

QAISAR'S WAR CRIMES TRIAL

Tribunal starts hearing closing arguments

Defence completes cross-examinations of prosecution witnesses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The proceedings of the case against Syed Mohammad Qaisar entered the final stage as the International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday began to hear the closing arguments.

The three-member tribunal headed by Justice Obaidul Hassan started hearing the arguments from the prosecution after the defence had completed cross-examination of the last prosecution witness in the case.

On completion of the testimony to the last prosecution witness, the defence usually produce their witness(es) to defend the accused, but Qaisar's lawyers declined to produce any witness in the case.

After the hearing of the closing arguments of both sides, the tribunal will either keep the case waiting for a verdict or set a date to that end.

Qaisar, the alleged founder of anti-liberation Qaisar Bahini, faces 16 charges, including genocide, committed in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria during the Liberation War.

Qaisar, who was a state minister of HM Ershad regime, however, pleaded not guilty before the tribunal.

As the defence counsel for Qaisar had completed cross-examination of the last prosecution witness, Monowara Begum, also the investiga-

tion officer of the case, prosecutor Rana Dasgupta started placing arguments yesterday.

Rana said father and maternal uncle of the accused were influential leaders of Muslim League, which always opposed movement for autonomy of the Bangalees, and the accused, being inspired by their ideology, not only opposed the Liberation War for political reasons but also committed numerous crimes in 1971.

The accused fled the country towards the end of the Liberation War and returned after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, said Rana, adding that a case was filed against Qaisar under the Collaborators Act-1972 for war-time crimes.

The defence said the accused was acquitted in the case.

Rana said the 16 charges brought against Qaisar are different from that with which he was charged under the collaborators act.

Citing testimonies of the first and second prosecution witnesses, Rana said Qaisar played a pivotal role in forming anti-liberation Peace Committee and Qaisar Bahini in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria to assist the Pakistan army.

The tribunal adjourned the case proceedings until today.



A delegation of the British parliament visits Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Hilton hotel suit on Park Lane on Tuesday.

PHOTO: PID

Invest more in Bangladesh

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Referring to the verdicts on maritime boundary disputes between Bangladesh and its neighbours Myanmar and India, Hasina said such verdicts have opened up the new door of investment, especially in the energy sector. "The UK companies are equally welcome to participate and compete for gas and oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal," she added.

Bangladesh, said the PM, is a role model for girl and women development for protecting the rights of women. The APPG members lauded the role of Hasina in girl education and women empowerment.

Rushanara Ali MP, Lord Curen

Faridul, Baroness Monzila Pola Uddin and Lord Tarek Ahmed were present at the meeting.

BNP CAN'T HARM PEOPLE: PM

The BNP would not be able to cause any harm to the country and its people, the prime minister said on Tuesday.

"I promise that they [BNP] won't be able to cause any harm by the grace of almighty Allah. They won't be able to do anything [destructive]," she told an Iftar and Doa Mahfil hosted by expatriate Bangladeshis in the UK. Local Awami League organised the programme at the ballroom of Hotel Hilton.

The PM is in the UK on a three-day official visit.

The present government, said Hasina, through the January-5 national election has got the chance to carry on the development works. She hoped that her government would be able to accomplish what needs to be done in the rest of the four and a half years of its current tenure.

If any party boycotts an election with a plan to thwart it and ultimately fails to do so and even fails to wage a movement, then the responsibility cannot be shifted to the common people of Bangladesh and to the AL, she mentioned.

Chaired by UK AL president Sultan Mahmud Sharif, chairman of the home affairs select committee Keith

Vaz MP, All European AL president Anil Das Gupta, Belgium AL president Rashid, UK AL organising secretary Sajjad Miah, joint general secretary Naimuddin Nizam, London AL president Nurul Haque, among others, spoke at the programme.

Earlier, just before attending the Iftar, the PM launched the website of UK unit of BCL through pressing a laptop button.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Meher Afroze Chumki, renowned journalist Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury and PM's special assistant Abdus Sobhan Golap were present.

UN warns of war crimes

FROM PAGE 1
a manner that could amount to war crimes," Pillay told the council, citing attacks that have killed Palestinian civilians, including children.

She said Israelis also had a right to live without constant fear of rocket attacks.

