

Alim got new life after '75 changeover

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Abdul Alim has been quite a lucky man.

Though his war crimes have finally caught up with him, in the years after 1975 Abdul Alim was able to climb back to prominence and national attention in a country whose birth he had vigorously opposed in 1971. Thanks to the violent political change-over in August, 1975, and the rise of the military regime of General Ziaur Rahman, he was able to serve as an elected chairman of Joypurhat municipality and Joypurhat Sadar Upazila twice, president of Joypurhat Bar Association twice and a parliamentarian thrice. His most satisfying moment came when he was inducted as a minister in the Zia regime. The tragedy of August, 1975, ensured that Alim, and many others who had like him energetically opposed the birth of Bangladesh, would be rehabilitated and would go on to serve a country they had never had cause to believe in.

In Alim's case, it was ironic that although he was taken into custody soon after liberation on charges of collaborating with the Pakistan occupation army in 1971, he found himself out on bail a mere two years into independence. Until he was netted for war crimes in March 2011, Alim stayed a free man, playing a prominent role in Zia's political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Born on November 1, 1930, in what is today West Bengal, Alim with his family migrated to Joypurhat in 1950-51. In 1958, he joined the Muslim League. He rose to being an influential leader of the Convention Muslim League headed by Pakistan's first military dictator Ayub Khan. In 1971, he served as vice chairman of Bogra District Council.

According to evidence presented by the prosecution at his trial, Alim, in his days as a student, was involved in the All-India Muslim Student League, the student wing of the Muslim League and was a cohort of its top leader Shah Azizur Rahman.

Shah Aziz, who himself would serve as a collaborator of the then Pakistan government, led the Pakistan dele-

gation to the UN General Assembly on behalf of the murderous Yahya Khan junta in September 1971. Aziz later became prime minister of Bangladesh under General Zia.

On June 11, 2012, when war crimes charges were framed against him, Alim claimed that he had been involved in progressive politics since his days as a student and taken part in the Language Movement in 1952. Closer to the truth is the fact that the Muslim League, which was in power in 1952, had directly opposed the language movement.

Alim, as a residential student of Salimullah Hall at Dhaka University, completed his master's in 1951 in Islamic History and LLB in 1953 from the university, his defence said.

According to the prosecution, Alim contested in the election of 1970 as a candidate of the Convention Muslim League but was defeated. He was chairman of Joypurhat Peace Committee and Razakar commander there during the nine-month-long war.

The members of the peace committee and the Razakar force actively collaborated with the Pakistani forces in committing genocide and mass killings in the nine-month-long war during which 30 lakh Bangladeshis were killed and over two lakh women raped, historic and prosecution documents say.

Alim set up an army camp, peace committee office and training centre for Razakars and accommodation for one Pakistani Major Afzal occupying the Gadi Ghar [trading office] of one Shownlal Bajla, a jute trader of Joypurhat, after he was compelled to go to India, leaving behind all his assets, the lawyer panel said.

While the nation was engaged in a life-and-death battle against the occupation forces and their local collaborators, Alim took part in a by-election to the East Pakistan provincial assembly on a CML ticket and was elected uncontested, the prosecution said.

But the defence claimed that Alim had gone into hiding after the Pakistan army entered Joypurhat in April, 1971, and was not involved

in any crimes committed in Joypurhat. The alibi was binned in yesterday's verdict.

According to a book titled Ekattarer Ghatok Dalara Ke Kothai, which was a prosecution document, Alim was captured by locals and put in a cage for exhibition when Joypurhat was freed.

But Alim's son Sazzad bin Alim, who testified at the trial as a defence witness, said his father had surrendered before a court on February 28, 1972 following the government proclamation under the Collaborators Act, 1972, and a case was filed against him under the same act on March 9, 1972. But his father was acquitted from the case owing to lack of evidence, he claimed.

A defence petition, however, contradicts Sazzad's claim.

Alim's discharge petition says, a special tribunal ordered police to go for further investigations into the case; and "in the meantime" the High Court on January 14, 1974, granted him bail; and Alim was released on January 18.

Alim was elected chairman of Joypurhat municipality in 1975 and 1977, according to the defence.

Having taken charge of the country, Ziaur Rahman made Alim a minister in 1978. Initially, he was made textile minister. After sometime, he was given charge of the ministry of communications. Alim joined Zia's then newly formed party BNP, as per defence and prosecution documents.

