

Cruelty in hills

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the relocated Bangalees.

"The Bangalees were enraged when they saw this in the morning. They held the indigenous people responsible for this and launched the attack," Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Rashid of Naniarchar Police Station told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

He said about 450 Bangalees took part in the attack in which 48 houses were damaged and torched.

The OC however denied the allegation of attack on the temple. "In fact, army personnel were deployed to protect the temple," he said.

The victims claimed the extent of damage caused by the attack would be much higher, and they had nothing to do with the destruction of the pineapple and teak plantation.

The villagers fled to nearby jungles during the attack. They returned only after the attackers left, and police and local administration officials arrived.

When this correspondent reached the scene about 12:30pm, he found several houses and granaries still burning.

"At least 125 mounds of rice was gutted in the fire. How will we survive now? Why have we been attacked?" Chanchaladevi Chakma, 38, said while wailing intermittently.

Head of Suridaspara village Ram Karbari said the villagers could save nothing as the attacks were carried out all of a sudden.

Deputy Commissioner Mostafa

Kamal of Rangamati, Superintendent of Police Amena Begum, Chairman of Naniarchar upazila parishad Shaktiman Chakma, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Nuruzzaman and Commander of Naniarchar zone of army Lt Col Md Sohel visited the spots.

At a brief meeting, they called upon the indigenous communities to maintain peace in the area and assured them of arresting the attackers.

The district administration gave Tk 1 lakh to each of the victim families. Besides, the DC assured the victims of providing with corrugated iron sheets for building houses and other relief materials, including blankets.

Immediately after the incident, the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) blocked the Rangamati-Khagrachhari road, suspending vehicular movement for several hours. Later, police and army personnel freed the road.

In separate statements, the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Shanghati Samity, the UPDF and the Parbatya Chattagram Nagarik Committee condemned the incident and demanded arrest and punishment of the culprits.

The local administration formed a 12-member committee headed by the Naniarchar upazila parishad chairman to settle the dispute.

No case was filed and none was arrested in this connection till 12:20am. Army and police personnel were deployed in the area.



A man stands on his pineapple field destroyed allegedly by Bangalee settlers at Suridas Para in Rangamati yesterday. A woman breaks down in tears seeing her stock of food grains damaged in an arson attack.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Tarique this time calls Bangabandhu a razakar

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Mujib himself banned it having labeled it a party of thieves. So Sheikh Mujib himself is a big Razakar for doing something like this," Tarique said at a programme on Monday in London.

Although the Awami League existed during the war, it's not necessarily a pro-liberation party and it is clear to all like daylight that Sheikh Mujib and his family had no contribution in the 1971 Liberation War; the Awami League was not the political party that had led the independence war of Bangladesh, Tarique alleged.

"Sheikh Mujib rather got arrested

on March 25 by the Pakistan occupation army through a compromise," Tarique, elder son of BNP chief Khaleda Zia, said on the seventh day of an eight-day programme in East London organised by BNP's London unit to mark the 43rd anniversary of Bangladesh's birth.

Tarique's nearly two-hour speech took a theatrical turn when he asked the audience: "If anyone, standing in the free and sovereign soil of Bangladesh, shouts slogan for Pakistan, what would that man be called?"

The audience, most of whom were BNP men, responded saying, "Razakar."

Tarique then pricked up his ear and said: "I can't hear, say louder." The audience shouted louder, "Razakar."

He then said, "I am speaking with evidence. Sheikh Mujib was a Razakar, murderer and Pakbandhu (friend of Pakistan)."

"When lakhs of people were on the battlefield, Sheikh Mujib's family was living a secure life in Dhaka with the murderer Yahya's money," Tarique said. "So, is it wrong to call him a Pakbondhu?"

The BNP second-in-command said he had "evidence" to prove his claims and called upon the Awami League men to come up with evi-

dence to disprove his claims.

He also said it was his father late president Ziaur Rahman who was not only "the first president" of Bangladesh but also the "first elected president" of the country, a claim he has repeated on a number of occasions since March 26 this year.

