

Qaiser once tried for war crimes, acquitted

Defence argues at war tribunal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The defence of war crimes accused Syed Mohammad Qaiser yesterday said their client was accused in a case filed under the Collaborators Act, 1972 immediately after independence and was acquitted by a special tribunal.

It would be double jeopardy, if charge(s) were framed against Qaiser and he was tried for almost similar charges, from which he got acquittal in 1972, defence counsel Rezaul Karim told the International Crimes Tribunal-2.

The defence, however, could not show the certified copy of that verdict yesterday.

On November 10, the prosecution pressed 18 charges against Qaiser, a former state minister in military dictator HM Ershad's cabinet, accusing him of his involvement in genocide and crimes against humanity in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria in 1971.

According to the prosecution, Qaiser was involved with Muslim League, which opposed the Liberation War, and was the founder and leader of the "Qaiser Force", an associate organisation of the Pakistani army in 1971.

The prosecution told the tribunal that Qaiser was involved in an act of genocide that

left 108 people dead, at least 10 incidents of killing that left 47 people dead, two incidents of rape and five incidents of abduction, loot, arson and other crimes between April 27 and November 15, 1971.

But moving a discharge petition, Rezaul yesterday said his client was neither involved with Muslim League nor led any force named "Qaiser Bahini".

Qaiser would have contested the 1970's election with Muslim League ticket, not as an independent candidate, had he been involved with the party, Rezaul argued.

If their client had led the "Qaiser Bahini" with 500-700 members, it must have got media's attention, but the prosecution had not submitted any newspaper reports, he added.

Rezaul further said a special tribunal in Sylhet acquitted his client in Sylhet of the charges brought against him in 1972.

"If he [Qaiser] had committed crimes [in 1971], he couldn't get the acquittal," said Rezaul.

When the court asked him if the charges brought by the prosecution and the charges brought against Qaiser under the Collaborators Act were the same, Rezaul said that case was related to a similar charge.

BNP lawmaker Khokon held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective Branch of police yesterday arrested BNP Joint Secretary General and lawmaker barrister Mahbub Uddin Khokon in the capital.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, confirmed the arrest with The Daily Star.

Khokon, also secretary of Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association, was detained in front of Matsya Bhaban, said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser advocate Khandaker Mahbub Hossain.

DB police picked up Khokon around 4:15pm when he was going to Karwan Bazar after coming out of the High Court to attend an anniversary ceremony of a private television channel there, Hossain added.

"DB police have not yet said in which case Khokon was arrested," Hossain told The Daily Star.

On Wednesday night, law enforcers barred Khokon from entering Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday rejected both bail and remand prayers for former BNP lawmaker Sarder Sakhawat Hossain Bakul and BNP MP Shammi Akhter and ordered police to quiz them at the jail gate.

On Wednesday afternoon, law enforcers detained the duo when they were entering BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan residence.

Bakul and Shammi were shown arrested in different cases filed with Bhatarara and Banani Police Stations for vandalising and torching vehicles.

Modi gets clean chit over 2002 Gujarat riot

AGENCIES

An Indian court yesterday accepted the clean chit given to Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi by special investigation team (SIT) over allegations by a victim's wife that he and 57 others were involved in a conspiracy behind the 2002 riots that killed some 2,000 people.

Metropolitan Magistrate BJ Ganatra told the court in Gujarat's main city of Ahmedabad that he accepted the findings of a 2012 official SIT inquiry that cleared Modi of wrongdoing.

Zakia Jafri, the widow of retired Congress party MP Ehsan Jafri, who was killed in the riots, filed a petition against the inquiry which was commissioned by the Supreme Court.

In her petition accused Modi, his ministerial colleagues, top police officials and members of the BJP of conspiracy in the riots.

The magistrate said insufficient evidence existed against Modi, who was chief minister of the western state of Gujarat at the time of the riots in which mobs went on the rampage leaving mostly Muslims dead.

The ruling is a boost to Modi, a Hindu nationalist with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who leads in opinion polls just months before the general election but still divides voters over his role in the riots.

"Satyamev Jayate! truth alone triumphs," the Gujarat chief minister tweeted on micro-blogging site Twitter after the verdict.



The petitioner Zakia Jafri broke down in the court room as the order in a seven-year long battle was pronounced. Zakia, her son Tanvir Jafri and their counsel later told the media that they plan to move a higher court against the order.

