

# Sherpur paddy field cleared for burial

STAR REPORT

It was a paddy field where green plants undulated in the air only a few days back. But the plants are all gone now and the plot has been prepared as a family graveyard to fulfill Jamaat leader Muhammad Kamaruzzaman's last wish to be buried there.

Kamaruzzaman's family started the process of turning the field into a graveyard on April 6, the day rumoured to be the date of his execution. The plot is adjacent to an orphanage set up by the Jamaat leader who was sentenced to death for crimes committed against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

As per his last wish, the war crimes convict will be buried on the premises of Bazithkila-Kumri Orphanage beside his village home in Kumri Mudipara.

"Preparations for my brother's burial on the orphanage premise have been made as per his last wish," said Md Kafil Uddin, Kamaruzzaman's brother.

To contain any untoward incident following Kamaruzzaman's burial, the government has deployed four platoons of BGB men, four platoons of RAB personnel and riot police at key points in Sherpur district.

Sherpur Police Super Mehedul

Karim told reporters yesterday that none other than journalists would be allowed to enter the area during the burial of Kamaruzzaman.

He also said only religious rituals would be allowed and police deployed at the grave after the burial.

Local freedom fighters, responding to the request of the district administration, went back on their earlier decision to resist the Jamaat leader's burial in the district.

The freedom fighters have decided to bring out a victory procession in the town today.

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

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

He submitted his appeal to the SC on June 6 last year challenging the tribunal judgment and seeking acquittal on the charges brought against him.

The 62-year-old Jamaat leader was arrested on July 13, 2010, at the Supreme Court gate and later shown arrested in the crimes against humanity case.



An ambulance carrying the body of executed war criminal Kamaruzzaman leaves the Dhaka Central Jail at 11:40pm yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Nightmare of Sohagpur hanged

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"He was hanged at 10:30pm," Inspector General (prisons) Brig Gen Syed Iftexhar Uddin told The Daily Star.

Jail sources said his body was kept dangling for around 20 minutes to confirm his death.

An ambulance carrying Kamaruzzaman's body came out of the prison under police protection around 11:40pm and headed for his village home at Kumri Mudipara in Sherpur.

The vehicle reached Phulpur of Mymensingh, around 40 kilometres from Sherpur sadar, at 2:40am today, said police sources.

Arrangements were made to bury him at his village, Sherpur Deputy Commissioner Zakir Hossain told this correspondent around 1:05am.

Meanwhile, Jamaat called a nationwide dawn-to-dusk hartal for tomorrow protesting what it said was "planned killing" of its leader Kamaruzzaman.

The Jamaat leader's execution was carried out five days after the Supreme Court rejected his petition for reviewing the death sentence, bringing an end to the decades-long wait of Sohagpur people for justice.

In his instant reaction, Jalal Uddin, whose father and six other family mem-

bers, were killed by Kamaruzzaman and his militia, said, "We have got justice after long 44 years. The souls of the martyrs will now find peace."

"His execution has brought solace to the families of the victims," Jalal, also a prosecution witness, told The Daily Star after watching the news of Kamaruzzaman's execution on TV at his village home.

He expressed gratitude to the government for bringing the key Al-Badr organiser to justice.

### FACE OF A TRAITOR

Kamaruzzaman was a college student when the Liberation War began. Hundreds of thousands joined the war against Pakistan. But this man chose to go against his own people and fight for the Pakistanis.

In the name of a united Pakistan, he didn't hesitate to pick up, torture and shoot people to death. His name would strike terror into the people of greater Mymensingh.

As the top leader of the then student wing of Jamaat -- Islami Chhatra Sangha (ICS) -- Kamaruzzaman led the formation of Al-Badr force, set up camps in greater Mymensingh region and killed many people during the 1971 Liberation War.

The nature and extent of the atroci-

ties he had committed were such that the Supreme Court in its judgment observed those were worse than the cruel acts of the Nazis during the World War II.

When Kamaruzzaman was finally caught and put in the dock during the previous tenure of the Awami League-led government in 2010, he denied his crimes.

The genesis of his hatred for the freedom-loving Bangladeshis goes back to the days when he joined the ICS. He then raised his own death squad, Al-Badr, in the greater Mymensingh. Al-Badr started working as the auxiliary force of the Pakistan army to identify and kill pro-Bangladeshi intellectuals and thinkers.

So low was his morality that Kamaruzzaman didn't hesitate to enrol for journalism in 1976 at Dhaka University, where his fellow Al-Badr men had committed the worst crime of picking up teachers and intellectuals and killing them.

But before that, he was briefly arrested and put in jail only to be released a few months later through means that he only knew.

With the political changeover following the 1975 coup, Kamaruzzaman never looked back and climbed up the

ladder of political influence.

