

## 16 burnt as gas cylinder explodes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

At least 16 people suffered burns in a fire that resulted from gas cylinder explosion in a Chittagong city market on Wednesday night.

The condition of five victims was stated to be critical. Of them, Tulshi Sen Gupta and Charan Biswas have been undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Tulshi Sen sustained 65 percent burns, said his family. Three others -- Jony Dhar, Jadu Das and Rajib Bonik -- are taking treatment at the burn unit of Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH).

Pradip, younger brother of Rajib, said most of the injured are goldsmiths. Shawkat Ali, senior officer of Nandankon Fire Station, said the fire erupted following a sudden explosion of a gas cylinder inside the shop of goldsmith Tulshi on the 1st floor of five-storey Mohammedia Press Market around 10:15pm.

The fire soon spread to the adjacent shops, leaving 16 people injured, he said.

Firefighters from Nandankon, Agrabad and Chandanpura fire stations rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control around 11:20pm, said fire service sources.

All the injured were taken to the CMCH, said Sub-inspector Zahirul Islam of CMCH police camp.

The loss caused by the fire could go up to Tk 2 lakh, said Shawkat.

## Malaysia detains 80 Bangladeshis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysian police on Wednesday night detained at least 80 Bangladeshi migrant workers allegedly working illegally in Kampung Raja area in the country's Pahang state.

The Bangladeshis, believed to be working at a construction site in Cameron Highlands, were picked up during two raids in Tringkap and Blue Valley of Kampung Raja, reported Malaysia's state news agency Bernama.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sayedul Islam, counsellor (Labour wing) at Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, said: "Although we didn't receive any official statement regarding the arrest of the Bangladeshi citizens, we have

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## Lawmen

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report sharing and discussion programme titled "NHRC: Institutional Commitment Needed". Organised by Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) at the Jatiya Press Club, the programme was chaired by ASK Executive Director Sultana Kamal. Referring to Mohammad Nafiz, 32, an alleged operative of banned outfit Hizb-ut Tahrir, who was shot by police on October 17 in the capital's Mohammadpur, Mizan said it was brutal and inhuman that they shot a person at point blank range and injured him.

Regarding Limon who was shot and maimed by the Rapid Action Battalion in 2011, he said the government cannot restrict its duty to only dropping false charges against Limon. The judiciary has a role to play in realising compensation for Limon, he added.

On March 23, 2011, a Rab team shot Limon in the left leg at Shaturia village in Jhalakathi, taking him for a notorious criminal it was looking for. Later, the Rab brought two false charges against him, which had been dropped in October this year.

At the programme, the ASK published an annual report on the performance and establishment of national human rights institutions in Bangladesh between January 2013 and June this year. It prepared the report as the Bangladesh country chapter for the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institution (ANNI) Report 2014.

"The overall human rights situation in 2013 was alarming amid continuous political violence throughout the year, and it has been one of the most challenging years for the country's economy in recent times," noted the report.

"Enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings [as 'crossfire' and 'encounter'] and deaths in police custody continued along with communal violence, harassment and killing of journalists, gender-based violence and violation of workers' rights," it added.

The report also referred to the Anti-terrorism (Amendment) Act, 2013, that empowers law enforcers to record conversations, videos, photographs and conversations posted on social media. The Anti-Corruption Act, 2004, has been amended to curtail the power of the ACC to sue government officials, it notes.



Fugitive war criminal Khokon Razakar is seen at Bredäng metro station in Stockholm, Sweden, in September 2013.

PHOTO: COURTESY

## Death, on six charges

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blood, a special tribunal yesterday sentenced MA Zahid Hossain Khokon, better known as Khokon Razakar, to death.

He is the third BNP man to have been convicted of war crimes. Also mayor of Nagarkanda Poursabha, Khokon was tried in absentia, as the tribunal's efforts to have him in the dock failed.

"We have taken due notice of the intrinsic gravity of the said offences of

Bongram in Faridpur.

Yesterday's court proceeding began with Justice Anwarul Haque reading out the summary of the 109-page verdict around 11:00am. Later, Justice Jahangir Hossain, another member of the panel, read out the second part of the judgment.

Justice M Enayetur Rahim read out the main part of the verdict.

With the latest judgment, the two special tribunals have so far convicted 13 people for committing war crimes.

that they knew Zahid Hossain Khokon and his elder brother, Razakar commander Zafar, and that the brothers committed war crimes in their locality in 1971.

