



Minutes before the August 21 grenade attack, Ivy Rahman, the then women's affairs secretary of Awami League, is surrounded by AL leaders and activists at the rally on Bangabandhu Avenue in 2004. Anisur Rahman, deputy chief photographer of The Daily Star, extreme left in a red T-shirt holding a camera, was beside her. Right, Ivy is being rescued. She later died of her injuries.

PHOTO: FILE



Minutes of Massacre

FROM PAGE 1
bodies -- dead and alive -- with screams and mayhem, smoke and explosion reverberating through the area, resembling the set for an apocalyptic movie.

"We were on the truck. Hanif bhai, Maya bhai and Squadron Leader Mamun shielded apa [Hasina] from three sides. I covered her from the front. Moving her to safety was the only thing we had in

our mind," Nazib Ahmed said in one breath, as he recounted to The Daily Star recently how they saved Hasina, now prime minister, on that day 11 years ago.

"Even in that situation, apa wanted to see around, but we didn't let her," he recalled.

Mohammad Hanif, late Dhaka mayor, was himself hit. Still he covered Hasina from the left side and Squadron Leader (retd) Abdullah Al

Mamun, a member of Hasina's personal security team, from the right, he said.

Maj (retd) Shoyeb Mohammad Tariqullah, another security staff, and Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique were also there, said Nazib, himself a member of Hasina's personal security team.

Together, they decided to get Hasina to the SUV, parked around 50 yards from the truck, at any cost. As they took only a few steps, another grenade went off near the truck. Nazib and Tarique sustained splinter injuries.

"We moved back," recounted Nazib, sitting at his Banani office on August 11. "We stopped on the truck for a few seconds."

Just then Shoyeb gave them the dangerous news.

"He told us that we shouldn't stay on the truck any longer as the fuel tank got leaked when hit by splinters, and fuel was dripping. The truck might go in flame any moment."

Immediately, they got down from the truck and managed to take Hasina to the SUV. Maj Mamun ran to the vehicle and opened its left door. Hasina huddled inside it. Nazib, Tarique, Shoyeb, Mamun and Maya followed.

Just then they saw the ghastly scenes. Some of the injured lay on the street, bleeding profusely, while some groaned sitting on congealed blood and some motionless bodies lay scattered.

"I saw Ivy chachi (Ivy Rahman) lying in a pool of blood, motionless. I also saw my cousin Bahauddin Nasim trying to stand up amid blood, but failed," said Nazib.

As driver Abdul Matin started the vehicle, it came under gun attack. Two bullets hit the left window, by which Hasina was sitting.

Undeterred, Matin sped away but the assailants pursued the vehicle and attacked it from behind as it reached near Purnima restaurant, creating a large hole on the rear window. The front and rear wheels in the left side got punctured by bullets. Still the vehicle moved a while, took a left turn to Zero Point and sped away.

Matin drove straight to Dowel Chhattar via Nawab Abdul Gani Road and then took the road in front of the Central Shaheed Minar. The vehicle reached Nilkhet intersection through Jagannath Hall, Palashi intersection and Azimpur.

"But we all were still apprehensive of further attacks," Nazib said.

"Apa [Hasina] was shell-shocked and suddenly asked, 'whose blood is this on my sari?'"

"We replied nothing happened. She again asked whether we all are okay. We replied that we all are fine."

Nazib said it was mainly Mohammad Hanif's blood that splashed on Hasina's sari.

From Nilkhet intersection, the vehicle took a left turn and reached the BDR Gate, leaving New Market and Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall behind. It went directly through the BDR gate in Jigatola and then reached Sudha Sadan on Road-5. It was a journey from death's doorstep to life.

"Our driver Matin kept his cool amid this terrifying situation. It took around 15 minutes to reach Sudha Sadan."

Getting off the car, Hasina gave some money to her party men and asked them to go to the spot immediately.

"Move...move...move now. Make arrangements for treatment of my party men with whatever possible means you have. No one should be left out," Nazib heard Hasina telling her leaders.

