



A day after the grenade attack, Sheikh Hasina apparently reeling from the trauma at her Dhanmondi home. After the hail of grenades on an Awami League rally on Bangabandhu Avenue a few rush to help as the injured regain consciousness surrounded by bodies on this day 10 years ago.

PHOTO: FILE

Justice so far away

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Moreover, a delivery of the verdict by the trial court will put the case into a new stage.

The accused, on conviction, will have the opportunity to challenge the verdict in the High Court and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in phases. It will require more time for a disposal of the appeals. This means there is still a long way to go to complete the trial conclusively in order to provide victims' families with justice, according to legal experts.

Like Zillur Rahman, Amena Begum, mother of Abdul Quddus Patwari, who was killed on August 21 on the spot, waited for justice for more than nine years.

She passed away in February this year, without relief from anguish caused by her son's murder.

"Now, we have no other demand, but for justice. My brother sacrificed his life to save Sheikh Hasina. So, we want justice during the tenure of her present government," Humayun Kabir, elder brother of Quddus, told our Chandpur correspondent.

Quddus was a leader of Swachhasebak League, a front organisation of the AL, in Haimchar upazila of Chandpur and used to live in the capital.

The slow pace of the trial has generated anger among many AL leaders. They have blamed a lack of proper supervision for the delay in the completion of the trial.

"There was no necessity to make so many people witnesses. One hundred witnesses are enough to prove the

case," said Abdul Matin Khasru, AL MP and former law minister, adding that the investigation officer made the mistake by making so many people witnesses.

He also blamed the inefficiency of the state prosecution for the delay and making the case complicated.

"The trial must be completed soon. Justice delayed is justice buried," said Khasru, who is legal affairs secretary of the AL.

Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anisul Haque has, however, said he has recently directed the prosecution to appeal to the court to expedite the proceedings by holding more hearings every week.

He said he had also asked the prosecution to apply to the court for recording the statements of only important witnesses.

"We are trying to ensure justice as early as possible," assured Anisul.

The court held hearings once a week for around two years since the beginning of the trial. The speedy trial tribunal, however, started holding hearings twice a week since January 2013, said a counsel of the case.

Chief state counsel of the case, Syed Rezaul Rahman, however said the target was to have the trial completed by trial court before August 21 next year.

"It is not necessary to record statements of all the witnesses of the case. We will ensure recording statements of as many as witnesses as possible to prove the charges against the accused," he told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

This case has become a glaring



example of how the state machinery was meticulously involved in a heinous political crime and also made desperate efforts to bury the need for justice by derailing the investigation into the crime.

The perpetrators carried out the grenade attack when the BNP was in power. And then government made all efforts to protect the masterminds behind the attack, which was aimed at assassinating Sheikh Hasina, who was then opposition leader in parliament.

Hasina was able to narrowly escape the attack, but 24 AL leaders and workers were killed and 300 others were injured in the blasts.

The reasons behind the BNP government's desperate move to bury justice were exposed by further investigation and submission of a supplementary charge sheet in March 2012, one year after the beginning of the trial on the basis of the earlier probe. Yet it took three years after the AL had

assumed power.

The further investigation revealed the grisly attack was an outcome of collaboration between the militant outfit Huji, influential leaders of the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami, and a band of senior officials of the home ministry, police, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), National Security Intelligence (NSI) and Prime Minister's Office (PMO). They were indicted in the case and are now facing trial.

Huji leaders, according to the supplementary charge sheet, met Tarique Rahman, elder son of former premier Khaleda and BNP senior vice chairman, a few days before the August 21 grenade attack and got the go-ahead to carry out the blasts.

Lutfozzaman Babar, then state minister for home, Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to then prime minister Khaleda Zia, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, secretary general of Jamaat-

e-Islami and the then social welfare minister, NSI director general Brig Gen Abdur Rahim and DGFI director Brig Gen Rezaul Haider Chowdhury were present at that meeting at Hawa Bhaban, popularly known as an alternative centre of power during BNP rule, in the capital's Banani.

According to the supplementary charge sheet, leaders of the banned militant group Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji) held two meetings with Tarique, who ran Hawa Bhaban and had huge influence over the then BNP government. Both the meetings were held at Hawa Bhaban.

Huji leaders at both the meetings sought support in executing their plans to assassinate Hasina and the top AL leaders. Tarique assured the Huji men of all-out support, said the charge sheet.

Due to their involvement in the heinous crime, the BNP-led administration did not even bother to pay attention to the international community's pressure for a fair investigation into the carnage.

Following pressure and grave concerns expressed by world leaders, the then BNP government allowed agents of Federal Bureau of Investigation of the US and Interpol to visit Dhaka to assist the probe.

But all efforts were waiting to go in vain.