The judgment read, "The accused had directly participated in the commission of crimes as an armed member of Razakar force."

"It is abundantly clear that the accused absconded to evade the process of justice though he is the sitting Mayor of Nagarkanda Poursabha. It

DESCRIPTION OF CRIMES	GUILTY	NOT GUILTY	PUNISHMENT
17 were tortured, house plundered in Bonogram		✓	Acquitted
Extortion, destruction of houses in Jongurdi-Bagutia village	✓		5 years' jail
Religious conversion in Jongurdi-Bagutia village	✓		10 years' jail
Looting and rape of two in Chandhat village	✓		20 years' jail
18 shot dead in Kodalia village	✓		DEATH
4 shot dead, set fire on houses in Ishwardi village	✓		DEATH
8 burnt and shot to death in Meherdia and Kodalia villages	✓		DEATH
2 shot dead in Goidal village	✓		DEATH
9 killed in Purapara village	✓		DEATH
Killed 15-20 villagers in Bagat and Churichar villages	✓		DEATH
One shot injured in Jongurdi-Bagutia village	✓		5 years' jail

crimes against humanity which are particularly shocking to the conscience of mankind," Justice M Enayetur Rahim, chairman of the International Crimes Tribunal-1, said in the judgment.

"... in consideration of the gravity and magnitude of the offences ..., we unanimously hold that the accused deserves the highest punishment," he said.

Seventy-two-year-old Khokon, who reportedly fled the country in 2011 and is now in Sweden, was found guilty on 10 of the 11 charges brought against him.

Six charges brought him death. Those include mass killing in Shahidnagar and Kodalia villages; murders, plundering and arson at Ishwardi, Meherdia, Kodalia and Bangram villages; the killing of two, including the baby girl at Goidal village; murders, plundering and arson in Purapara village; and mass killing at Baghat and Churichar villages in Faridpur.

The tribunal jailed him for 20 years for involvement in looting and rape of two Hindu women at Chandhat village on May 27, 1971.

He was given 10 years' imprisonment for forcing eight Hindus to convert to Islam at Jongurdi-Bagutia village between May 16 and 28, 1971.

Khokon got five years' imprisonment for destroying houses at Jongurdi-Bagutia village, and another five years for shooting and injuring Kanailal Mondol of the village.

All the sentences will merge into a single sentence of death, said the court.

The three-member tribunal, however, acquitted him of the charge of abducting and torturing 17 people, and plundering their houses at

Of them, four are on the run.

Khokon, who was 29 during the Liberation War, received training on how to operate weapons to become a Razakar in April, 1971.

Formed by the then Jamaat leader AKM Yusuf, Razakar Bahini collaborated with the Pakistani army as its auxiliary force in killing 30 lakh people and raping two lakh women during the Liberation War.

Khokon and his elder brother Zafar formed the Nagarkanda unit of infamous Razakar force in May, 1971. After his brother's death in a battle with freedom fighters, he became the commander of local Razakars.

Khokon campaigned for a Jamaat-e-Islami candidate in the 1970 elections and was involved with the party until he joined the BNP, founded in 1978.

The prosecutors said Khokon was a self-proclaimed Razakar commander, and he used to say it publicly with pride.

Later, he became vice-president of Nagarkanda BNP. He was elected municipality mayor in 2011, but went into hiding after taking the oath.

Usha Munshi, acting mayor of Nagarkanda municipality, said Khokon was suspended from office after the probe in his war crimes case began last year.

During case proceedings, state-appointed defence counsel Abdus Shukur Khan claimed his client Nagarkanda mayor MA Zahid was charged with war crimes that were actually committed by another person named MA Zahid Hossain Khokon.

He also insisted that his client MA Zahid is actually a freedom fighter, and never went to those crime sites during the Liberation War.

However, 18 of the 24 prosecution witnesses, mostly victims, testified

may be presumed that had the accused not been involved in the crime, he would have certainly appeared before the Tribunal to face the trial", the court observed.

"Thus, the claim of the defence that wrong person has been charged and prosecuted has no leg to stand," the verdict adds.

Family members of the victims expressed satisfaction at the verdict, and demanded he be brought back home and executed.

As in the past, the defence in this case also was unhappy with the judgment.

"It did not establish justice. My client was not involved in any war crime activities and the allegations against him were false and baseless," said Shukur Khan.

The lawyer said he couldn't deal with the case properly as the convict's family members didn't cooperate with him.