Alim was elected chairman of Joypurhat Sadar Upazila in 1985 and 1990, and president of Joypurhat District Bar Association twice in the 1990's. He was elected a parliament member in 1979, 1996 and 2001 from the BNP.

A family member of Alim told The Daily Star that Alim was the 28th founding member of the BNP and number one member of Joypurhat BNP. In 2008, he sought a nomination from the BNP but was denied as he was considered to be a reformist. He, however, was active with BNP politics till before his arrest in March, 2011.

Alim is a widower and the father of four sons and a daughter.

Terminator of Hindus

FROM PAGE 1

The dead include 90-year-old Kanchira Mohanta, whose throat was slit, and Ashwini Kumar Devnath, who was buried alive.

During the trial, prosecution witnesses testified to Alim's personal war against the Hindus, and International Crimes Tribunal-2 in its judgment yesterday said it found his "genocidal intention" from those attacks and his provocative speeches aimed at destroying the community.

Dilip Kumar Chakraborty, the 11th prosecution witness in the case, testified that one day in May 1971, possibly the ninth of the Bangla month of Jaistha, the Pakistan army, local Peace Committee members and Razakars attacked their village, Uttarhat Sahar, and another Hindu village, Harunjahat.

Ten people of the two villages were killed on Alim's orders, the eyewitness said, adding that seven or eight days before the

incident, Alim and Pakistani Major Afzal addressed a meeting at Hatsahar Haat attended by members of the Peace Committee and Razakars.

In the presence of around 500-600 collaborators, Alim asked his followers "to loot the belongings of the Hindus," said Dilip, adding: "We heard him on the loud-speakers from our house."

After the killings, 100-150 Hindus, including Dilip's family members, left for India, he told the court.

First prosecution witness Abdul Momen quoted Alim as saying at the meeting: "We will offer our upcoming Eid prayers at the Garer Math in Kolkata [apparently wishing to occupy some parts of India during the war].... Loot all properties of the Hindus."

The tribunal yesterday said: "The inciting speech made by accused Alim is a fair indication that the intent of targeting the Hindu community was to destroy it in part which is a

constitutive element of the offence of genocide.

"Naturally his speech, in other words, urging the destruction of the Hindu community was inciting and provocative and it had a substantial effect on launching the attack directed at the Hindu community."

The court cited a report published in Dainik Bangla on January 20, 1972, where Alim said people of the minority community would not be spared if they returned to the country and even if they got presidential clemency.

"They will be handed over to the armed forces immediately after their return," the court quoted the report.

It was just one glaring example of his provocative speech.

Molla Shamsul Alam, the fourth prosecution witness, testified that Alim was also personally involved in mass killings in Hindu-inhabited villages in Joypurhat.

According to his testimony, around 12:30pm on April 26, 1971, he was talking to some people near Kural Pukur of Kadiপুর village when a Pakistani army vehicle arrived.

"After sometime, some Pakistani army personnel arrived on trucks and Abdul Alim came along with the Pakistan army," said the witnesses, adding: "He showed the army Hindu localities like Sonapara, Jugipara and Palpara."

"Afterwards, some of his men along with the Pakistan army went to the Hindu villages. There they looted houses, set fire to them and dragged 370 people from their homes to Kural Pukur.... I saw 26 of them being gunned down there."

Bhagirath Chandra Barman, Ajit Mohanta and Jogen Chandra Paul, three eyewitnesses of the massacre carried out by the Pakistan army and their local collaborators, gave a heart-wrenching description of the killing mission.

Bhagirath said Alim ordered the killing of 350-370 Hindus while Ajit, whose 90-year-old grandfather was slaughtered that day, told the court that Alim was the "key person" behind the daylong massacre at the Hindu villages -- Karai Kadiপুর, Chawkpura, Sonapara, Palpara and Munshipara -- in Joypurhat on April 26, 1971.

Bhagirath said 300-350 Hindu women and children, including himself, from Barmanpara and Palpara left for India after the mass killing.

In its verdict, the tribunal said, "This [the testimonies] amply indicates that the attack was launched with 'genocidal intent' of causing massive destruction and killing of civilians belonging to the Hindu community."

The tribunal found Alim guilty of abetting and facilitating the two acts of genocide in Joypurhat and jailed him for the rest of his life.