Huji leader Tajuddin, supplier of the grenades, and brother of BNP government's deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu, left the country for Pakistan on instructions from Lutfozzaman Babar. Khaleda was

aware of this, according to the supplementary charge sheet.

Tajuddin was provided with a fake passport with the name "Badal", Khaleda's nephew and private secretary Saiful Islam Duke, his brother-in-law and DGFI official Lt Col Saiful Islam Joarder, and another DGFI high-up Maj Gen ATM Amin helped Tajuddin flee the country on October 10, 2006, at the fag end of the BNP's rule.

After the attack, the BNP even launched a campaign blaming the AL for carrying out the attack on its own rally.

Through several investigations, the BNP-led alliance government relentlessly tried to establish that the AL had killed its own activists to tarnish the government's image and to topple it.

Through a judicial commission-led by a Supreme Court judge, it even tried to prove that "foreign enemies" had instigated the carnage, and some listed criminals holed up in India had taken part in the attack.

As a part of the plan to put the blame on the AL, the investigators made up a story involving Mokhesur Rahman, an AL leader and former ward commissioner of Moghbazar, in the city.

On the instructions of the government high-ups, they also attempted to feed the public with another story woven around Joj Mia, a petty criminal. They forced Joj Mia to make a confessional statement naming Mokhesur as one of the plotters. The whole story turned into a farce.

Things started taking a different shape only after an end to BNP rule.

THE ACCUSED

26 behind bars

Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Lutfozzaman Babar, Mufti Hannan, Abdus Salam Pintu, Rezaul Haider Chowdhury and Abdur Rahim are among them

18 on the run

Tarique Rahman, Harris Chowdhury and Maulana Tajuddin are among them

8 on bail

Shahudul Haq, Ashraf Huda and Khoda Baksh are among them

All AL wanted was to rally against militants

FROM PAGE 1

the opposition, with an aim to kill her apparently for her stance against religious extremism, which had mushroomed allegedly under the patronisation of the then BNP-Jamaat government.

Militants of Harkatul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji), with alleged links to several serving ministers and officials of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and top BNP-Jamaat leaders, carried out the attack as Hasina began to wrap up the rally with a call to end the rule of the government that "inspired" bomb attacks.

The AL central leaders were still on the truck with Hasina when at least 13 grenades exploded around them.

As the grenades rained down from the top of nearby buildings, Hasina ducked and scores of supporters created a shield around her, demonstrating the highest loyalty one could display to

leaders at a crucial time. The grenades missed the truck and landed on either side of it.

Hasina was then huddled into a sports utility vehicle, as her security personnel fired blank shots to ensure her quick exit from the scene, and wheeled away through thick smoke under police escort.

The assailants fired seven bullets at the bulletproof SUV that Sheikh Hasina had boarded immediately after the blasts. A bullet also punctured the rear wheel of the vehicle and there was a large hole on the rear right side of its window shield.

Hasina narrowly escaped with ear injuries, but at least 16 people were killed on the very day and 300, including top AL leaders Abdur Razzak, Amir Hossain Amu, Suranjit Sengupta, Ivy Rahman and Kazi Zafarullah, were injured critically.

The injured leaders and activists

collapsed on the street bleeding, some of them profusely. Within moments, the scene turned ghastly scene, with disjointed limbs and blood littered and smeared all over the place. Individuals, bruised and bloodied, lay groaning and screaming for help. But nobody dared to come to their rescue.

After some time, a few people gathered on the spot but they were too shocked to swing into action and had little idea about what to do. Some supporters then brought in minibuses, rickshaw vans and minibuses and picked up the injured leaders and workers.

The injured were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, the largest and nearest hospital, which had to arrange beds on the floor. Many of the injured had to move to other hospitals as DMCH could not accommodate them.

The capital city of around ten million

people had swiftly turned into a city of tears, protests, chaos, fear and confusion. Some wept as they stood beside the injured, some torched vehicles in protest and some tried to pick their way out of the clouds of smoke and dust.

The deadly attack sent shock waves throughout the country, generating instant, widespread outpouring of grief, condemnation and protests.

Ivy Rahman and seven others succumbed to their injuries later.

Dozens have been maimed for life, with many passing their days with splinters still inside their bodies even after long treatment at home and abroad.

One of the victims is Mahbuba Parvin, who escaped death but not the hundreds of splinters that penetrated her body. Despite taking treatment, she still carries 1,800 splinters in her.

"It pains all the time. It would have been better if I were killed that day," she told The Daily Star.

Timeline

FROM PAGE 1

The government forms a one-member judicial inquiry commission led by a High Court judge.

Aug 23

- Police and BNP men attack AL protest processions.
- US President George W Bush expresses shock at the grenade attack. Secretary of State Colin Powell phones Hasina and PM Khaleda Zia to convey the message. He describes the attackers as enemies of the people.
- The US, the UK, Pakistan and India offer help to probe the carnage.
- Khaleda shelve her plan to visit Hasina amid protests.
- The Detective Branch (DB) of police takes charge of investigation but fails to begin its work.

