soul will now rest in peace."

He thanked the government for holding the trial.

"Like me, thousands of sons, daughters and family members of martyrs are waiting to see other war criminals walking the gallows," Gopal said.

Some journalists rushed to Azad's home in Dhaka after the verdict but his wife refused to open the door or talk to them. She, however, did say that according to her knowledge, her husband was not involved in any crime and that she does not know Azad's whereabouts.

PROVED CHARGES IN BRIEF

During the first week of June 1971, Azad and his accomplices apprehended Ranjit Kumar Nath alias Babu Nath from Khabashpur in Faridpur town and took him to the Pakistani army camp at Faridpur Circuit House.

After discussion with Pakistani Major Akram Koraishi and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Ranjit was taken to a house at Bihari Colony, kept confined to a room there and tortured with the intent to kill, but he somehow escaped. Mojaheed, now secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami facing war crimes charges, was a top leader of Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of the Islamist party.

On May 14, 1971, Azad accompanied by 10-12 armed Razakars attacked the village of Kolaran of Boalmari in Faridpur. There, he shot landlord Sudhangshu Mohan Roy and injured his son Monimoy Roy.

On May 16, 1971, Azad accompanied by 10-12 armed Razakars captured Madhab Chandra Biswas of Purura Namapara village of Nagarkanda in Faridpur, about 300 yards from his house. He shot Madhab to death.

On June 8, 1971, Azad along with 10-12 armed Razakars attacked Natibodia village in Boalmari of Faridpur and took away two females from the house. He along with

four to five of his accomplices raped them.

On June 3, 1971, Azad along with 10-12 armed Razakars launched a planned attack on the Hindu-dominated village Fulbaria of Nagarkanda in Faridpur and looted houses.

Accompanied by seven-eight accomplices, Azad dragged out Chitta Ranjan Das from his house and shot him dead.

On May 17, 1971, Azad accompanied by 30-35 armed Razakars launched a planned attack on the Hindu-dominated Hasamdia village of Boalmari in Faridpur. They looted and burnt houses of Hindu civilians and shot nine Hindus to death.

On May 18, 1971, Azad along with seven-eight armed Razakars attacked the house of Guru Das of Ujirpur Bazarpara of Saltha in Faridpur and abducted his daughter and tortured her keeping her locked up for seven to eight days.

The girl was released, but she committed suicide when the accomplices of Azad tried to take her again.

Fares charged

FROM PAGE 20

Sohag Hossain, a private university student, on Friday bought a ticket of VIP Deluxe Paribahan for Jhenidah for Tk 400, which was earlier sold at Tk 350.

The other bus operators on Dhaka-Magura, Meherpur and Chuadanga routes have been charging the same fare, he added.

The distance from Dhaka to Jhenidah is around 230km. As per the government decision, the fare on this route should be hiked by Tk 23.

Buses of SR Paribahan ply the Dhaka-Rangpur route. A staff at its Kalyanpur counter in the city said they are now charging each passenger Tk 550, which was Tk 500 a week ago.

Rangpur is around 310 kilometres off Dhaka and the fare should be increased by Tk 31.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity secretary General Khandaker Enyet Ullah said, "I have heard the allegations that some transport owners have hiked bus fares immediately after the announcement of fuel price hike. This might have occurred due to a long gap [18 days] between the fuel price hike and bus fare hike."

On January 3, the government raised prices of diesel and kerosene by Tk 7 a litre, and octane and petrol by Tk 5 a litre in efforts to cut subsidy cost.

Diesel and kerosene now sell at Tk 68 a litre, and octane and petrol at Tk 99 and Tk 96 a litre respectively.

Domestic help

FROM PAGE 20

The Bangla daily Kaler Kantho in the recent days, Kazal Mollah, a politically influential person at Kapasia in Gazipur, raped the girl, aged around 18, while his wife tortured her brutally in their house.

Kazal claimed to be the assistant private secretary (APS) to ruling Awami League lawmaker Simin Hossain Rimi. But the lawmaker said Kazal Mollah was neither her APS nor her relative, according to reports.

Yesterday, the court also ordered the government authorities concerned to take necessary steps for physical and mental treatment of the girl.

After hearing a writ petition, the HC bench comprised of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Zafar Ahmed said Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWL) will supervise her treatment at the OCC.

It also fixed January 24 for passing further orders on the issue.

Earlier, the court recorded the statements of the victim after Kapasia police produced her before the bench as per its January 20 order.

Victim's father, Deputy Attorney General Mokhesur Rahman, writ petitioner Salma Ali, also executive director of BNWL, and her lawyer Fawzia Karim Feroze were present in the judges' chamber during recording of her statement.

Salma Ali filed the petition on January 20 with the HC following the newspaper reports, and prayed to the court to pass necessary orders.



Sultana Kamal

"It's a much-awaited moment in our life," said rights activist Sultana Kamal. She said the identified war criminals are getting their due punishment.

"These people might not have been legally identified as war criminals for so long, but crores of people of Bangladesh know that they were war criminals," said Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra.

After this verdict, there is no confusion over the identities of these war criminals. "It's a big achievement for us."



Shyamoli Nasreen

"We have got a long cherished justice today," said Shyamoli Nasreen Chowdhury, another war crimes trial campaigner.

She expressed her gratitude to the prime minister on behalf of martyred families and hoped the trial of other war crimes accused, who were now behind bars, will be completed soon.

"Apart from fulfilling the electoral pledges, I hope, the government will rid the nation of stigma by holding trial of all other accused and executing the verdicts quickly."

