

Rains slow Lanka search for mudslide victims

AFP, Colombo

Heavy rains yesterday slowed the search for victims of a major mudslide on a tea plantation in central Sri Lanka that police say left 38 people missing and presumed dead, officials said.

A military official said rains were creating problems for rescuers using heavy equipment to dig through tonnes of mud at the site in the picturesque Koslanda region, around 200 kilometres (125 miles) east of Colombo.

Additional soldiers were being sent to the site, taking the number of searchers to more than 800, as they discovered on Sunday debris from homes and a vehicle but no bodies, Major General Mano Perera said.

"Heavy rains have made it difficult for us... some vehicles are getting bogged down," said Perera, who is leading the search.

"But we have deployed more men and we will keep up the operation till we recover all the bodies."

Sri Lanka on Saturday reduced to 38 the number of dead and missing from Wednesday's mudslide at Meeriyabedda tea estate, from about 100.



Traffic movement in the city was almost normal during the tepid second day of Jamaat's countrywide 72-hour hartal. This photo taken around 10:00am yesterday shows traffic congestion at Paltan intersection. PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Colombia to send first research ship to Antarctica

AFP, Bogota

Colombia will send a ship on a scientific research expedition to Antarctica for the first time in mid-December to probe climate and health issues, organizers said Saturday.

A total of 21 researchers from Colombia and other countries will travel on the ARC 20 de Julio to research physiological changes triggered by acclimation to extremely cold conditions, as well as the links between the El Nino phenomenon, and sea and climate safety.

The Navy-led expedition will "initiate the second phase of Colombia's National Antarctic Program, which designates its own ships to travel to the 'white continent' for ongoing scientific research," a statement said.

The OCV-80 ocean patrol cruiser is considered by international ship-building industry experts as an "example of Colombia's maritime industry and technological development," the statement said.

Judgment comes after 4-yr hurdle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Delay in investigation, transfer of the case and "dilly-dallying tactics" of the defence were the reasons that kept the nation waiting for more than four years to see the verdict in the war crimes case against Jamaat leader Mir Quasem Ali.

Taking considerably longer time than six other war crimes cases, the International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday sentenced Quasem to death for his involvement in crimes against humanity during the liberation war.

The International Crimes (Tribunals) Investigation Agency took over 33 months for investigation and submitted its probe report to the prosecution on May 6, 2013. The agency began probe into Quasem's involvement in crimes against humanity on July 26, 2010.

The agency cited lack of "logistic support" as reasons for the delay in submitting the probe report.

Tribunal-1 indicted Quasem, who was the chief of Chittagong Al-Badr during the Liberation War in 1971, on 14 charges on September 5 last year. But the case remained stalled for about three months as it was transferred from ICT-1 to ICT-2 due to some procedural drawback.

As per the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, the defence got three weeks after indictment for preparation.

On September 30, the case was transferred to Tribunal-2 from Tribunal-1 for quick disposal. But the

defence filed a petition for review on that day after the transfer of the case. Tribunal-2 then sent back the case to Tribunal-1 to resolve the review petition. After settling the matter, it sent back the case to Tribunal-2.

Defence, on several occasions, made time petition on various grounds which resulted in further delay. The prosecution alleged this defence's dilly-dallying tactics.

Quasem was arrested on June 17, 2012, after Tribunal-1 issued an arrest warrant for him.

The prosecution on May 16, 2013, submitted formal charge including a 200-page investigation report, witnesses' statements, seizure list and documents to the tribunal.

The tribunal took the charges into cognisance on May 26, 2013, and heard arguments of both the prosecution and the defence for charge framing.

The Tribunal-2 began recording testimony of prosecution witnesses on December 11, 2013.

Twenty-four prosecution witnesses, including the investigation officer, testified against Quasem. Three defence witnesses, including the younger sister of Quasem, testified for the Jamaat leader. The examination of witnesses ended on April 23, 2014.

Both the prosecution and the defence then placed their closing arguments and the tribunal kept the case waiting for verdict on May 4 this year. On October 30, the tribunal fixed yesterday for delivering the judgement in the case.

SC verdict

FROM PAGE 1

Siddique and Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik.

This is the third time the Appellate Division of the SC is going to deliver a verdict on an appeal against a tribunal's judgment.

On September 17 this year, the apex court commuted the death sentence of Jamaat-e-Islami's Nayeb-e Ameer Delawar Hossain Sayedee and sentenced him to imprisonment till death for committing crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

The SC on the same date a year before handed down the death penalty to Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah for his crimes against humanity committed during the war.

Mollah was executed on December 12, 2013.

On September 17 this year, on conclusion of hearing that went on for 16 days, the Appellate Division kept the appeal of Kamaruzzaman waiting for verdict.

On May 9 last year, the International Crimes Tribunal-2 sentenced Kamaruzzaman, one of the key organisers of the infamous Al-Badr force, to death.

The Jamaat's senior assistant secretary was found guilty of mass killing, murder, abduction, torture, rape, persecution, and abetment of torture in greater Mymensingh.

Both the state and the defence counsels yesterday expressed optimism that the apex court's verdict would go their way.

