

TORTURE, ABDUCTION IN 1971

# Witness testifies against Qaisar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A woman yesterday testified that Syed Mohammad Qaisar and his cohorts had tortured her husband and father-in-law, taken away her husband and burned their house in Brahmanbaria during the Liberation War.

Nishamon, wife of late Golam Rouf of Haripur village under Nasirnagar upazila, told the International Crimes Tribunal-2 that her husband was released in exchange of ransom, but her father-in-law died after two weeks due to the torture.

"My mother-in-law and I pleaded for the lives of my husband and father-in-law to Qaisar and his men, but Qaisar shoved me away," added Nishamon, 15th prosecution witness in the case against Qaisar.

Her brother-in-law Golam Noor, also 13th prosecution witness in the case, gave almost a similar description citing Nishamon, his brother, mother and several others as he was in India at that time.

Qaisar, a state minister of the HM Ershad regime, faces 16 charges including genocide committed in Brahmanbaria and Habiganj during the war. The 73-year-old accused, however, pleaded not guilty before the court.

During her 70-minute testimony, Nishamon said Qaisar and the members of his "Qaisar Bahini" had come to their Haripur house around 11:00am on the 8th of Bangla month Asar [June 23, 1971] and Qaisar directed his accomplices to pick up her husband.

"We entered the house and locked it. My husband tried to escape, but Qaisar Saheb and his men detained him," said the 71-year-old witness.

Nishamon said the attackers had asked for the whereabouts of her brother-in-law Noor, who was a freedom fighter, and started torturing her husband, as he could not give the information.

Qaisar was acquainted to her and local Tajul, who was a Razakar, helped him and his force find their house, said Nishamon, adding that Qaisar and his men had also tortured her father-in-law when he tried to save his son and could not give the whereabouts of Noor.

Nishamon, who was pregnant at that time, said the attackers had set fire to their house and cowshed, burning eight cows alive.

Qaisar and his men had also taken away her husband, said the witness, adding that when she informed the matter to her father, he went to Qaisar but failed to release him.

Her father and an uncle-in-law had again gone to Qaisar the next day and requested to release her husband, but the accused sought Tk 10,000 in ransom, Nishamon said. Later they had given Tk 8,000 to Qaisar and got her husband released, she added.

"After his return, I had seen torture marks on my husband's body," said Nishamon, adding that her father-in-law died after 16 days due to the torture.

"What was our fault for which Qaisar Miah tortured us? I want justice," said the witness as she completed her testimony and identified the accused at the courtroom.

After her testimony, defence lawyer SM Shahjahan cross-examined her.

During her 34-minute cross-examination, Shahjahan mainly asked questions about the location and distance between different places and suggested that the witness had given 'false testimony', which she denied.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam adjourned the proceedings until Sunday.

The tribunal has meanwhile also completed recording cross-examination of Korban Ali, sixth prosecution witness in the case against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdus Subhan.

## Fear grows as murder accused

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been reorganising and threatening to kill them.

"Hossain's men can carry a systematic attack on us anytime," said Abdus Salam, younger brother of Narayanganj city panel mayor Nazrul Islam, one of the victims.

Five people, who had been summoned to the office of the Detective Branch of police in the capital's Khanpur, expressed their fear before the law enforcers yesterday.

DB Officer-in-Charge Mamunur Rashid Mondal, investigation officer of the case, talked to the victims' families for over three hours.

Mizanur Rahman, brother of another victim Swapan, told The Daily Star that DB police had recorded their statements under the section 161 of the penal code.

He added that they had been asked about Nazrul's rivalry with Hossain and on what grounds they were accusing the Rapid Action Battalion of being involved in the abduction and killing.

"We told our part and also expressed fear due to police's failure to

arrest the accused," Mizanur said.

Khandaker Mahid Uddin, Narayanganj police superintendent, said the families were called in as part of the investigation.

On April 27, Narayanganj panel mayor Nazrul Islam and his four aides, and lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver were kidnapped around the same time after they had left the court area by two cars.

Six bodies, including those of Nazrul and Chandan, were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river on April 30. Another body was found the next day in the river.