Zakia's husband was killed in the riots along with 69 others in one of the worst massacres at Gulberg Society in Ahmedabad on February 28, 2002.

Her husband was burned to death along with 68 others when a mob stormed a residential complex housing Muslim families in Ahmedabad.

The riots across Gujarat were triggered by the death of 59 Hindu pilgrims in a train fire on February 27, 2002 that was blamed on Muslims. An inquiry in 2005 concluded the train fire was accidental.

2 AL men killed

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the chairman of Khedapara union, in this connection.

Quoting locals, Mir Rezaul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Monirampur Police Station, said Shofi along with 4-5 AL activists had an altercation with Faruque when they were pasting posters in Mazihiyali-Chanpur area for Khan Tipu Sultan, the party hopeful for Jessore-5 (Monirampur) constituency.

Soon after Faruque left the place, Rezaul said, a band of BNP-Jamaat activists numbering 15-20 suddenly attacked the AL men around 2:30pm.

The criminals then beat and stabbed Shofi mercilessly, leaving him injured critically.

The miscreants also attacked another party man, Arobindo Hazara, as he tried to save Shofi. Others, however, escaped unhurt.

The locals whisked them off to Monirampur Upazila Health Complex where the doctors declared Shofi dead.

Local AL brought out a procession in the upazila headquarters protesting the killing.

The OC said the move was on to nab the criminals.

INJURED AL LEADER DIES

Meanwhile, AL president of Godkhali union in Jhikargacha of the district, Robiul Islam, succumbed to his injuries at a private hospital in Dhaka yesterday afternoon.

Unidentified miscreants stabbed him indiscriminately on the way from Godkhali Bazaar to his home at Babupara around 11:00pm on Wednesday.

Jhikargacha Police Station OC Kamruzzaman said Robiul was attacked in an internal feud.

Attacked again

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guerillas during the war, said: "I feel like giving up the idea of an independent nation that Mujibur [Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] had given me, but it is difficult to let go of the dream.

"I was 25 years old then. I gave valuable information to the guerillas that helped them blow up bridges and carry out operations."

Khodabaksh said his father had been very vocal against the arson attacks over the past few months and even publicly protested such violence. This might have brought the attack on him.

"They cannot make me vote for them by burning me," ranted the freedom fighter in his bed.

Meanwhile, the condition of Shahjahan, who was burnt when arsonists set fire to a CNG he was travelling by on Saturday, remained unchanged yesterday.

The 30-year-old from Mymensingh suffered 31 percent burns, and his pain is so much that anyone entering the Intensive Care Unit could hear him groan.

"He cried all night. He neither slept himself nor let anyone else sleep," said his aunt, Ambia.

His wife or anyone else of his family was yet to see him.

"It is good that way -- I doubt his wife could bear to see him in this state. His lips are so swollen, the bottom lip is hanging down to his chin," said Ambia.

The pain in his throat was caused by flames and pollutants that damaged his respiratory tract, said burn unit resident surgeon Partha Shankar Paul.

Police constable Faizul Islam, who was burnt in an arson attack on a police bus on Tuesday, was having the same difficulties.

The authorities are ready to take him to Singapore if needs be, said Khan Muhammed Rajowjan, deputy commissioner of Dhaka

Egypt Muslim Brotherhood may radicalise after terror listing

AFP, Cairo

The military-installed government's listing of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group signals determination to uproot its vast grass-roots network, possibly radicalising the Islamists as they go underground, analysts said.

Security forces had already decimated the group following Islamist president Mohamed Morsi's overthrow in July, with more than 1,000 people killed and thousands more imprisoned, including the Brotherhood's top leadership.

The last major crackdown on the Brotherhood, by president Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, led several members to break off and form more radical groups that are now seen as precursors to al-Qaeda.

Now analysts fear a similar process could unfold, with a new generation of activists breaking from the Brotherhood's more cautious leadership, most of whom are imprisoned with little communication to the outside world.

"It is impossible to dismiss the idea that at least a fringe group of the repression's victims will choose counter-violence and join the jihadists," said Francois Burgat, a Beirut-based expert on Islamist movements.

The decision to list the Brotherhood as a

terrorist group came after the deadly bombing of a police station on Tuesday that killed 15 people and was claimed by Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, an al-Qaeda inspired group spearheading attacks in the Sinai peninsula that have killed scores of police and soldiers since Morsi's overthrow.



