

Village of widows

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whether he was a freedom fighter. Unsatisfied with his reply, they gunned him down. Before leaving, they also killed Julekha's brother-in-law.

Shuddered with fear, she fled to nearby Nakla village leaving her husband's body there. On her return three days later, she found that her husband's body had been partly eaten by animals. She buried his remains.

But her miseries didn't end there. The Pakistan army came again and raped her. And those known faces were with them this time too.

This is how the Pakistan occupation forces and their collaborators massacred innocent civilians at Sohagpur village in Nalitabari upazila of Sherpur during the Liberation War.

They killed 164 men and raped many women at the village on July 25, 1971. Only 57 women survived, only to live out life as widows. After that day, Sohagpur was to be known as Bidhoba Palli, a village of widows.

And it was Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, the then chief of greater Mymensingh Al-Badr, and his accomplices, who led the Pakistani army to Sohagpur to commit unspeakable atrocities on the villagers that day.

Forty-three years later, those heinous crimes bring in death for Kamaruzzaman, now assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, as the Supreme Court yesterday upheld the death penalty handed down by the International Crimes Tribunal-2.

The tears of those widows have dried up, but they are happy to see the leader of the local collaborators get the capital punishment. They now demand quick execution of the verdict.

"We have waited 43 long years to see him [Kamaruzzaman] get death penalty. We are happy. We will feel happier when we see him hanged," Julekha told The Daily Star over the phone in an emotion-choked voice.

Julekha gave a deposition before the ICT-2 about the brutal killing of her husband and the torture she had endured.

In her testimony, she mentioned the names of Baka Bura and Nasa as local collaborators who along with Kamaruzzaman accompanied the Pakistan army.

Like Julekha, many others have

stories that are full of horror and agony.

Jalal Uddin lost his father and other relatives on that day. He also testified before the tribunal.

In his deposition, Jalal, son of martyr Safir Uddin, said he hid in a nearby place hearing that Pakistan army along with Razakars and Al-Badr men attacked Sohagpur.

"When I came back to my house running, I saw 11 bodies at the yard of my house," said Jalal.

"The bodies of my father, my paternal uncle Kitab Ali, my cousin Monnas Ali, Mohammad Ali, Momin Mia, Kutum Uddin, Rejot Ali and Iman Ali, and some other unnamed people were lying there."

They were buried in three graves, he said.

Jalal also mentioned that Baka Bura, Nasa and Kadir doktor were Razakars, and Kamaruzzaman was their chief. They carried out the massacre, bringing the Pakistani army to the village.

In his reaction to yesterday's verdict, Jalal told The Daily Star that there was an apprehension that Kamaruzzaman might get a lesser punishment like Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee.

"We were relieved after hearing the verdict. We want quick execution of the verdict."

"My father and other villagers were killed brutally at the hands of Razakars and Al-Badr men led by Kamaruzzaman, and only death is the befitting punishment for the crimes he had committed," said Jalal, demanding the trial of all local collaborators.

Adjudicating the charge of mass killing in Sohagpur, the ICT-2 in its verdict observed that the attack was launched in such grotesque and revolting manner that hundreds of unarmed civilians couldn't save their lives. The act of massacre and devastation of human honour was diabolic and detrimental to basic humanness.

"The accused [Kamaruzzaman] by his acts and conducts participated in the perpetration of such horrendous attack that resulted in murder of hundreds of unarmed civilians constituting the offence of crimes against humanity," it said.



A list of 1971 martyrs in Sherpur's Bidhoba Palli.

"Undeniably, the act of indiscriminate sexual invasion committed on women, in conjunction of the event of mass killing at Sohagpur village, shocked the conscience of humankind and aggra-

vates the pattern of the criminal acts and liability of the accused as well," the tribunal added.

A plaque with the names of 69 villagers stands next to a mass graveyard at Sohagpur, bearing the testi-

mony of a brutal massacre.