Not only he enjoyed impunity like many other anti-liberation people, but also the freedom fighters and families of the martyrs had to witness Kamaruzzaman and other anti-liberation forces consolidate their positions as they were patronised and politically rehabilitated over the years in independent Bangladesh.

He regrouped his men when the ICS resurfaced as Islami Chhatra Shibir in 1977. He then consolidated his position in Jamaat and took charge of the party's mouthpiece -- the daily Sangram in the early '80s.

Father of five sons and a daughter, Kamaruzzaman had been Jamaat's assistant secretary general since 1992.

With a strong footing in the party, he contested parliamentary elections in 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008, but never won.

Though he never showed remorse for his crimes, Kamaruzzaman, following his arrest in 2010, proposed reorganising Jamaat and bringing in new faces to the party leadership.

In May 2013, he was sentenced to death by the International Crimes Tribunal-2 for war crimes, including mass killings in Sohagpur.

In November last year, the SC

upheld the death sentence. He then sought review of the judgment, but the petition was rejected by a four-member SC bench headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha on April 6.

### HANGED, AT LAST

The countdown to Kamaruzzaman's execution began the moment the apex court rejected his review petition on Monday.

His family members met him at Dhaka Central Jail later that day, giving rise to speculations that he might be executed that very night.

However, that didn't happen as the jail authorities hadn't received the copy of the SC judgment.

Speculations over his execution ran high again two days later, as the SC released the copy of the verdict and it reached the jail authorities through the tribunal on Wednesday evening.

However, Kamaruzzaman wasn't hanged this time also, as he was taking time to decide whether he would seek presidential clemency.

The Jamaat leader didn't give his decision even after his lawyers met him at the central jail on Thursday. Then on Friday morning, two magistrates met him at the jail but didn't disclose the meeting's outcome to the media.

Neither the government nor the jail authorities would clearly say anything about the time of execution.

Things started to change fast on Friday evening when State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said the Jamaat leader wouldn't be given any more time to seek clemency.

Around the same time, security was beefed up in front of the central jail. Movement of vehicles near the jail area was also restricted.

But the death sentence couldn't be executed reportedly for lack of preparation.

The state minister hinted that Kamaruzzaman might be hanged yesterday.

Since yesterday morning, there had been indications that the war criminal would be executed by last night. Tigh security was in place in the capital and elsewhere.

Around 2:45pm, the execution order reached the jail authorities from the home ministry. In the evening, Kamaruzzaman's family members met him at the jail.

Finally, Kamaruzzaman was hanged at 10:30pm, touching off an outburst of celebrations across the country.

[Shaheen Mollah and Rafiul Islam contributed to this report]

## Some solace for village of widows

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returned two or three days later, were not spared.

Ever since that fateful day, Sohagpur has come to be known as the "Bidhoba Palli", the village of the widows. Many of them are still alive to bear testimony to the massacre.

The widows have aged, their tears dried up. For more than 44 years, they had kept the unspeakable agonies of their loss buried inside, counting days and praying to see the killers of their loved ones punished. They finally saw justice on the night of April 11, 2015.

Expressing their feelings to The Daily Star, the widows once again broke down in tears, but this time tears of happiness seemed to bury their pains.

"I am happy that the man who killed my husband was hanged," a widow who was raped that night told The Daily Star over the phone. She heard the news of Kamaruzzaman's execution on television.

The Daily Star is not revealing her identity.

The Supreme Court in its verdict termed the incident of Sohagpur one

of the "most barbarous and horrendous incidents ever happened on earth in this civilized world".

"We find no difference between the conduct of a man and a beast in the perpetration of these crimes," said the verdict.

However, irony lies in the fact that instead of seeing him punished, the widows saw the man responsible for all those killings gain political clout and lead a free life. Kamaruzzaman, now assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, had contested in the parliamentary elections from the very Sherpur constituency that also included Sohagpur.

He took part in the polls five times, but could not win even once.

The widows finally saw a ray of hope when the Awami League government formed the International Crimes Tribunal in 2010 to try those who committed crimes during the Liberation War in 1971.

Braving the social stigma attached to rape victims, they appeared before the tribunal and described in detail the atrocities Kamaruzzaman and his ruthless militiamen had carried out in

the village. Three widows, who were raped, testified before the court.

About the widows, the SC in its verdict observed: "They are old women having children and grandchildren. At this age they did not hesitate to disclose the loss of their chastity in the hands of perpetrators of crimes. It was possible and natural on the part of educated women, particularly those of the developed countries to disclose such incidents, but it was unimaginable that these illiterate old women would come forward to disclose in detail the acts of violence caused to them at this age."

It also said, "They knew the impact and consequences of their disclosures. Taking the risk of tarnishing their families honour and dignity to the estimation of the local people and their relations, which might also disgrace their next generation, they were not relented, rather disclosed it."