The court said the convict can file an appeal in 30 days, but only after he surrenders or is arrested.

Prosecutors Mukhlesur Rahman Badal and Sabina Yasmin Munni said the 30-day deadline began yesterday, and the convict wouldn't be allowed to file an appeal once the deadline expires.

But Shukur Khan said Khokon could file an application with the Supreme Court even after the deadline, and seek its permission for lodging an appeal. The apex court would then decide whether it would allow him to file the appeal.

Last year, the ICT-2 handed down death penalty to expelled Jamaat-e-Islami member Abul Kalam Azad, known as Bachchu Razakar, and former Al-Badr leaders Ashrafuzzaman Khan and Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin -- all tried in absentia in war crimes cases.

## Hard to catch

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Meanwhile, victims' family members and Gonojagoron Mancha, a pro-liberation platform, yesterday urged the government to execute the verdict immediately after bringing the fugitive back to the country.

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday sentenced Khokon to death as it found him guilty in mass killing and several other crimes committed in Faridpur during the Liberation War. Khokon was the fourth accused sentenced to death by war crimes tribunals after they were tried in absentia.

Sanaul Huq, a senior member of the investigation agency of the International Crimes Tribunal, told The Daily Star yesterday that Khokon fled to Sweden in 2011, and has been living there with his son and daughter since.

"I had seen him in Sweden when I visited there in July or August last year. He [Khokon] is living there openly and I had seen him gambling."

Prosecutor Tureen Afroz said she had also seen Khokon in Sweden last December. Although Khokon has sought political asylum there, he has not been granted citizenship, she added.

Dr Farhad Ali Khan, a member of the executive committee of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, Sweden unit, told The Daily Star over the phone last night that they had boycotted a social programme held at Stockholm in July this year protesting Khokon's participation in the programme.

Khokon was seen several times in the southern part of Stockholm in last few months, where his son and daughter live, he said.

Farhad, also a vice-president of Sweden Awami League, said they have been working for the last two years to send Khokon back to Bangladesh. But after the death penalty, Sweden may not deport him to Bangladesh.

"In that case, we will intensify our efforts to hold his trial at Swedish war crimes tribunal," he said. He also urged the Bangladesh government's quick and effective diplomatic steps in this regard.

About his repatriation, Tureen said it is very difficult to bring him back from Sweden as the European Union has abolished death sentence and naturally it would not send a death

row convict back.

She, however, said there are laws against any war criminals in Sweden and it could hold summary trial of Khokon upon receiving war crimes documents from Bangladesh.

"We have to convince them [Swedish government] that no war criminal should be allowed roaming around freely. To do so, strong diplomatic efforts are required," she added.

But, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, chief of the monitoring cell responsible for overseeing the capture and return of fugitive war crimes convicts and accused, said they have no specific information about Khokon's location.

"We are trying to track him down with the assistance of Interpol, and if we can trace him, government to government level diplomatic process will be initiated to bring him back," he added.

When he was given the information about Khokon's location in Sweden, he said, "We have to ascertain his specific location first." If Khokon lives in Sweden, it would be difficult to bring him back as Bangladesh does not have an extradition agreement with Sweden, he added.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam also said they have no specific information about Khokon's whereabouts.

If the home ministry gives them (foreign ministry) information about Khokon's whereabouts, the foreign mission of the specific country will carry out rigorous manhunt to trace him, he told The Daily Star.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice M Enayetur Rahim asked the authorities concerned to transmit the conviction warrant to Inspector General of Police and District Magistrate of Dhaka and his native district Faridpur for necessary action and compliance.

Earlier, Tribunal-2 awarded death penalty to Al-Badr leaders Chowdhury Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman Khan for intellectual killings and former Jamaat-e-Islami member Abul Kalam Azad for wartime crimes.

Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman are living in the UK and the USA respectively, but they could not be repatriated mainly due to the same reasons as in Sweden, sources said.

Location of Azad is yet to be confirmed, they added.

## Testimony of torture

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According to charge-11, Khokon inflicted inhuman torture on Kanailal Mondol, shot and injured him in July 1971.

Now 74, Jibon witnessed how the once Jamaat activist Khokon Razakar became a BNP leader Zahid Hossain Khokon and got elected as mayor of Nagarkanda municipality under Faridpur in 2011.

Khokon left the country in the same year when investigators started probing his alleged crimes against humanity.