The villagers demand that a monument be built there to commemorate the people who lost their lives at the hands of Pakistan army, Razakars and Al-Badr men.

COURTESY: INVESTIGATION AGENCY, ICT

SC verdict hailed

Prosecution thinks it fulfilled nation's expectations; Kamaruzzaman's son says his father is innocent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While pro-liberation activists and the prosecution welcomed the Supreme Court verdict that upheld the death penalty of Muhammad Kamaruzzaman for his crimes against humanity in 1971, his family and the defence termed it "unjust".

Mofidul Hoque, a Liberation War Museum trustee, said the country through a legal path was slowly getting over the anguish of impunity to war criminals that had scared the nation for so long.

"It is a great beginning for Bangladesh. Justice and truth is being established," he said.

Freedom fighter and cultural personality Nasiruddin Yusuf Bachchu said freedom fighters, martyrs' families and victims of the liberation war as well as ordinary people would breathe a sigh of relief upon hearing the verdict.

"Since people's expectation of justice was not addressed for forty years, they had become skeptical. However, people's confidence in the rule of law is

returning with the continual announcement of verdicts," he said.

Referring to the atrocious role of Kamaruzzaman as an Al-Badr leader, Bachchu said, "This verdict would pave the way for the nation to take the right path."

Meanwhile, Kamaruzzaman's family alleged that the apex court did not deliver justice by handing him a death sentence on war crimes charges.

"My father is innocent but he was awarded the capital punishment," said Hasan Iqbal, elder son of Kamaruzzaman, after the verdict was pronounced yesterday. "We will seek a review."

"My father had no involvement in the mass killing for which he was awarded the death penalty," he said. "Besides, there is no record of his involvement in crimes in historical documents."

Iqbal was speaking to reporters near the Supreme Court Bar Association after the Appellate Division upheld his father's death penalty on one charge and commuted his capital punish-

ment on another charge to life term imprisonment.

However, he denied commenting on whether the family would seek the presidential clemency to save Kamaruzzaman from the gallows.

Kamaruzzaman's lawyers said they would file a review petition with the Supreme Court seeking acquittal on all charges which he was found guilty of.

The petition will be filed within 30 days after getting the certified copy of the verdict, advocate Shishir Manir, a counsel for the war crimes convict Kamaruzzaman, told reporters.

"If the apex court evaluates the petition in our favour, Kamaruzzaman will be acquitted," Shishir said adding that his client was not involved in any wartime offences.

Tajul Islam, another defence counsel, claimed the defence was eligible to file a review plea against the Supreme Court verdict.

"It is Kamaruzzaman's constitutional right," he added.

"We had filed a review petition in

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DEATH PENALTY FOR KAMARUZZAMAN

Witnesses hope for quick execution

STAR REPORT

The families of the victims are satisfied that the Supreme Court has upheld the death sentence for war criminal Muhammad Kamaruzzaman and now, all they want is his execution as early as possible.

"It seems the blood of my brother who was martyred in 1971 did not go in vain," said Musharraf Hossain Talukder, who is also the fifth prosecution witness in the war crimes case against the Jamaat-e-Islami assistant secretary general.

In May last year, the International Crimes Tribunal-2 had awarded Kamaruzzaman death for his involvement in the killing of Musharraf's brother Golam Mostafa during the war. However, the SC yesterday commuted the sentence to a life term.

The four-member SC bench headed by Justice Surendra Kumar however upheld the death penalty to the Jamaat leader given by the ICT-2 for killing 164 at Shohagpur village in Sherpur in

1971.

Kamaruzzaman and his accomplices had killed Mostafa at Serih Bridge area in Sherpur on August 23, 1971. "He [Mostafa] was shot dead after being stabbed with a bayonet," Musharraf had told the ICT-2 during his deposition.

"We have got justice as the verdict has been upheld. The souls of my dead parents will now get peace," he said yesterday.

Monowar Hossain Khan alias Mohan Munshi, a key witness in the war crimes case, who was a security guard at an Al-Badr camp in Sherpur during the war, expressed satisfaction over the verdict.