Nazrul's widow Selina Islam filed an abduction case accusing Nur Hossain, Yasin Ali, Hasmat Ali and three others with Fatullah Police Station on April 28. The case was transformed into a murder case following the recovery of the bodies.

Meanwhile, Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam alleged that police were not sincere in quizzing the three Rab officials remanded in the case.

"They have been kept in AC rooms

and provided with rich foods. In this way, you cannot expect that police will get any vital information from them," Shahidul said.

The three Rab officials-- Lt Col Tareque Sayeed Mohammad, Maj Arif Hossain and Lt Commander Masud Rana-- were forced into retirement and later arrested based on Shahidul's allegation.

On May 3, he claimed that some Rab-11 men killed Nazrul and others in exchange for Tk 6 crore from Nur Hossain and his accomplices.

ACC to probe corruption by Nur Hossain, Rab officials

The Anti-Corruption Commission will investigate the corruption allegations against Nur Hossain and the three Rab officials.

"We are collecting data and facts and will launch an inquiry into the matters that fall under the jurisdiction of the commission," ACC Secretary M Faizur Rahman Chowdhury told reporters at the monthly press briefing at the commission's Segunbagicha office in the capital yesterday.

## Crime pays back

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opened fire on him, killing him on the spot.

The trial of his murder was never held. However, people of Feni by and large believe that the murder was carried out on the directives of Ekramul Haque as the duo had been engaged in an escalating feud over establishing supremacy in the area. Ekramul too was a Jubo League leader back then.

Fourteen years later, Ekramul, now chairman of Phulgazi upazila parishad and president of the upazila Awami League, was shot and burnt alive inside his car near the same spot on Tuesday. The grisly murder too appears to be a result of internal strife of the ruling party.

The background of Ekramul does not look bright. He was a contractor and allegedly controlled illegal activities like extortion, tender manipulation and illegal occupying of sand extraction points known as balu

mahals in Feni.

Son of late Nurul Haque, Ekramul came to the limelight for being one of the members of the "steering committee" of Jainal Hazari, a former ruling party lawmaker, who was known as a criminal godfather in Feni during the 1996-2001 tenure of the AL. The "steering committee" was a fearsome name in the town for it used to carry out Jainal's "assignments".

However, when Jainal went into hiding following the defeat of the AL in 2001 elections, Ekramul followed the suit. He had been either on the run or behind bars until 2009.

With the AL assuming power again in 2009, Ekramul surfaced again. He then contested the upazila elections the same year and came out victorious.

He, however, had a new competitor in the area. Local AL leader Nizam Hazari had established his influence in Feni politics. Nizam became the mayor of Feni municipi-

ality in 2010.

Ekramul joined hands with Nizam and started working together but not for long.

Both Ekramul and Nizam vied to become the MP from two constituencies of Feni in the January 5 elections. But Nizam went ahead of him and became the lawmaker of Feni-2.

In another dark scheme, Ekramul was elected general secretary of Feni Diabetic Samity last year, violating the constitution of the association. The charter does not allow anyone involved in politics to be the president or the general secretary.

A section of local AL leaders opposed him and locked down the door of the samity office. However, Ekramul broke the lock and started attending office there.

In his political career, Ekram faced at least two dozen lawsuits, including murder cases. He was acquitted in some of those, some were withdrawn and the rest are still under trial.

## Modi didn't

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Modi, during his campaign in the recent parliamentary polls in India, had aggressively raised the issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh.

He was vocal about it during his campaign in the north eastern state of Assam and the eastern state of West Bengal.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had launched a sharp attack on Modi for his threat to deport illegal Bangladeshis residing in West Bengal.

Modi in return had accused Mamata's and other parties of indulging in vote-bank politics by allowing Bangladeshi immigrants to settle in Assam and West Bengal.

Modi had also drawn a distinction between Hindu migrants and migrants belonging to other communities without naming them.

The Indian home ministry, in a recent report, noted that infiltration from Bangladesh had come down to a great extent but had not stopped totally, reports our New Delhi correspondent citing Indian home ministry sources.