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AUG 21 BLACK DAY

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AUG 23

Police and BNP men attack AL protest processions. US President George W Bush expresses shock at the grenade attack. US Secretary of State Colin Powell phones Hasina and PM Khaleda Zia to convey the message. He describes the attackers as enemies of the people.

The US, the UK, Pakistan and India offer help to probe the carnage.

Khaleda shelves her plan to visit Hasina amid protests.

The Detective Branch (DB) of police takes charge of investigation but fails to begin its work.

AUG 24

The AL and its allies enforce two-day countrywide hartal protesting the attack, crippling the country. Rail links collapse.

AUG 26

The government announces that it will seek Interpol's help to investigate the carnage. The CID takes over the investigation.

AUG 29

Interpol experts arrive in Dhaka, scan carnage scene and collect information from local investigators.

SEPT 1

FBI agents arrive to probe the grenade attack.

SEPT 5

US State Department's counter-terrorism coordinator Joseph Cofer Black arrives and meets Khaleda and Hasina.

OCT 2

The judicial inquiry commission claims in its report to have identified the perpetrators of the carnage, but its head Justice Joymul Abedin declines to disclose their identities, hinting at the involvement of foreign forces apart from the local ones.

Note: A few months later, senior CID officials make up farcical Joj Mia story and detain him and 20 more petty criminals. Joj Mia and two others are forced to give statements confessing their involvement in carrying out the grenade attack. Their real identities are later revealed by the media. The ludicrous nature of the investigation is exposed by the end of 2004.

Yet the CID does not go for further investigation. Rather, it keeps wasting time by proceeding with the farcical investigation through 2005 and 2006. The CID officials prepare for submitting the charge sheet on the basis of their so-called investigation.

2007 [CARETAKER GOVERNMENT REGIME]

JULY 31

A new CID official is given the charge for fresh investigation into the carnage.

2008, JUNE 11

The CID submits charge sheet accusing 22, including Huji leader Mufti Hannan and former deputy minister of the BNP-led government Abdus Salam Pintu. The charge sheet hints at the involvement of some government and security high-ups in the plot.

OCT 29

Court frames charges against the 22 accused (and begins trial the following month).

2009 [AL-LED ALLIANCE IN POWER]

JUNE 22

Prosecution files a petition with the court for further investigation to identify the suppliers of Arges grenades used in the attack and sources of financing.

AUG 3

Court orders further investigation.

AUG 12

A new CID official is assigned for conducting further investigation (and he continues the task for about 23 months).

2011, JULY 3

The CID submits supplementary charge sheet accusing 30 more individuals, including politicians, senior officials of civil and military intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

2012, MARCH 18

Court frames fresh charges against 30 individuals as accused in the supplementary charge sheet, taking the number of accused to 52.

Khaleda Zia's elder son Tarique Rahman; then state minister for home Luftozaman Babar; Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to then PM Khaleda; Jamaat leader and then social welfare minister Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahed; then BNP MP Kazi Shah Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad; then DGFI director Brig Gen Rezaqul Haider Chowdhury; then NSI director general Brig Gen Abdur Rahim; owner of Hanif Paribahan Mohammad Hanif; and then councilor of DCC Ward-53 Ariful Islam Arif are charged with masterminding and approving the attack plan executed by Huji men and their accomplices.

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The Huji founder Abdus Salam, Huji leaders Moulana Sheikh Farid, Moulana Abdur Rouf and Moulana Abdul Hannan Sabir, Kashmiri-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) leader Abdul Malek alias Golam Mohammad, Pakistan-based LeT leader Yusuf Butt alias Majid Butt, Mufti Shafiqur Rahman, Mufti Abdul Hai, Hafez Moulana Yahya and Babu alias Ratul Babu are indicted for killing, causing grievous hurt, attempt to murder, abetment and criminal liability.

Then IGP Shahidul Haque and then DMP commissioner Ashraful Huda are charged with providing financial and administrative support to the attackers.