Aug 24

- AL and its allies enforce two-day countrywide hartal protesting the attack, crippling the country. Rail links collapse.

Aug 25

- Several foreign missions in Dhaka express dissatisfaction over the government's poor performance in identifying the criminals involved in the 10-truck arms haul and bomb attacks in different parts of the country.

Aug 26

- The government announces that it will seek Interpol's help to investigate the carnage. The CID takes over the investigation.

Aug 29

- Interpol experts arrive in Dhaka, scan carnage scene and collect information from local investigators.

Sept 1

- FBI agents arrive to probe the grenade attack.

Sept 5

- US State Department's counter-terrorism coordinator Joseph Cofer Black arrives and meets Khaleda and Hasina.

Oct 2

- The judicial inquiry commission claims in its report to have identified the perpetrators of the carnage, but its head Justice Joynul Abedin declines to disclose their identities, hinting at the involvement of foreign forces apart from the local ones.

Note: A few months later, senior CID officials make up farcical Joj Mia story and detain him and 20 more petty criminals. Joj Mia and two others are forced to give statements confessing their involvement in carrying out the grenade attack. Their real identities are later

revealed by the media. The ludicrous nature of the investigation is exposed by the end of 2004.

- Yet the CID does not go for further investigation. Rather, it keeps wasting time by proceeding with the farcical investigation through 2005 and 2006. The CID officials prepare for submitting the charge sheet on the basis of their so-called investigation.

2007 [Caretaker Government Regime]

- A new CID official is given the charge for fresh investigation into the carnage.

2008

- The CID submits charge sheet accusing 22, including Huji leader Mufti Hannan and former deputy minister of the BNP-led government Abdus Salam Pintu. The charge sheet hints at the involvement of some government and security high-ups in the plot.

Oct 29

- Court frames charges against the 22 accused (and begins trial the following month).

2009 [AL Rule]

June 22

- Prosecution files a petition with

the court for further investigation to identify the suppliers of Arges grenades and sources of financing.

Aug 3

- Court orders further investigation.

Aug 12

- A new CID official is assigned for conducting further investigation (and he continues the task for about 23 months).

2011

July 3

- The CID submits supplementary charge sheet accusing 30 more individuals, including politicians, senior officials of civil and military intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

2012

March 18

- Court frames fresh charges against 30 individuals accused in the supplementary charge sheet, taking the number of accused to 52.
- Khaleda Zia's elder son Tarique Rahman; then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar; Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to then PM Khaleda; Jamaat leader and then social welfare minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed; then BNP MP Kazi Shah Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad; then DGFI director Brig Gen Rezaul Haider

Chowdhury; then NSI director general Brig Gen Abdur Rahim; owner of Hanif Paribahan Mohammad Hanif; and then councillor of DCC Ward-53 Ariful Islam Arif are charged with masterminding and approving the attack plan executed by Huji men and their accomplices.

- Huji founder Abdus Salam, Huji leaders Moulana Sheikh Farid, Moulana Abdur Rouf and Moulana Abdul Hannan Sabbir, Kashmir-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) leader Abdul Malek alias Golam Mohammad, Pakistan-based LeT leader Yusuf Butt alias Majid Butt, Mufti Shafiqur Rahman, Mufti Abdul Hai, Hafez Moulana Yahya and Babu alias Ratul Babu are indicted for killing, causing grievous hurt, attempt to murder, abetment and criminal liability.
- Then IGP Shahudul Haque and then DMP commissioner Ashraf Huda are charged with providing financial and administrative support to the attackers.
- Then deputy commissioner (East) of the DMP Obaidur Rahman and then DC (South) of the DMP Khan Sayeed Hassan are charged with having the evidence of the attack vanish and providing the killers

with administrative assistance.

- Lt Commander (retd) Saiful Islam Duke, also the nephew and private secretary to then PM Khaleda; then director of Counter Terrorism Intelligence Bureau of DGFI Brig Gen Maj Gen ATM Amin; and then DGFI official (later sacked) Saiful Islam Joarder are charged with protecting militant Tajuddin, who supplied the Arges grenades used in the attack, and helping him flee to Pakistan.
- Then senior officials of the CID -- SP Ruhul Amin, ASP Munshi Atiqur Rahman and ASP Abdur Rashid -- and former IGP Khoda Baksh Chowdhury are charged with misleading the case and creating the ridiculous Joj Mia drama to save the killers.
- Ruhul Amin, Atiqur Rahman and Abdur Rashid were the officials who led the first investigation when Khoda Baksh was IGP.

March 27

- Re-trial begins.

2014

Aug 20

- The court so far has recorded statements of 98 witnesses out of 491 in the case.

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