Shahriar Kabir

FROM PAGE 1

despite many odds.

"But this is not the end; we have a long way to go."

Shahriar, executive president of Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, said many consider Azad as a lesser-known Razakar, which is not true.

Whatever Azad did in 1971 as a member of notorious auxiliary force Razakar Bahini was part of genocide.

The verdict is important to understand the atrocity of Razakar Bahini and the need for trial of Razakar, Al-Badr, Al-Shams and their patron Jamaat-e-Islami as organisations.

The judgment also makes it clear how brutal the genocide was.

It's an example for the countries seeking justice for genocide. "There are around a hundred incidents of genocide that had taken place in different countries in the last century and many of the countries are waiting for trial. Bangladesh has showed the way."

Shahriar also said Azad might use his death sentence as a trump card. "He [Azad] may seek political asylum in Europe and Canada showing the copy of the verdict."

Therefore, he called for comprehensive diplomatic efforts to bring back Azad. "We have to run a campaign so that no country gives political asylum to those who had committed genocide."

Calling upon the government to ensure quick execution of the verdict, he said, "This trial is not for just any other crime like murder or rape; it's for a crime committed to eliminate a nation."

"The entire nation has been waiting for justice for the last 40 years. So the government will have to take the public demand into serious consideration."



Nasiruddin Yousuff

Nasiruddin Yousuff, a noted cultural activist and freedom fighter, said, "Now it is proved that Jamaat-e-Islami is a party of war criminals."

It is one of the biggest days for the nation, he said, appealing the government to bring back Bachchu Razakar and execute the verdict immediately.

He paid his gratitude to Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam and Poet Sufia Kamal for their relentless efforts for the trial of those liable for the crimes against humanity.



MA Hasan

Freedom fighter and war crimes researcher MA Hasan said, "It is a victory of conscience against crimes and criminals."

"If we can implement the verdict, it will be a landmark in establishing human dignity for which we fought the Liberation War in 1971," said Hasan, also convener of the War Crimes Facts Finding Committee.

Mentioning the trial for crimes against humanity in domestic court as unique, he said, "If we complete all the trials successfully, it would be an example for the whole world."

He called upon the government to put international pressure on Pakistan to send back Azad to Bangladesh.

Saying that many others are yet to be tried, he suggested setting up a permanent investigation agency to probe those who committed crimes against humanity in 1971. He hoped the government will take initiative in this regard.

Mizanur Rahman

FROM PAGE 1

He was addressing the launching of "Indigenous Human Rights Reports-2012," at Cirdap auditorium in the capital.

"I am glad because the verdict will end the culture of unaccountability going on in our country for ages, and I am upset that an offender [Azad] escaped dusting the eyes of law enforcement agencies."

Kapeng Foundation organised the programme.

Ferdousy

FROM PAGE 1

people."

A victim and survivor of the 1971 war crimes, Ferdousy said words cannot express how happy she is.

The verdict brought an end to the nation's long wait, she said, hoping that the trial of the other top war crimes accused will be completed soon. "The nation has waited long 42 years and does not want to wait any longer."

Expressing gratitude to the government and the war crimes trial campaigners, Ferdousy Priyabhashini, also a veteran sculptor, demanded the government bring back Azad and execute the verdict immediately.

AK Khandaker

FROM PAGE 1

movement."

He hoped the trials of other war crimes accused will be completed soon.



Muntassir Mamoon

With this historical verdict, the four-decade-long wait has ended and fresh journey has begun, said Muntassir Mamoon, an eminent historian and a leading war crimes trial campaigner, in his first reaction while stepping down from the courtroom.

From now on, he said, the country will head towards justice from the culture of impunity.

Mamoon, the first witness in the war crimes case against former Jamaat chief Ghulam Azam, said, "We believe what the tribunal has done amid its constraints is incomparable."

Terming the judgment a big achievement for a country in South Asia, he called upon the government to be more careful about the hearing on the appeals of the accused at the Appellate Division to avoid any disaster.

He suggested appointing more lawyers in this regard.



Kazi Mukul

"We want continuation of the trial till a single collaborator remains alive," said Kazi Mukul, general secretary of Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee.

For the last 20 years the committee has been campaigning for the trial, he said, hoping that the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court will dispose of the matter quickly once the defence appeals.

Promise kept

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kept our word," the prime minister said in her reaction to the maiden verdict of war crimes trial.

"By the grace of Almighty Allah, the first verdict has been pronounced," she said, adding that the war crimes trial would continue and those accused of the crimes would be brought to book.

Hasina was addressing a meeting of the Awami League Central Working Committee at her Gono Bhaban residence.

She said, "Earlier, the nation got rid of a stigma through the execution of the verdict in Bangabandhu murder case, and today [Monday] we have detached ourselves from another stigma."

Hasina, also president of the ruling AL, said the task of trying the war criminals was not that easy. "I seek people's support to complete the job."

She hoped that from now on, no one would be able to scuttle the war crimes trial.

The prime minister alleged BNP founder Ziaur Rahman had stopped the war crimes trials, freed the war criminals, given them citizenship and rewarded them with lucrative portfolios after the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and four national leaders.

She said they had started collecting information about war crimes trials since the AL's previous rule, and for this reason, they were able to start the trial by enacting law and setting up tribunals.

AL leader Abul Hasnat Abdullah thanked the prime minister for making good on her promise to try the war criminals.

Party's acting General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif also spoke at the meeting.