"It is possible only when they were determined that even at the cost of social strictures, the real story should be disclosed and the perpetrators punished. They did so only to heal their mental shock to some extent."

along with two other doctors checked his health.

The jail authorities and hangmen entered his condemn cell around 10:15pm. The convict was then administered tawba (pardon) by Dhaka Central Jail Jame Mosque Imam Manir Hossain.

He was handcuffed from behind and a hangman put a noose around his neck.

It was around 10:20pm that he was taken out of his cell to the gallows, guarded by 12 armed prison guards. It took him a few minutes to reach the gallows. Tying his legs, the hangmen led by Raju and Masum, waited for the jail super's nod to pull the levers to part the scaffolds.

It was 10:30pm. Senior Jail Super Farman Ali gave his signal by dropping a handkerchief from his hand and the

hangmen pulled the levers.

Kamaruzzaman was kept hanging from the noose for around 20 minutes to confirm his death, said jail insiders.

After that, the civil surgeon checked the body and declared him dead. He was not bathed after his death as per his wish.

The body of Kamaruzzaman was taken out of the jail by an ambulance around 11:40pm for his village home at Kumri Mudipara in Sherpur.

Additional Inspector General of Prisons Col Md Fazlul Kabir, DIG Prison Golam Haider, Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Tofazzal Hossain Mia, Civil Surgeon of Dhaka Abdul Malek Mridha, Jailor Nesarul Alam and four deputy jailers were, among others, present there.

### FAMILY MET THE CONDEMNED

The prison authorities around 1:20pm

asked the family members to meet Kamaruzzaman by 5:00pm. Around 2:45pm, the home ministry communicated the execution order with the jail authorities.

Twenty four members of his family, including his wife and children, met him at 4:12pm.

After meeting his father, Hasan Iqbal, Kamaruzzaman's eldest son, said, "There is no necessity to seek clemency from the president as he is no one to take my father's life or give it back to him."

"My father called upon his party men to refrain from any unruly decision centring the death sentence," Iqbal said adding, "He [Kamaruzzaman] said goodbye to us with a smile."

Iqbal further told The Daily Star that his father wished to be buried at his village home in Sherpur Sadar.

## Graft-free services

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ensuring the accountability and reducing graft from the city corporation, he said.

Saki, chief coordinator of Ganasanghati Andolon, is a mayor candidate in the Dhaka North City Corporation polls. His electoral symbol is "telescope".

The 42-year-old had joined politics in 1990 soon after completing his HSC. He was also involved with the anti-autocracy movement against the HM Ershad-led regime.

After being associated with Dhaka University's student politics for several years, he became president of Chhatra Federation in 1998. Four years later, he was made the chief coordinator of Ganasanghati Andolon.

Saki believes it is possible to transform Dhaka into a modern city through a combined effort involving all -- citizens and authorities.

"A happy locality is formed when citizens' rights are ensured and they carry out their duties accordingly," he said.

The citizens who are deprived of their rights are often indifferent towards performing their duties, he said, adding that the issue could only be resolved through upholding what he called citizens' dignity.

"All the civic amenities would have to be ensured. Only then, the citizens would actively participate in the effort to build a Dhaka we are dreaming of," he added.

Saki said if elected, he would work to make Dhaka "friendlier" towards women by ensuring their safety.

In terms of civic amenities, Dhaka could be easily termed an "unfriendly city" for women even though thousands of women are working here and contributing to the economy, he said.

"There are no public toilets, proper transport facilities and above all, security for women and children."

Although Dhaka is the heart of the country's economy, its per capita production is not enough due

infrastructural limitations, according to the mayor aspirant.

Traffic jam has slowed down the pace of citizens' lives. The lack of availability of modern technology is also affecting the per capita production.

He said a separate cycle lane would be built on each street as cycling could help reduce traffic congestion and environment pollution as it is a "healthy way of moving within the city".

Stopping environmental pollution would be at the centre of Saki's policies and development schemes for the capital.

"Due to the ongoing exploitation of nature, the city is set to face environmental catastrophes. Water bodies and open spaces are disappearing quickly ... rivers and air are being polluted mercilessly every day," he said.

He said if elected, he would force the factory owners not to dump industrial waste into the rivers surrounding Dhaka within the next year.

Although slum dwellers pay a high rent to stay in their shanties, they are deprived of all the civic amenities, including sanitation, safe water and electricity.

Saki also promised that all the slums would be brought under the city corporation, if elected.

Asked why he decided to run for mayor, he said, "People, especially the youth, are tired of seeing state power being used as a way of amassing wealth. The youth have the ability to imagine change."

Talking about the transparency in the polls, he said the environment required for free and fair city corporation elections was absent.

"The Election Commission is not using its constitutional power to stop the mayor aspirants who are violating the electoral code of conduct. We are not sure whether it would use law enforcers to ensure transparency during voting," he said.