Holding his trial in absentia, the ICT-1 yesterday found the fugitive guilty of committing crimes against humanity in some villages of Faridpur in 1971 and handed him the death penalty on six charges.

Locals in Faridpur celebrated the verdict by bringing out processions and distributing sweets among people. But Jibon only said, "We just hope he

[Khokon] would be punished for his atrocities."

Visiting Khokon's house at Nagarkanda yesterday, this correspondent found the entrance to the first floor of the two-storey building near Nagarkanda Govt Girls High School under lock and key. There were tenants on the ground floor.

His wife Ambia Begum claimed her husband is innocent. "He is the victim of a conspiracy as he was involved with BNP politics."

"I don't know the whereabouts of my husband. He phoned me three to four days ago," she told The Daily Star over the phone.

Another prosecution witness Kashem Matubbor, also the younger brother of slain freedom fighter Nuru Matubbor of Ishwardi village in Nagarkanda, said he was happy with the verdict.

He demanded the government implement the verdict after bringing Khokon back home.

## Obama worried

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The US leader set the tone for his three-day trip to Myanmar with hard-hitting comments on the pace of reforms in an interview with news website The Irrawaddy published just before he arrived on Wednesday.

"Even as there has been some progress on the political and economic fronts, in other areas there has been a slowdown and backsliding in reforms," Obama said.

"In addition to restrictions on freedom of the press, we continue to see violations of basic human rights and abuses in the country's ethnic areas, including reports of extrajudicial killings, rape and forced labour."

Obama planned to speak out on behalf of the nation's Muslim Rohingya minority in "all of his engagements" in Myanmar, his deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, told reporters yesterday.

Around 140,000 Rohingya languish in fetid displacement camps in western Rakhine State after religious violence flared two years ago, leaving scores of the minority dead and casting a dark cloud over the nation's path to democracy.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Wednesday also raised the "serious humanitarian" condition of the Rohingya.

A draft of a controversial government-backed Rakhine Action Plan seen by AFP would force Rohingya to identify themselves as Bengali -- a term seen as disparaging -- in order to apply for citizenship. Those who refused

would be forced to live in camps.

Many in Myanmar's government and local Buddhists view Rohingya as illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh, while many from the community say they can trace their ancestry in the country back for generations.

Rhodes said Obama would encourage all Myanmar figureheads, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, to support an alternative plan for the Rohingya that "allows them to become citizens of this country without having to self-identify as something they do not believe they are". The plan should also provide more humanitarian access and ensure they are not "settled indefinitely in camps".

Since the current violence erupted in 2012, some 100,000 people have taken to boats, many barely seaworthy, to escape the dire conditions in Rakhine, where both Buddhist and Muslim communities have long suffered Myanmar's worst poverty levels.

Meanwhile, Rakhine authorities yesterday issued a rebuke to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his insistence that the United Nations would use the term Rohingya as part of its principle to "recognise the rights of minorities" at a press conference in Naypyidaw on Wednesday.

Rakhine State Chief Minister Maung Maung Ohn said Ban's comments "could further inflame local sentiment and undo previous gains we have achieved", in a document released by the ministry of information.

## The underground city

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The quarries often connected to the trenches above, and became established fighting bases for thousands of men. Journalists who visited them during the conflict describe chapels carved into the rock, fires lit underground, and rooms strewn with straw for men to sleep on.

Some of the artworks were also left on narrow tunnel walls carved out by the infamous sappers of the First World War who dug tunnels under enemy lines to plant explosives, made famous in Sebastian Faulks' book Birdsong.

American physician and fine art photographer Jeffrey Gusky has

captured more than 2,000 images of the forgotten shelters, and is publishing them in a new collection called The Hidden World of World War I.

He said: "The project gives us a glimpse into the individual humanity of soldiers who refused to be silenced in the face of modern mass destruction."

"Men from both sides defied the inhuman scale of modern life and declared themselves as human beings who could think and feel and express and create, and who remind us today that they were here and that they once existed as living, breathing human beings."

## Khaleda

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Abbas responded: It's hard to complete reorganisation of the party's Dhaka city unit as police are detaining BNP men and filing cases against them.

At one stage, the BNP chief said she will take to the streets and all her party leaders will have to join her in the movement.

As some standing committee members responded positively to her comment,

Pointed at filing of a charge sheet yesterday against Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury and Habiganj municipality Mayor GK Gaus in the SAMS Kibria murder case, she said the government wants to "destroy" the BNP.