Talking to The Daily Star, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said he was hopeful the SC would uphold the tribunal's verdict, as Kamaruzzaman was involved in the killing of 164 people in Sohagpur village and one Golam Mostafa of Gridda Narayanpur village in Sherpur in 1971.

Kamaruzzaman's lawyer SM Shahjahan told The Daily Star that he was optimistic that the apex court would scrap the Tribunal-2 verdict and acquit Kamaruzzaman, since there was no "convincing or cogent" evidence to prove the charges brought against his client.

Acting SC registrar SM Kuddus Zaman said he had requested the police high-ups to ensure adequate security on the court premises today.

The Tribunal-2 handed down the death sentence to Kamaruzzaman in two charges -- for killing 164 civilians and raping several women at Sohagpur and killing Golam Mostafa at Gridda Narayanpur village in Sherpur.

It sentenced him to life imprisonment in two other charges for abducting and killing Badiuzzaman of Ramnagar village in Sherpur and killing Zahurul Islam Dara and five others on Golapjan Road in Mymensingh, and 10 years' imprisonment in the charge for inhumanly torturing Syed Abdul Hannan.

The Tribunal-2 also acquitted the convict of two charges -- one for killing eight civilians at Jhenaigati Ahammed Nagar army camp and another for torturing and killing one Tunu in Mymensingh.

Silent witness still there

FROM PAGE 16

It was a day in late November, 1971. Al-Badr men took freedom fighter Nasiruddin to the hotel. After some time, Quasem along with other Al-Badr men entered the hotel.

"You are yet to glean any information from him [Nasiruddin]. Beat him up," Quasem ordered his fellows.

The Al-Badr men started beating up Nasiruddin with sticks, iron rods and electric cables, the freedom fighter told the International Crimes Tribunal-2.

At one stage, Quasem himself grilled the war hero to know about his co-fighters, their shelter and arms. The torture continued.

Among the other Al-Badr victims at the hotel was another freedom fighter, Iskandar Alam Chowdhury.

Narrating his ordeal before the court, Iskandar said Quasem at one stage threatened to kill him and dump his body into the Karnaphuli if he didn't give information about the whereabouts of freedom fighters.

As Iskandar declined to give in, the Al-Badr men inflicted brutal torture on him.

Quasem as the chief of Chittagong Al-Badr, an auxiliary force of Pakistan army, had full control of its headquarters in the city. The name of Dalim Hotel appeared in all the 14 charges brought against the Jamaat leader as the crime scene.

Apart from grilling the captives, Quasem even had the authority to free detainees on the pledge that they would work as his informer to help him detain freedom fighters.

On December 16, 1971, there were over 100 captives of soon-to-be independent Bangladesh, some even for a month, at the Dalim Hotel. They were still unaware that the Liberation War was almost over.

Confined to the Al-Badr camp, some tortured people thought they would die in captivity. A group of freedom fighters rescued them from the hotel early that day.

Among the freed were prosecution witnesses Nasiruddin and Iskandar. Most of the 24 prosecution witnesses were either victims or members of victim families. They testified about the camp and brutal torture there.

THE VERDICT Yesterday, the ICT-2 in its verdict said, "On cumulative appraisal of evidence as discussed above it is proved that 'system cruelties' practiced routinely at the AB [Al-Badr] camp also included killing of the detained civilians by causing dreadful and brutal torture in confinement there..."

"The evidence presented too provides support to the conclusion that the camp at Dalim Hotel building came to serve as a model for an expanding and centralised torture camp system under AB management," added the court.

According to the prosecution, Quasem colluded with the Pakistan army, Jamaat, and other anti-liberation forces and formed Al-Badr

force; set up several torture camps like that of Dalim Hotel.

The Dostwa Mohammad Panjabee Building and Salma Manzil were the camps set up in Chittagong under Quasem's leadership for torturing and killing pro-liberation people, said witnesses.

The judgment said, "Nature and extent of brutality forming attack directed against civilians, as revealed, indeed demonstrates the grave antagonistic attitude of the AB members and the accused Mir Quasem Ali who had been in steering capacity of them, imbued by his political ideology."

"Accused Mir Quasem Ali, by his act and conduct had thus achieved a profile of 'Khan Saheb', 'Bangalee Khan' and 'Sarder' [leader or commander] of the AB torture and detention camp at Dalim Hotel and in this way he became an indispensable cog in the 'murdering machinery'," read the verdict.

Justice done

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time the tribunal gave a divided judgment."

It is a matter to observe how the Appellate Division looks at it, he added.

Quasem's son Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem, who is one of the defence counsels, declined to comment on his family's behalf over the verdict.

Law Minister Anisul Haq told private channel ATN News that the government was satisfied with the verdict and hoped that it would be executed very soon.

"A conspirator and killer like Quasem, whose hands are stained with blood of unarmed people whom he brutally killed [during the Liberation War], got the chance to engage in politics in Bangladesh."

Those days are gone and "now we can go to court and ensure justice through a legal process. This is our biggest achievement," he said.

In another television interview, he expressed the hope that the attorney general's office that dealt with the war crimes cases at the SC would put as much effort as the prosecution did at the war crimes tribunal to ensure that the verdict would be upheld by the Appellate Division.