The UN Human Rights Council later launched a probe into the Gaza offensive, backing calls by the Palestinians to hold Israel to account despite fierce opposition from the Jewish state.

The decision came after a marathon seven-hour emergency session of the top UN human rights body, where the Israelis and the Palestinians traded accusations over war crimes.

The 46-member council backed a Palestinian-drafted resolution by 29 votes, with Arab and fellow Muslim countries joined by China and Russia, plus Latin American and African nations.

The United States was the sole member to vote against. The 17 abstentions were by the council's European members, plus Japan and South Korea.

The probe team, yet to be appointed, is tasked with reporting back to the council by March.

Israel denied any wrongdoing. "Get lost," Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said on her Facebook page in response to the probe, reports Reuters.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu reacted furiously to news of the planned UN investigation, aware of the damning report into Israel's 2008/09 Gaza operation, which killed more than 1,000 Palestinians.

"The decision today by the HRC is a travesty," he said in a statement. "The HRC should be launching an investigation into Hamas's decision to turn hospitals into military command centers, use schools as weapons depots and place missile batteries next to playgrounds, private homes and mosques."

ADFLAME TRIAL
Law Commission
to find reason
behind delay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Law Commission has decided to find out how prosecution of Adflame Pharmaceutical officials over producing toxic paracetamol syrup was delayed for long 22 years.

Commission Chairman Justice ABM Khairul Haque told this to The Daily Star yesterday, a day after the owner and two other Adflame officials were jailed for 10 years as its paracetamol syrup brand,

Flammadol, containing toxic chemical diethylene glycol caused deaths of many children between 1982 and 1992.

"The commission will seek access to all the documents from the district court [Dhaka Drug Court] relating to the case," mentioned Khairul.

The three-member commission is likely to visit the court.

The three convicts were also fined Tk 2 lakh each under the Drug (control) Ordinance, 1982.

The verdict has also shed light on the law in terms of its leniency as it does not have any provision for capital punishment in case of deaths from tainted drugs.

Adulteration of paracetamol syrup came to light in 1992. The Directorate of Drug Administration in December that year had sued four drug manufacturers. But all the cases were stayed in 1994, with most of the accused securing bail and many absconding there after.

The Adflame trial proceedings, which remained halted for 16 years, resumed in 2009 following a Daily Star investigation.

Netherlands mourns

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attention as a trumpeter played The Last Post, the military funeral call for people killed in war.

After a minute's silence - observed in stations, factories, offices and streets across this stunned nation - servicemen from all four branches of the Dutch military boarded the Dutch Hercules C-130 and Australian Boeing C-17 to carry the coffins to 40 waiting hearses lined up on the runway.

Relatives of some of the victims were present at the airport but were shielded from the media glare, officials said.

Thousands of people lined the 100 km route, watching from motorway bridges as the cortège travelled from Eindhoven to the military base at Hilversum where the bodies will remain until they can be identified, a task that could take months.

As the cortège passed, drivers spontaneously stopped their cars and watched silently from the side of the motorway. Some clapped in tribute, others threw flowers on the hearses.

The process will be repeated many times over coming days as the bodies of all the victims are brought home.

Amid US accusations that the rebels shot the civilian plane down in error with a Russian-supplied missile, an opinion poll showed an overwhelming majority of the Dutch want sanctions imposed on Moscow, even if it hurts their own economy.

The Netherlands has disproportionately large trade and financial flows with Moscow due to its position as an oil and commodities trading hub and an offshore base for companies.

Meanwhile, the plane's black box flight recorders, handed over by the rebels' leader, were flown from Ukraine on a Belgian military aircraft on Tuesday to Britain, where a team of experts examined the Cockpit Voice Recorder yesterday no evidence that it has been tampered with.

The flight data recorder is to be analysed today, the investigators said.

Church bells tolled as the planes carrying the remains arrived from Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine, shortly before 4:00pm, and windmills around the low-lying coastal nation had been set in a mourning position - with the topmost sail fixed counter-clockwise from the vertical.

The remains of an unknown number of victims were transported in refrigerated rail carriages from the rebel-held part of Ukraine on Tuesday. Rutte has said that while some of the bodies may be identified immediately, it may take weeks or even months to complete the task.