Terming Sheikh Mujib the "Lal Salu" of the AL in Bangladesh politics, he said: "The hypocrites surrounding the Lal Salu have been labeling anyone Razakar for their own interests."

On the other hand, he lavished praise on Hossain Shahid Suhrawardy, Sher-e-Bangla AKM Fazlul Haque and Mawlana Bhasani

for their political roles towards achieving East Pakistan's self-governance.

Towards the end of his speech, he called upon people to turn away from the AL whose leaders only spout lies and participate instead in the upcoming movement to be led by Khaleda Zia for saving the country and its people.

Criticising the AL for twisting the country's history for the past four decades, he urged his supporters to shout 'Razakar' whenever an AL supporter would be sighted.

His controversial speeches have triggered criticism among a cross section of people for distorting

Bangladesh's history. Tarique has drawn flak for his comments from within his own party circles.

Early this month he termed Bangabandhu a "Pakbandhu" (friend of Pakistan) for which he is facing an arrest warrant from a Dhaka court after an aggrieved person filed a case against his humiliating remarks on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib.

Chaired by Shayesta Chowdhury, chief of BNP's London unit, the programme was addressed, among others, by the party's Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed and BNP chairperson's adviser Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin.

The memories of a bloody December

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records and albums...the house had been looted," he says, gritting his teeth.

"The neighbours told me my mother had gone to stay with my sister in Parbatipur, and my father and brother were missing, but no one would give me any details. But they were all dead," he says, with a sense of finality.

Now, 43 years after the bloodshed, as he speaks to us from his idyllic home in Abbottabad, Mr Khan appears to have made peace with his traumatic past. He even laughs as he says, "It was inevitable. When the Awami League swept the 1970 elections and the assembly was not called to session, what else could have happened," he posits.

He is clear in his convictions. For him, the bloody separation was caused by the actions of those in the west.

"Admiral Mohammad Ahsan, the last governor of East Pakistan, recalls that when Yahya Khan came to talk to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he asked the admiral 'What are these six points,'" he recalls.

"The admiral offered to send for the document, but Yahya refused, saying 'No, no, I'll manage'. This shows there was a lack of seriousness to engage with the people of East Pakistan."

He says that some in his family have ostracised him for supporting the creation of Bangladesh and the Bengalis'

right to self-determination.

"What happened to me on a personal level was painful, but it was inevitable. When a force denies people their basic rights such a reaction was to be expected.

Cilocia Zaidi was only 10 years old when Dhaka fell, but, "What we saw as children left us with scars that can never be healed. We don't like to talk about it because it's too painful to recall. But not talking about it doesn't change what happened," she says.

Now a journalist based in Islamabad, Ms Zaidi witnessed first-hand some of the worst violence that came to pass in 1971. "I remember our Hindu dhobi (laundry man) had a beautiful daughter. One day, she sat outside our gates, sobbing inconsolably. The gate was guarded by army men, who would not let her in. When we asked our mother why the girl was crying, she said nothing. Today, I know what happened to her and to countless others like her," she says.

She recalls the day Sheikh Mujib gave his final call to the Bengali people and asked them to fight for their liberation.

"From the window of my house, I saw people emerging from every corner, holding makeshift weapons. I saw our milkman, an elderly man, walking with a spear in his hand. After that, it was sheer chaos," she says.

"The resentment was against the army

operation, not necessarily against Pakistan. After all, Bengal too was Pakistan, it was the land of the Muslim League's birth," she said.

"Bengalis are a proud people; proud of their culture and their language. But West Pakistanis always looked down on Bengalis and were very racist towards them. This is what sowed the seed of resentment." Ms Zaidi's father, Capt Asghar Hussain Zaidi, had been a member of parliament and a part of Ayub Khan's cabinet. Although he was Bengali, his support for a united Pakistan made him a target for the Mukti Bahini.