The report said fencing along the 4,096km India-Bangladesh border had not been completed due to various factors, including the existence of riverine areas.

## Businessman

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Asked why they did not inform police of the ransom deal, he said they did not communicate information to the police, out of fear the abductors might kill his brother.

After kidnapping Musa, the gang initially demanded a ransom of Tk 1 crore from Musa's family.

Musa said the kidnappers took him to Myanmar and tortured him.

Meanwhile, Musa was kidnapped in March last year and was freed in return for Tk 6 lakh.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach Syed Ahmed for his comments about the ransom deal.

Altaf Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kutubdia Police Station, said the victim's family had informed him about the release of Musa.

## Speaker to attend ceremony in Delhi

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Narendra Modi has invited the leaders of SAARC countries, including Bangladesh and Pakistan, to his oath taking ceremony as prime minister next Monday, which is considered as a bold step to embark on a policy of regional engagement.

Modi will be administered the oath as the 15th prime minister of India by President Pranab Mukherjee at the forecourt of the historic Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi which will be attended by more than 3,000 guests.

This is for the first time that these foreign leaders have been invited to an Indian prime minister's swearing-in ceremony.

"Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh has written to his SAARC counterparts inviting their leaders to attend the swearing-in ceremony on May 26," Syed Akbaruddin, spokesperson of the Indian external affairs ministry, said in New Delhi yesterday.

The spokesperson added that invitations to the SAARC heads of state and government had been sent on behalf of prime minister-designate Modi for the swearing-in ceremony.

Apart from Hasina and Nawaz Sharif, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai, Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Nepal Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and Maldivian President

Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom have also been invited, reports Our New Delhi Correspondent.

Some of the leaders including Karzai, Rajapaksa and Tobgay have indicated that they may attend the ceremony.

Narendra Modi's party BJP yesterday said it was his desire to invite the heads of state and government of all Saarc countries at his swearing-in, saying it was a first step towards improving ties with neighbours.

BJP leader Arun Jaitley said, "It is the Modi government's intention to maintain good ties with its neighbours and this is the first indication of that intention."

## Dhaka wants

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exclusive zone in Chittagong and was doing very well there.

These projects are in addition to the \$4 billion Japanese financing for the 1,200 megawatt coal-fired power project along with a coal terminal in Matarbari of Maheshkhali island.

"Japan has done a series of feasibility studies and came to a conclusion that Matarbari is the best location for a deep sea port and coal power plant," said Japanese Ambassador Shiro Sadoshima.

Speaking to members of the Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, the ambassador said Japan would try to

impress Hasina into looking towards the east more seriously to diversify the base of Bangladesh's production in the future.

Bangladesh has been very successful in European and North American markets. But now it should prepare itself to diversify its products and explore new export markets, and Japan will be happy to collaborate with Bangladesh, he added.

The ambassador said Bangladesh holds a key position in combining the economic activities of Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean regions.

Putting emphasis on regional comprehensive economic partnership, Sadoshima said shortages of energy and transportation infrastructure are the two barriers to investment in

Bangladesh.

"This should be addressed as quickly as possible. In general terms, Japan is always behind this country," he said.

The prime minister will return home from Japan on May 29 and visit China from June 6 to 11.

She would sign a number of deals with the Chinese government regarding implementation of various infrastructure projects, including the deep-sea port.

The government has already sought loans and grants of more than \$8.6 billion from the Chinese government for implementing 18 projects including the construction of a rail/road bridge across the Karnaphuli river in Kalurghat of Chittagong.

## JU student

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Fatema was waiting for a bus by the highway when the pickup van driver lost control over its steering and crushed her to death around 4:45pm.

The students demanded compensation for the deceased's family, a foot bridge at Prantik Gate, lower speed limits on the highway in front of the university and widening of the Dhaka-Aricha highway there.

A resident student of Pritilata Hall said Fatema died on the spot.

A couple were also injured in the incident and rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The pickup driver whilst trying to make the hit-and-run got involved in another accident near CMB area close to the university. He too was taken to DMCH with injuries.

The university vice-chancellor, Farzana Islam, went to the spot and talked to the students to quell the protest.