Trains came to a stop as the country observed a minute's silence. No planes took off or landed at Schiphol Airport, from which the Malaysia Airlines flight departed, for 13 minutes around the time the bodies landed.

With so many of their countrymen dead, the Dutch have been taking a leading role in the international effort to recover and identify the bodies and investigate the cause of the crash.

Dutch authorities are leading the investigation, with extensive help from other countries.

Rutte, thrust into an unaccustomed spotlight, said on Tuesday the disaster had fundamentally changed the way the Dutch view Russia, urging the European Union to unite behind a firm approach to force Moscow to cooperate with the investigation.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has pledged to "do everything" to influence the separatists and ensure a full probe.

US intelligence officials have said they believe the rebels mistakenly shot down the doomed Malaysia Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur with a surface-to-air missile.

Putin is staring down fresh European sanctions just a week after the latest set was unveiled over its role in the Ukraine crisis, which has chilled East-West tensions to the lowest point in years.

Recruit more
peacekeepers
in key posts

Dhaka urges UN

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka has requested the United Nations to recruit Bangladeshi peacekeepers in 'policy and commanding-level' posts in the coming days.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam made the request to visiting under-secretary-general and head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) of the UN Hervé Ladsous during a meeting at the foreign ministry yesterday.

"They are considering a Bangladeshi peacekeeper at deputy-commander level and he [Ladsous] hoped that a positive outcome would come soon in this regard," Shahriar told reporters after the meeting.

Responding to a question, the state minister said they are considering increasing Bangladeshi peacekeepers in African countries.

"It's still at the working level," he said adding that they were considering two destinations -- Mali and Central African Republic -- where Bangladeshi peacekeepers will be deployed.

The state minister said Ladsous highly appreciated Bangladesh's role in the UN peacekeeping missions. "He especially applauded female peacekeepers' contributions," added the state minister.

Shahriar said some 7,083 armed forces members and 1,758 police members, including 218 female police, are now deployed in UN peacekeeping missions abroad. The UN wants to increase the number of female peacekeepers in the missions.

The state minister thanked the UN for increasing financial benefits for the peacekeepers that took place after 18 years.

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Roads clogged with rickshaws

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go back home with Tk 8,000 to 9,000 on the eve of Eid day," said Akhtar Hossain of Bogra, who was seen trying to get passengers at Palashi around midnight on Saturday.

He earns Tk 500 to 600 from 4:00pm till dawn. To minimise living costs, he spends his nights at the rickshaw garage and pays Tk 200 in rickshaw rent and food.

Sirajul Islam of Narsingdi, who came to Dhaka early this month, is also planning to return home with several thousands of taka for Eid expenses.

Father of two sons and a daughter, Sirajul has a small piece of land for farming, but he chose to come to Dhaka and pull rickshaws since there is no work in his village at the moment.

Sirajul, who got the rickshaw from a garage at Rayet Bagh in Kadamtoli near Narayanganj, said many rickshaws from Narayanganj often entered the city ahead of Ramadan since they help to make better earnings in the capital.

Often these rickshaws use fake numbers to dodge law enforcers, he added.

The Daily Star talked to around 30 rickshaw pullers who had come to Dhaka from different districts like Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Kurigram, Naogaon, Tangail,

Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Kishoreganj, Madaripur and Jessor.

The capital has 79,554 rickshaws licensed with the Dhaka city corporations, but around four lakh illegal rickshaws ply the city streets, said Mohor Ali, chairman of a rickshaw and rickshaw-van owners association.

On top of that, around 1.5 lakh additional rickshaws, a large number of which were either partially damaged or remained unused in the garage throughout the year for lack of demand, hit the streets ahead of Eid.

As police appear to be lenient with the rickshaw pullers during this time of the year, many are seen plying the streets that are off limits to non-motorised vehicles.

"The road is off-limits to rickshaws, but police do not stop us in Ramadan," said Rafiqul, who himself ignored the restriction.

Mosleh Uddin, DMP joint commissioner (traffic), said since the force remained busy managing the messy traffic during Ramadan, it could not keep regular vigil on rickshaws.

He, however, said sometimes police along with Dhaka city corporations' officials launched special drives against unauthorised rickshaws.