Durga Puja

FROM PAGE 16

throughout the day," he added.

On the eve of the festival, President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleida Zia, in separate messages, conveyed their heartiest greetings to the Hindus.

"Bangladesh is a glaring instance of communal harmony in the world," Hamid said, hoping that everybody would contribute from their respective position for the development of the nation, maintaining communal harmony.

In her message, the premier said Sharadiya Durga Utsav is not the festival of the Hindu community alone, it has turned into a festival of all, irrespective of race and religion.

"The main characteristic of Durga Utsav is ruination of the evil forces and prayer for truth and beauty.

"Bangladesh is a safe haven for people irrespective of religious belief, creed and colour. Our constitution enshrines the equal rights of people of all faiths," she added.

Nirmal Chatterjee, general secretary of Dhaka City Sarbojanin Puja Committee, told BSS a total of 28,000 puja pandals had been erected for Durga Puja across the country. The figure was 27,200 last year.

Victims' families dejected

BHANUBHUSAN CHAKRABORTY

FROM PAGE 16

army at the instigation of Alim.

"I remember Baba [father] but most of my memories of him are hazy," Bhabubhusan said.

He and his three other siblings waited 42 years to see the man, who had taken away their father from them good, punished.

The judges of the International Crimes Tribunal awarded Alim a jail-unto-death sentence, considering his old age and ailment but "Alim did not show any consideration when my father was taken away and killed".

Bhanubhusan, however, said, "We have to accept the judgment delivered by the honorable tribunal. But he (Alim) did not get the capital punishment he deserved.

"The judges themselves said he [Alim] deserved the capital punishment for the heinous crimes he had committed."

He is hopeful that the government will challenge the verdict in the Supreme Court.

"Before this trial began, the war criminals had this notion that nothing would ever happen to them. Now it is proved that a criminal cannot elude justice," he noted.

DILIP CHAKRABORTY

"A life for a life should have been the right sentence," said Monibhusan's nephew Dilip. Hiding in the bush, he had witnessed how Alim's men took away Hindus, including Monibhusan, to Khetlal Police Station from where they never returned.

Dilip, 59, a primary school teacher in Joypurhat, had testified against Alim in the court.

"The learned tribunal awarded him imprisonment till death. We have no other choice but to accept it," he said.

Instead of getting punished, the war criminals had roamed around the very land whose liberation they opposed while the children of those who were killed in 1971 suffered, Dilip said.

"No one tried to understand their pain. The fact that the perpetrators are being tried at last provides some sort of solace."

LAILY BEGUM

"I am not happy with the verdict," Laily said.

The 64-year old can clearly remember how her father Abdul Kashem was taken away by the Pakistan army and local Razakars in the early hours of July 24, 1971.

She was the 12th prosecution witness in the Alim's case. The defence could not shake her testimony a bit during the cross examination, according to the judgment.

"I am hundred percent certain that Alim is responsible for my father's killing."

Laily, her brother and uncles had pleaded with Alim's men not to take her father away but in vain.

Forty-two years later, Alim was sentenced to 20 years in jail for his involvement in the killing of Abdul Kashem.

Izhar's son arrested

FROM PAGE 16

At least seven were wounded in the incident.

Police filed two cases -- one under explosive substances act and another for stashing acid -- accusing 12 identified and many unnamed persons. Mufti Izharul and Harun were made the prime accused in both the cases.

A murder case was also filed last night against seven, including the father and son and one of the injured, Nurun Nabi.

Nurun Nabi, a diploma engineer, is also a charge-sheeted accused in a murder case filed for the killing of two people in a gunfight that took place in Chittagong after the war crimes verdict against Sayeede, police say.

He landed in jail on March 31 and got bail on May 22.

Now under treatment at

Dhaka Medical College Hospital with 90 percent burns, he is a cadre of Islami Chhatra Shibir, according to police.

On Tuesday, talking to the media, C M P Commissioner Shafiqur Rahman said Nurun Nabi might have been taken to the madrasa for making bombs.

Police have recovered four hand-made grenades from the dormitory room where the blast happened. Eighteen bottles of picric acid, a bomb-making material, have also been found in Izharul's office.

Mufti Izharul, the founder and principal of the madrasa, has remained absconding since Monday evening.