"They (Mukti Bahini) were people we called brothers or uncles. We were a vibrant family with a variety of political affiliations. My grandfather and uncles were Awami Leaguers and became part of the liberation movement."

But when the trouble began, her grandfather wisely suggested that the family relocate to the village.

"I remember walking through the vast riverbed with thousands of ordinary villagers, just walking out of the city. That's when the helicopters began firing at everyone. I remember asking my mother why our army was shooting at us, and she said that from their viewpoint, they could not see who was innocent," she says, the emotional strain showing as her eyes begin to glisten.

Meet the 11-yr-old

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"Today, I'm seeking a \$20 investment so I can purchase the necessary tools I need to expand and grow my business," she tells them.

In fact, one woman was so charmed by Asia's enthusiasm that she offered her a \$100 bill. With her father Michael waiting nearby, she also distributes business cards as she makes the rounds.

"Detroit is still a great place to start a business. We have wonderful people. They'll encourage you. I mean, I sell my candles here, like I make pretty good money," the precocious pre-teen said.

Asia even caught the attention of Dave Anderson, co-owner of Bamboo Detroit, a local incubator for startups.

"She really understands business concepts a lot better than most adults that I interact with, and it's just a natural thing," said Anderson, who bought a candle from Asia last year.

"I was so impressed with her pitch, I just wanted to give her all the money in my pocket," he added.

Bamboo Detroit has given Asia free space and Internet support to develop Super Business Girl and fulfill her dream of training other children in entrepreneurship.

Murder case

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environment secretary of the same committee Enamul Hasan Ovi, Varsity Express (VEx) group leaders Rubel Dey and Shahrid Shuvo.

"Sub-Inspector Habibur Rahman will investigate the case," the OC said, adding that police were carrying out raids to arrest the accused.

Suman Mamun, a leader of a CU BCL faction, said the case was supposed to be filed by Taposh's brother.

"As he was yet to reach Chittagong from Sunamganj, Taposh's friend and classmate Hafiz has filed the case after consultation with Taposh's family," he added.

Taposh, a Sanskrit department student, was shot dead and four others were injured during a clash between two feuding groups of BCL on the CU campus.

According to campus sources, the activists of a BCL faction known as Choose Friends with Care (CFC) were returning after placing wreaths at Shaheed Buddhijibi Chatter marking the Martyred Intellectuals Day on Sunday.

In front of Shah Amanat Hall, some BCL men belonging to the VEx group, allegedly backed by the administration, hurled abuse and threw brick

chips at the CFC activists, which later triggered the clash.

The next day, another CU BCL agitating faction, led by Suman, besieged the vice-chancellor's office demanding removal of the university proctor. They blamed the proctor for his "inaction to take legal steps against the killers."

They postponed the programme later in the afternoon upon authorities' assurance of meeting the demand in 24 hours.

The proctor, however, was not removed within the given time.

Over the matter, Suman said they would announce new programmes today as the university remained closed yesterday due to the victory day celebrations.

Meanwhile, police arrested two CU students accused in the murder case from Dampara area around 5:00pm yesterday.

The arrest was made immediately after the CFC and Vex group locked in a clash there, said Mohiuddin Mahmud, OC of Panchlaish Police Station.

The arrestees -- Abu Ahad Omi of Management department and Jayed Mahmud of Bangla department -- were handed over to Hathazari police later, he added.

'I saw death so close'

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and gave lectures.

In an instant, the peace was shattered - gunfire, smoke and dead bodies strewn across the school's halls and corridors, with crazed militants rushing from room to room shooting randomly at pupils and adults.

The school in Peshawar, a Pakistani city on the edge of the country's turbulent tribal belt, is operated by the army. Although it enrolls some civilian students, many of its pupils are children of army officials, the Taliban's intended target.

The assault began around 10:00am local time as a group of nine militants, suicide vests tightly strapped to their bodies, burst into the building, according to witnesses. Some said they were wearing Pakistani army uniforms.

They bypassed the heavily guarded main entrance and slipped in through a less frequently used back entrance, the witnesses added.