"We will do everything we can to execute this verdict," he said. **WITNESSES REACTIONS** The witnesses who testified against Quasem said they were happy with the judgment and that they wanted

to see its execution as early as possible.

"To me, today [yesterday] is like Eid day," said Syed Md Imran, the first prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Quasem.

Imran himself was a victim of torture by Al-Badr men at Dalim Hotel, the Chittagong city camp of the auxiliary force of the Pakistan occupation army in 1971.

On instructions of Chittagong Al-Badr Bahini chief Mir Quasem, pro-liberation people from different parts of the city were taken to the camp, tortured and killed almost every day during the war, he said.

The verdict on Quasem brought joy not only to the people of Chittagong, he said, "I think it brought joy to all patriots and democratic people of the country."

Like many others, Al-Badr men had picked him up from Chandgaon of the port city on November 30 that year.

Every day they shifted people from one room to another at the camp. On the camp's rooftop, Al-Badr men carried out inhumane torture on the abductees to glean information about freedom fighters.

Some people were sent to jail from the camp. After December 10, 1971, many were killed in the camp.

"It was for my good luck that they did not kill me," said Imran who had been released from the camp on December 16, the day Bangladesh came into being.

In his reaction to the verdict, he said he felt the same joy as in 1971 when the nation won freedom from Pakistan.

Expressing his satisfaction over the judgment, the third prosecution witness of the case, Nasiruddin Chowdhury, said Quasem had not only been the chief of Al-Badr in Chittagong city but a killer too.

"Had the capital punishment not been delivered, the whole nation would have been disappointed. I think martyrs' souls would get peace," the freedom fighter said.

In late November of 1971, Al-Badr men abducted him from a residence in Anderkilla, where he had taken shelter. They beat him up on the way to Dalim Hotel.

"When they [Al-Badr men] came to know on December 15 that Pakistan would be defeated by freedom fighters, they fled from the camp and then local people of Hazari Goli area rescued me on December 16," said Nasiruddin, adding that he hoped the verdict would be upheld in the Supreme Court.

"I am pleased. I think it is a proper judgment and wish that the capital punishment of Mir Quasem would remain unchanged in the higher court," said Sanaullah Chowdhury, who also testified against Quasem.

The people of the country will be pleased if the verdict is executed as early as possible, he added.

PM to visit

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Summit in London, will depart Dhaka for London on November 16 for three days to deliver an address in Oxford Union.

The president of Oxford Union, a debating society in the city of Oxford, England, has invited Hasina to deliver her lecture in its session.

PMO sources said she is likely to address on "Girls Education" on November 17.

Hasina is the first Bangladeshi prime minister who addressed on "World Peace" at the Oxford Union on January 27, 2011.

Founded in 1823, it is the Britain's second oldest university union (only the Cambridge Union Society is older).

During her stay in London, Hasina is likely to participate in the graduation ceremony of one of her close family members.

From London, the premier will fly to Rome, Italy on November 18 to take part in the 3-day Second International Conference on Nutrition, which is an inclusive inter-governmental meeting on nutrition jointly organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Health Organisation.

Last month, Hasina visited Milan to attend the ASEM Summit.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury will also participate in the conference.

The PM is expected to return home on November 20.

After a few days of UK and Italy visit, Hasina is scheduled to travel to Kathmandu to participate in the 18th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit to be held on November 26-27.

Kofi Annan

FROM PAGE 3

added the former United Nations secretary general.

Annan said child marriage is a major violation of human rights, holding back girls, families and communities and which has impeded achievements of six of the eight Millennium Development Goals.

Girls who are married and out of school do not contribute to Bangladesh's economic development and prosperity, perpetuating cycles of poverty while the impact on their health and that of their family is severe, he said. Complications in pregnancy and

childbirth are among the leading causes of death in girls aged 15 to 19 in low- and middle-income countries; 90 percent of adolescent pregnancies take place within the context of marriage, he added.

Annan said where girls survive childbirth, they are at increased risk of injury and other complications, citing an example that 65 percent of all cases of obstetric fistula occur in girls under the age of 18.

Deaths among babies in their first few weeks of life are 50 percent higher among those born to mothers under 20 years of age than among those born to mothers in their 20s, he said.

Likewise, the risk of birth defects, developmental delays and long-term disabilities related to low birth weight are also higher for mothers under 20.

Annan also called upon Hasina "to work with civil society organisations, development partners and others as you develop and resource a national action plan to end child marriage".

He ends saying, "Bangladesh has an opportunity to lead the way in efforts to address this global problem by demonstrating what can be done to end child marriage and secure a better future for girls."

Jail Killing

FROM PAGE 3

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. AL's programmes of the day include hoisting of the national flag and of party flags at half-mast at Bangabandhu Bhaban and party offices; placing wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu on the premises of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at 7:00am; and placing wreaths on the graves of the martyrs of August 15 and November 3 carnages at Banani graveyard at 7:30am.

A milad mahfil will also be organised at Banani graveyard.

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid tributes to the four national leaders on the eve of the day.

In separate statements, both prayed for eternal peace of the departed souls.