Then deputy commissioner (East) of the DMP Obaidur Rahman and then DC (South) of the DMP Khan Sayeed Hassan are charged with having the evidence of the attack vanish and providing the killers with administrative assistance.

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MARCH 27

Re-trial begins.

2015, AUG 19

The court so far has recorded statements of 176 witnesses out of 491 in the case.

Compiled by Shakkawat Liton and Chaitanya Chandra Halder

A trip down the grenade-hit lane

FROM PAGE 1
minutes long. I took the last shot as she concluded with 'Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu!'

But before she could finish her slogan, I heard a loud explosion from the side of the truck.

I was not alarmed that much because crackers often are blasted from rallies. I glanced in the direction of the sound but could not see anything because of the people standing in front of me.

Just then I heard another big bang from the back of the truck about six feet from me. This time I saw the women who were standing there suddenly sit down. I was baffled. Why did they sit down so suddenly with the sound? I thought they were taking cover from the blast.

Another bang in the back and I turned my head. What I saw froze my heart.

Men and women were lying on the street in pools of blood. Their limbs were torn apart. The impact of the grenade had shredded their clothes.

My heart was beating so fast that I could hardly breathe. I went numb. My knees felt weak. Then I felt something moist on my leg. I looked down and found a glob of flesh mixed with red blood, sticking to my foot.

I shuddered and quickly shook it away. And then I noticed a blood-stained Ivy Apa slumped in a heap on the road in front of me.

Unthinking, like a robot, I raised my camera and took a snap of Ivy Apa's crumpled figure. My head was blank and I don't know how I did that, probably that is how I am trained – to take photographs even when not thinking. Then I started to run, my feet slipping on thick blood flowing on the tarmac.

But there was nowhere to go. Thousands were running to escape just like me. It seemed it was a roiling, fuming human wave.

More grenades were raining down on the crowd. I don't know how many grenades were hurled that day but I can recall at least five blasts. The last one was near the AL office entrance where among others

Suranjit Sengupta was standing.

The rally space was now left only with the dead and the hundreds of injured men and women.

I moved to the sidewalk where thousands were pushing and shoving to get away from the unseen assassins. There were people lying in front of the AL office. Their blood-soaked bodies shredded by grenade splinters.

There were bodies everywhere. And the injured too. The injured were silently trying to say something; they had no voice. They just opened and closed their mouths but no words came out. They were clutching at the air with their hands, calling for help.

I saw Suranjit Sengupta standing there with a stunned look. His body was soaked in blood streaming down his face.

I thought it was the last day of my life. I felt a jolt of fear almost paralyzing me. I felt a tightness in the chest as if something very heavy had been piled on me. I wanted to do something, anything to save myself. There was this rickshaw van by the sidewalk with clothes on it. The seller had run away abandoning it.

In desperation I grabbed a handful of clothes and clutched them around my chest, as if this would protect me from the splinters. I looked at the truck and saw Mohammad Hanif (former mayor of Dhaka) and others kneeling down on the truck, creating a shield around Sheikh Hasina.

Then I started running towards

Ramna Bhaban. As I crossed the road I saw Ada Chacha, the old tea vendor who used to sell raw tea mixed with Ada (ginger, hence his name), sitting dazed by the truck.

Then some running feet struck him and he just rolled over onto the street, dead.

As I reached Ramna Bhaban, another grenade exploded about 20 feet from me. It was then that I gave up all hope for my life. And that brought a sudden transformation in me. I knew I would die. Death no more mattered now. I raised my camera and started capturing the mayhem.

I saw a man in a bright orange shirt come out of an alley and run towards Ivy Rahman. He tried to lift her. A mortician of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, who I knew from before, also joined him. They sat her up. Ivy Rahman had a blank look. She was in shock. She looked down at her legs which were missing from above her knees. Then she collapsed.

By now I had run out of films. We did not have digital cameras back then. And I felt exhausted and numb. I felt lightheaded, dizzy.

So I walked to my motorcycle parked near the Zero Point and went straight to a relative's house. First thing I did there was to get a shower. My legs were all smeared with blood and I felt as if I could still sense that