Speaking from his bed in the trauma ward of the city's Lady Reading Hospital, Shahrul Khan, 16, said he

and his classmates were in a careers guidance session in the school auditorium when four gunmen wearing paramilitary uniforms burst in.

"Someone screamed at us to get down and hide below the desks," he said, adding that the gunmen shouted "Allahu akbar" (God is greatest) before opening fire.

"Then one of them shouted: 'There are so many children beneath the benches, go and get them'," Khan told AFP.

"I saw a pair of big black boots coming towards me, this guy was probably hunting for students hiding beneath the benches."

"One of my teachers was crying, she was shot in the hand and she was crying in pain," he said as he lay on a bed in Peshawar's Lady Reading Hospital.

"One terrorist then walked up to her and started shooting her until she stopped making any sound. All around me my friends were lying injured and dead."

Khan said he felt searing pain as he was shot in both his legs just below the

knee. He decided to play dead, adding: "I folded my tie and pushed it into my mouth so that I wouldn't scream.

"The man with big boots kept on looking for students and pumping bullets into their bodies. I lay as still as I could and closed my eyes, waiting to get shot again.

"My body was shivering. I saw death so close and I will never forget the black boots approaching me -- I felt as though it was death that was approaching me."

As his father, a shopkeeper, comforted him in his blood-soaked bed, Khan recalled: "The men left after some time and I stayed there for a few minutes. Then I tried to get up but fell to the ground because of my wounds.

"When I crawled to the next room, it was horrible. I saw the dead body of our office assistant on fire," he said. "She was sitting on the chair with blood dripping from her body as she burned."

It was not immediately clear how the female employee's body caught fire, though her remains were also later

seen by an AFP reporter in a hospital mortuary.

Khan, who said he also saw the body of a soldier who worked at the school, crawled behind a door to hide and then lost consciousness.

"When I woke up I was lying on the hospital bed," he added.

At least 500 pupils aged between 10 and 20 years old were inside the building when the attack started.

Khalid Khan, 13, told Reuters he and his class mates were in a first aid lesson in the main hall when two clean-shaven armed men wearing white clothes and black jackets entered the room.

"They opened fire at the students and then went out. The army doctor and soldiers managed to escape and we locked the doors from inside," he said. "But very soon they came, broke the doors and entered and again started firing."

He said many tried to hide under their desks but were shot anyway, adding that there were around 150 students in the hall around the time of the attack.

"They killed most of my class mates and then I didn't know what happened as I was brought to the hospital," said Khan, breaking down in sobs.

Others said the gunmen addressed each other in a language they could only recognize as either Arabic or Farsi - a possible testament to the Taliban's network of hundreds of foreign fighters holed up with them in the remote mountains on the Pakistani-Afghan border.

"ONLY I SURVIVED" Another student at the hospital, Hammad Ahmed, added: "I was with my friends in the corridor in front of my class when we heard gunshots.

"We rushed inside the classroom, our teacher closed the door, she was trying to lock it when the terrorists kicked on the door and forced it open," he continued.

"All 10 of my classmates and our teacher died, only I survived," he said.

But like Khan, he survived despite being shot in the feet because his attackers assumed he was already dead and moved on.

Jalal Ahmed, 15, could hardly

speak, choking with tears, as Reuters approached him at one of the hospitals.

"I am a biochemistry student and I was attending a lecture in our main hall. There are five doors in the hall. After some time we heard someone kicking the back doors. There were gun shots but our teacher told us to be quiet and calmed us down.

"Then the men came with big guns." Ahmed started to cry. Standing next to his bed, his father, Mushtaq Ahmed, said: "He keeps screaming: 'take me home, take me home, they will come back and kill me'."

One nine-year-old boy, who asked not to be named because he was too afraid to be identified, said teachers shepherded his class out through a back door as soon as the shooting began.

"The teacher asked us to recite from the Koran quietly," he said. "When we came out from the back door there was a crowd of parents who were crying. When I saw my father he was also crying."