"Kamaruzzaman had forced me to guard the torture cell at one Surendra Saha's house. I witnessed all the evil activities including rape of many women committed by him," he said.

Prosecution had also brought a charge against the Jamaat leader for torturing one Syed Abdul Hannan in

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Key man

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Kamaruzzaman's appeal was pending there.

Ending all apprehension and speculations, the apex court yesterday upheld the death penalty for his crimes against humanity committed in 1971. Now the justice seekers demand quick execution of the verdict.

Son of Insan Ali Sarkar of Kumri Mudipara in Sherpur, Kamaruzzaman was born on July 4, 1952. He got involved in Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat, when he was a student of class X, according to prosecution documents.

He passed the Secondary School Certificate examination from GKM Institute in Sherpur in 1967.

Soon he became the general secretary of Islami Chhatra Sangha of a dormitory unit at Jamalpur Ashok Mahmud College and then the president of Chhatra Sangha of greater Mymensingh (Mymensingh, Jamalpur and Sherpur) in 1971.

Prosecution documents also show that Al-Badr, an auxiliary force of the Pakistan occupation army, was formed after the army entered Jamalpur on April 22, 1971. The entire Mymensingh district Chhatra Sangha joined Al-Badr within a month under the leadership of Kamaruzzaman.

The identity of Kamaruzzaman as the chief organiser of Al-Badr is very much evident from a report published in Jamaat's mouthpiece, the daily Sangram on August 16, 1971.

The report said Momenshahi [Mymensingh] Al-Badr had organised a rally and symposium at local Muslim Institute on August 15 marking the 25th independence day of Pakistan and Kamaruzzaman, as the chief organiser of Al-Badr, had chaired the programme.

After taking short training, Al-Badr members started committing atrocities targeting the Hindus and unarmed Bangalees of greater Mymensingh, say the prosecution documents.

After the Liberation War, law enforcers arrested Kamaruzzaman in the capital on December 29, 1971 as one of the collaborators of the Pakistan army.

The Bangla daily Purbadesh ran a report headlined "15 more collaborators including Deen Mohammad arrested" on December 31, 1971. The Dainik Bangla published another report headlined "15 more collaborators arrested" in the same issue.

Kamaruzzaman was 14th on the list of arrestees published in the reports. He was 287th on a list of arrested collaborators of Dhaka that was prepared by the Directorate of National Security Intelligence (NSI) Bangladesh on April 13, 1972.

News of his arrest was substantiated from the testimony of Kafil Uddin, elder brother of Kamaruzzaman as well as the fourth defence witness in the case.

During his cross-examination, Kafil said Kamaruzzaman was detained at Kamalapur Railway Station when he had gone to Dhaka towards the end of 1971 but was released after 90-105 days.

Sources in the investigation agency of ICT say Kamaruzzaman sat for the HSC examinations from Dhaka Central Jail in 1972 and got released after around nine months as no case was filed against him in the capital. But a case was filed against him in Mymensingh under the Collaborator Act, 1972.

However, he was not arrested in connection with that case.

After the rebirth of Jamaat's student wing which assumed the name Islami Chhatra Shibir after independence in 1977, Kamaruzzaman became its president in the second executive committee, according to prosecution documents.

The war criminal joined Jamaat in 1979.

He obtained his bachelor's degree in 1974 and master's in journalism from Dhaka University in 1976, according to defence documents.

He joined the monthly Dhaka Digest as an executive editor in 1980. Thereafter he took charge of the weekly Sonar Bangla as its editor in 1981 and remained in that position even after his arrest. He joined the daily Sangram as an executive editor in November 1983 and served in that capacity until 1993.

He joined Jamaat's Dhaka city unit in October 1979 and served as a joint secretary in 1981-82. He was the central publicity secretary from 1983 to 1991. He has been serving as an assistant secretary general of Jamaat since 1992, according to defence documents.