The group has no known link to the Brotherhood, and jihadist groups have long criticised the Brotherhood's refusal to take up arms and its embrace of elections, seen by radicals as un-Islamic.

But the government blamed the

Brotherhood for the bombing, and Morsi along with other top Islamists already face trial for allegedly colluding with militants to carry out attacks.

Following the terrorist designation, anyone taking part in the protests the Brotherhood has held on a near-daily basis demanding Morsi's reinstatement could be sentenced to five years in prison, according to the interior ministry.

Possessing Brotherhood literature, or supporting them "verbally or in writing" is also punishable by up to five years in prison, it said in a statement.

Repression could foster violence

The 85-year-old Brotherhood was the most well-organised opposition group during decades of dictatorship and prevailed in a string of polls held after the 2011 overthrow of Hosni Mubarak.

But in the group's early days it did not shy away from violence. The Brotherhood was responsible for a string of assassinations in the 1940s, and was accused of trying to assassinate Nasser, the pan-Arab nationalist icon, in the 1950s.

That led to a major crackdown in which Brotherhood members were jailed and tortured, leading some to break away and form armed groups that went on to launch a wave of attacks on security forces and foreign tourists.

BALLOT PAPERS

The EC will send ballot papers to 146 constituencies of 59 districts amid tight security.

The commission yesterday issued two circulars to the returning officers giving different instructions about receiving ballot papers and their duties and polls results management.

It also sent a letter to the home ministry, requesting it to keep helicopters ready for carrying electoral materials and election officials in remote areas.

POLICE PROMOTION

Also yesterday, the commission approved the promotion of 617 policemen of constable and assistant sub-inspector levels.

Under the law, any transfer or promotion of government officials during election period must be approved by the EC.

Sixty hurt in Argentina piranha attack

AFP, Buenos Aires

Piranhas on a Christmas Day feeding frenzy injured some 60 people in the Argentine city of Rosario, officials said yesterday.

Those injured in the attack Wednesday by the ferocious fish included a girl who lost part of a finger. Health Undersecretary Gabriela Quintanilla told reporters.

Quintanilla said the attack occurred Wednesday off the coast of Rosario, some 310 kilometers (200 miles) north of Buenos Aires.

A medical official, Gustavo Centurion, said the attack which began at mid-morning on Christmas Day was "very aggressive."

"There were some people that the fish literally had torn bits of flesh from," he said.

The region has been hit by a heat wave with temperatures soaring to some 38 degrees Celsius (more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit) prompting thousands to seek relief in the waters of the Parana River, which is packed with carnivorous fish.

Nine die in Russian plane crash

AFP, Moscow

A Russian cargo plane crashed into a military warehouse complex in Siberia yesterday, killing all nine people on board, the emergencies ministry said.

The Antonov An-12 military transport plane, flying from the Siberian city of Novosibirsk with cargo on board, crashed into storage warehouses at a military unit near Irkutsk, another Siberian city.

A defence ministry spokesman said the airplane destroyed the roofs of two buildings where auto parts were stored.

Scrap Jan 5

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Abdur Rob at that time did not give any response to Kader Siddique's remark. Bikalpadhara President Badruddoza Chowdhury also remained silent.

Kader Siddique, however, added that if any violence occurred during the march programme, the alliance would withdraw its support.

According to the statement read out at the conference, the alliance will always be against autocracy, war crimes, crimes against humanity, terrorism, extremism and communalism.

Wildcat strike hits Lufthansa flights to Paris

AFP, Bobigny

Lufthansa flights to and from Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris were disrupted yesterday after workers staged a wildcat strike against planned job cuts, but were set to slowly resume.

Schneckenleitner said two flights from Frankfurt would leave for Paris in the afternoon as scheduled.

A total of 11 flights were due to depart from Roissy Thursday and an equal number scheduled to arrive.

The Aerports de Paris had earlier said all the flights would be cancelled. But the situation changed after two Lufthansa officials held

talks with unions and persuaded them to go back to work, a French union member said.

In a joint statement, several unions had earlier complained of a "general malaise" among Lufthansa workers at France's main airport.

Lufthansa, under tough pressure from low-cost rivals, has embarked on a savings drive to boost profitability and earmarked 3,500 job cuts around the world, including 199 in France.

Since the announcement, workers have been "tired and depressed" and several have taken medical leave, leading to understaffing levels of more than 20 percent, said Franck