## Main gate

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occupying the field with half a dozen unauthorised structures for the last few years, complained environmentalists.

The High Court in 2011 had ordered the erstwhile Dhaka City Corporation, police and public works ministry to open the playground to the public and remove all illegal structures from there.

On April 18 this year, the club sued three eminent green activists, Mobassher Hussain, Bapa Joint Secretary Iqbal Habib, architect Salma A Shafi and national award winner sports organiser Quamrunnahar Dana for entering the playground.

## 5.9-magnitude quake hits Taiwan, three injured

AFP, Taipei

A 5.9-magnitude earthquake jolted Taiwan yesterday, shaking buildings in the capital and injuring three schoolchildren, officials said.

The quake struck at 8:21 am (0021 GMT) with its epicentre 33.3 kilometres (21 miles) southwest of the eastern city of Hualien, at a depth of 18 kilometres, the Seismology Centre said.

Three children were slightly injured by falling ceiling material during a singing lesson at a school in the southern city of Tainan, education ministry officials said.

The quake, compounded by heavy rain for several days, also triggered landslides which disrupted traffic on four highways in mountainous areas.

## Dist councils to run

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and 60 in Khagrachhari -- enjoy the government's monthly payment order (MPO) facilities.

Apart from these schools, a technical institution named Khagrachhari Technical School and College will also be handed over to the district council concerned.

Earlier, a number of public offices, including the health engineering directorate and the department of agriculture extension, had been brought under the three district councils.

Sources in the education ministry

said once the district councils have control over the institutions, their activities would be better coordinated.

The 1997 peace treaty was signed on December 2, 1997 by the then Awami League government and Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity. It stipulates handing over authority of 33 government departments and offices to the CHT district councils.

According to an order issued by the CHT affairs ministry on Tuesday, the educational institutions are going to be handed over in compliance with the peace accord and Clauses 22 and 23 of

## ACC largely ineffective

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motivated cases filed against politicians and others and by March 2011, the committee had withdrawn 4,687 cases, most of which involved members of the ruling party.

The committee also dropped 12 corruption cases against the prime minister as well as other cases filed against senior party leaders, known party supporters, and their relatives, it said.

The Berlin-based corruption watchdog recommended that the government ensure that appointments, transfers and removals of heads and senior staff of anti-corruption agencies and the judiciary are conducted transparently, on the basis fair criteria and with the participation of a range of stakeholders, including members of the institutions themselves.

Appointments should be made by a body independent of the executive and the legislature and its members should be appointed through an objective and transparent process, it said. Such critical decisions must not be made by the government or the president alone, the report added.

The report said the RTI was a strong one but awareness of the law remains low among public officials and it was far from achieving its objectives.

According to a survey conducted in the second year of the implementation of the RTI Act, 88 percent of those who

asked for information reported having to visit the information provider's office numerous times, 29 percent reported facing harassment, 26 percent reported facing difficulties finding the information officer concerned.

Eight percent reported having to pay additional money to get the information, the survey said.

It recommended that all public agencies appoint and train public information officers so that they are aware of their responsibilities under the law and are empowered to provide information.

The report said although the government had enacted the Bangladesh Public Interest Related Information Disclosure (Protection) Act in 2011, no progress had been made to make the act effective.

Bangladesh must implement awareness raising programmes for public sector officials at all levels so that they are familiar with the whistleblowing procedures, the watchdog recommended.

Apart from Bangladesh, the study examines efforts to fight graft in five other South Asian countries -- India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- and found the corruption fighting agencies of those countries lacking the power and independence to properly investigate politicians and officials for graft.

## Church raided in S Korean ferry disaster probe

AFP, Seoul

South Korean investigators yesterday raided a sprawling religious compound believed to be the hideout of a fugitive billionaire as part of a widening probe into a ferry disaster that killed hundreds.

The raid began shortly before noon as more than 1,000 riot police,

backed by 20 firetrucks and ambulances, readied for action outside a 50-acre (20.2 hectare) church and farming complex in Anseong 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of Seoul.

After an eight-hour operation, TV footage showed seven vehicles packed with investigators leaving the compound.