Kamaruzzaman, father of five sons and one daughter, contested the parliamentary elections in 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 but never won.

Govt moves

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The country plunged into a power crisis just before Saturday noon after the Bangladesh-India Power Transmission substation in Kushtia's Bheramara had tripped due to an unspecified glitch, and it lasted for over 10 hours.

On the day, a seven-member investigation committee was formed to find out the reasons behind the gross power failure. The committee, headed by Additional Secretary of Power and Energy Ministry Ahmed Kaikaus, has been asked to submit a report by three working days.

No escape

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counts of war crimes.

In its short verdict, the SC did not clarify the grounds of its sentence order. It will be known once the full text of the judgment is released.

The convict, now in a Kashimpur jail, was not present in the court when the verdict was pronounced. Normally, an accused is not produced before the appeal court.

But he heard the news on radio, a private TV channel reports.

REVIEW OR NO REVIEW

After the judgment, confusions surfaced again as to whether a war crimes convict can file a review petition.

Attorney General Mahubey Alam said Kamaruzzaman had no right to move such a petition, as he was tried under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973. It is a special law and it does not allow any of the parties to file a review petition.

But Kamaruzzaman's lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir told The Daily Star his client had the legal right to move a review petition and that they would do so.

Contacted, eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said the SC usually entertains review petitions on two grounds -- if there are serious factual errors in the judgment and if an inap-

propriate law is applied.

"But the Appellate Division hardly changes its verdict in the review," he told The Daily Star.

Amid tight security in and around the court premises, the SC judges took seats at 9:10am and Justice Sinha pronounced the short verdict in about a minute.

Other members of the bench were Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah, Justice Hasan Foez Siddique and Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik.

A few hundred people, including lawyers, journalists, justice seekers and observers were present in the court. Kamaruzzaman's son Hasan Iqbal was also there.

Different organisations, including Gonojagoron Mancha, and people of Sohagpur in Sherpur hailed the verdict and brought out processions. People were seen distributing sweetmeats in many places, including Sohagpur.

"With agonising pain and trauma, we had been waiting to see him punished. We are happy, but we would be happier when we see him hanged," said a rape victim of Sohagpur, who also lost her husband at the hands of Pakistani army and its collaborators accompanied by

Kamaruzzaman.

Kamaruzzaman's family members and defence counsels denounced the verdict, saying they did not get justice.

VERDICT EXECUTION

According to legal experts, Kamaruzzaman will be hanged a few weeks after the SC releases the certified copy of its verdict, which may take two to three months.

In the case of Abdul Quader Mollah, it took 82 days after the SC sentenced him to death for war crimes last year. The SC gave the short verdict on September 17 and the Jamaat leader was hanged on December 12.

Under the law, the war crimes tribunal will issue a death warrant for Kamaruzzaman upon getting the certified copy of the SC verdict and will send the warrant to the prison authorities, the home ministry and the district magistrate concerned.

The jail authorities will then take steps for implementing the warrant.

The experts further said the jail code was not applicable to Kamaruzzaman, since he was sentenced under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act 1973, which is a special law.

Under the jail code, death sen-

tence is executed not before 21 days and not after 28 days of the jail authorities' receipt of the certified copy.

Citing Quader Mollah's example again, the jurists said the convict was hanged four days after the tribunal issued the death warrant.

The SC released the full judgment in Quader Mollah's case on December 5 last year and the tribunal received its certified copy on December 8. The tribunal issued the death warrant the same day and the prison authorities executed the order four days later.

Quader Mollah had filed two petitions seeking review, but the SC dismissed those. Nearly a year on, the SC has neither disclosed the grounds for the dismissal nor has it released the full text of the dismissal order.

Kamaruzzaman, however, can seek presidential clemency if he wants.

Meanwhile, Law Minister Anisul Huq told reporters the government was going to take necessary steps for Kamaruzzaman's execution soon.

He added it was possible to hang the war criminal on the basis of the short verdict of the SC after its certified copy was released.