Sources said acting on a tip-off, a joint team of Chittagong Metropolitan Police began a raid in Ichhapur village under

Hathazari upazila around 1:00am yesterday.

Hathazari is known as the base of Hefajat, a radical Islamist organisation.

Police arrested Harun and his bodyguard Junaid, 30, in Ichhapur around 3:00 a.m., said C M P Additional Commissioner Banaj Kumar Majumder.

During interrogation, Junaid claimed to be the security guard of the madrasa, said the police official.

Harun left the madrasa after the explosion and was hiding in his in-laws' house, from where he was detained, police said in a press briefing.

Several students of the madrasa and witnesses said Harun had arranged sending the injured to hospitals.

Harun, also deputy principal of the madrasa, along with two of his associates was arrested by detectives in

the madrasa in November 2009 over his alleged links to the militant outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

Yesterday afternoon, a Chittagong court placed him on a 10-day remand in the two cases.

The court of Chittagong Metropolitan Magistrate Mashfiqul Islam passed the order when police produced Harun and six other arrestees with a prayer for remand.

One of the arrestees, Monir Hossain, was placed on a day's remand while each of five others, including Junaid, was put on a three-day remand in the explosives case.

Monir, hostel superintendent of the madrasa; its teachers Md Ishaq, Abdul Mannan and Tafsir Ahmed and a student named Habibur Rahman were arrested at the madrasa on Monday night.

Alim's family to challenge conviction

FROM PAGE 16

Such crimes, people wouldn't have voted for him."

Also a defence witness in the case against Alim, Sazzad said his father never belonged to the Razakar or Peace Committee during the Liberation War. "In 1971, our father was in hiding, far from Joypurhat," he added.

Defence lawyer Ahsanul Huq Hena said they would lodge an appeal with the Supreme Court against the verdict.

Talking to The Daily Star, Attorney General

Mahbubey Alam said Alim should have been awarded death sentence for committing crimes against humanity.

But it is a matter of satisfaction that the trial of Alim has been completed and his misdeeds have finally been revealed before the people, he mentioned.

On whether an appeal will be filed with the SC seeking death penalty for Alim, the attorney general said they will decide on it after getting the full text of

the verdict.

The ruling Awami League was not happy about the verdict, but said it accepted the tribunal's judgment as the party is respectful of the court.

"People's expectation was capital punishment for Alim. But the tribunal has sentenced him to jail for the rest of his life considering his health and age," Mahbul Alam Hanif, joint general secretary of the AL, told The Daily Star.

He hoped that the prose-

cution would move to challenge the judgment in the higher court.

The main opposition BNP remained tight-lipped yesterday following the conviction of its former leader in the war crimes case.

Talking to newsmen, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said they will express their reaction after discussing the verdict issue in the party forum.

Jamaat-e-Islami, a key component of the BNP-led

18-party alliance, did not make any statement over the verdict.

Rashed Khan Menon, president of Workers Party, a component of the AL-led 14-party alliance, said, "We have seen enough examples that at Alim's age many war criminals of the Second World War got capital punishment. But in this case we didn't see this."

He urged the prosecution to go for an appeal with the Supreme Court against the tribunal's verdict.

Many witnesses

FROM PAGE 2

Ajit Mohanta, another prosecution witness, and Dhirendranath Mohanta, who had lost a few of his relatives to the massacre, also fled Koro Kadiপুর and are now living in Joypurhat town, Bhabirodh added.

The villagers who stayed back also refused to comment on the verdict.

Contacted, Md Hamidul Alam, Joypurhat superintendent of police, said he was aware of the plight of the villagers, adding that his department was keeping a

close watch on the areas so that the villagers were not persecuted.

Amzad Hossain, commander of Joypurhat Muktiyoddha Sangsad, and Zakir Hossain, joint secretary of Joypurhat Awami League, said the verdict had surprised the entire nation because a war criminal like Alim who had committed crimes against humanity in association with Pakistani troops was not given capital punishment.

On the other hand, BNP leaders in the district said they

had no plans for activities over the verdict since Alim had acted like a reformist during the tenure of the last caretaker government.

The BNP leaders declined to talk about the verdict.

Meanwhile, Alim's supporters tried to bring out a procession in Joypurhat town, but were chased away by supporters of the ruling AL in Pachurmor area.

Alim was arrested on March 27, 2011, for committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.