



Oishee Rahman being taken out of a Dhaka court yesterday after it sentenced her to death for murdering her parents -- official of Special Branch of police Mahfuzur Rahman and Swapna Rahman. PHOTO: STAR

Oishee given death penalty

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"supported" her in committing the murders. It was a heinous crime and a pre-planned murder, the court said in the judgment.

It gave Oishee the death penalty on two counts of murder, and said her execution would be carried out if the High Court upholds the verdict.

She planned to kill only her mother. But she murdered her father as well, thinking he would not "tolerate" it, said the court.

Oishee had claimed before the court that she was in a drunken stupor when she killed her parents. But such an excuse was unacceptable and was rejected, it added.

Oishee was an "adult" when she killed her parents, and there was no scope for considering her as a minor, Judge Md Sayeed Ahmed of Dhaka Speedy Trial Tribunal-3 said while pronouncing the verdict in a packed courtroom around 12:10pm.

"If such an offender is given minor punishment instead of the death penalty, such crimes will increase," said the judge.

Hearing the verdict, Oishee broke

down in tears, and then covered her face with a scarf. As journalists approached her at the courtroom, she refused to talk.

The court said she could file an appeal with the HC within 30 days after receiving a copy of the judgment.

It also fined her Tk 20,000, in default of which she has to spend a year in jail. Her friend Roni was fined Tk 5,000. He will have to serve one more month in prison if he fails to pay the fine.

On August 16, 2013, the bodies of Mahfuzur and his wife Swapna were recovered from their Chamelighat house in the capital.

Oishee, who was then an O-level student, turned herself in to Paltan police the following day.

She told police that she killed her parents as they went too far in disciplining her.

On August 24, 2013, she confessed to a magistrate that she alone killed her parents and their domestic help Khadiza Akhter Sumi helped her hide the bodies. Later, she retracted her confessional statement, saying she was mentally and physically tortured, and

was forced to make a confession.

Police drew flak for taking into remand an "underage" Oishee, whose school documents showed she was below 18.

Following a court order, an examination was conducted to determine Oishee's actual age.

She was sent to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital for physical examination. Doctors there concluded that she was around 19 years of age.

On March 9 last year, police pressed charges against Oishee, Johnny, Roni and 11-year-old domestic help Sumi in the case.

According to the charge sheet, Oishee alone killed her parents, Johnny instigated the murders and Roni gave her shelter after the incident. Sumi was accused of assisting Oishee in hiding the bodies.

It also said the couple had been doped before they were killed.

The trial of child domestic help Sumi, now on bail, is pending with a juvenile court, the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court in Dhaka.

When will we have such polls again?

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the previous election in 2011, his party had got only 34 seats which jumped to 184 this time. The 150 seat gain was the biggest ever for a single party in Canada's history and it is for the first time that a party positioned third became the majority party.

The Bihar elections, much closer to home, was significantly different in nature and content. It was a frontal fight on all counts. Persons, parties and issues were all stark and bitter. As the elections neared, the campaign got bitter and so did the personal attacks--nothing to match ours of course, election or no election. The Grand Alliance (Mahagathbandhan) formed by two former bitter enemies, Nitish Kumar and Lalu Prasad Yadav and the Congress and many other smaller parties created a tide that even the charismatic and highly effective campaigner Narendra Modi could not stem. The Times of India calls it the catching up of the Law of Diminishing Return for the Prime Minister.

For us in Bangladesh, the election took greater significance than usual because of the communal colour that Indian politics was taking in the last few months and which inevitably got reflected in this election. The "beef eating" controversy and some sporadic killing of Muslims on suspicion of eating it suddenly made Indian politics look almost medieval. The desperate attempt by BJP to use the "cow" issue to rally the votes in Bihar definitely made the election a far more religion based than it would otherwise have been.

We cannot but be gratified at the defeat of the communal politics in Bihar even if for the time being. In that sense, Bihar election can turn out to be of historic significance as a clear signal by the Indian voters that they reject the divisive nature of the present BJP politics.

Of all the three, the Myanmar election is the most significant. The might of "Peoples' Will" glowed in all its majesty inspiring democracy loving people all over the world. The army had been in power there for more than sixty years, making Myanmar one of the most isolated, backward and poor countries in the world, all the while siphoning off the country's wealth for personal aggrandisement of the generals and their relatives and cronies.

It is a sign of the inner urge for freedom of people in general that, with all the threats, intimidation, and power play by the army, voters voted for

democracy and totally rejected the army's involvement in running the country.

The army held the election under its own rule, set plan and a tailor made constitution that reserved 25% of the nominated seats for itself no matter how the voting went. The army backed USDP has received only 7 % of the votes so farcounted.

The good news is President Thein Sein has consistently promised the results will be honoured and his spokesman Ye Htut has already offered his congratulations to NLD's (National League for Democracy) leader Suu Kyi.

These three elections started a stream of memories in this writer. The first one is of the election of 1970. Its similarity with the one in Myanmar is quite striking. It was held during the last days of Pakistani Army's rule, led by General Yahya Khan. Like in Myanmar, the Pakistan army also had a tailor made law, called the Legal Framework Order, which basically governed the election process completely supervised by them.

Unlike in Myanmar, the Pakistan Army did not keep any reserved seats for themselves in the new dispensation that was about to be ushered in. The 'good sense' of the army was not due to their love for people's rule or that they wanted to leave the running of the country totally to the people's representatives but to a realistic assessment of the public mood which would not have accepted any such move in either wing of the country, especially by the Bengalis of the eastern wing.

Like Myanmar, we were led by our own charismatic leader and again like Myanmar the majesty of "Public Will" broke through all the barriers set up by the army. As a young voter full of enthusiasm to break out of the army's control over our political life I, along with millions of others, much like the youth and students of Myanmar, worked to ensure that our wishes held sway over that of the army. I can almost relive the happiness of those moments 45 years ago as no doubt the youth of Myanmar are experiencing at this very moment.

Fast-forwarding to the nineties, when once again we tore political power away from the army's grip and gave it to the people's representatives, first by peaceful protests and then by an election in 1991. This election, steered through by an Interim Government led by Justice Shahabuddin, marked a watershed in our history, bringing representative rule back on track.

Democracy thus restored, we felt

certain that our politicians, much the wiser from the brutal killing of Bangabandhu and his family, the subsequent killings of four national leaders, killings of army's brightest generals and officers and the various attempts to derail our democracy, will set us on a steady course of freedom and development.

We began well by a historic cooperation between the Treasury Bench, formed by BNP, and the Opposition, formed by AL, working together to amend the constitution and bringing back parliamentary form of government in place of the presidential one. There was a second instance of collaboration in 1996, this time forced upon BNP through mass agitation that instituted the caretaker form of government to oversee elections as a permanent system by amending the constitution. The election of 1996 saw a peaceful changeover of power with AL forming the government after 21 years.

Oscillation of power between our two major parties--AL and BNP--however flawed and acrimonious, took us forward on a somewhat bumpy democratic path till 2004. On August 21st of that year, an attempt was made to assassinate Sheikh Hasina, then opposition leader and now Prime Minister, causing the death of 24 of AL leaders and workers.

This transformed Sheikh Hasina's view of Khaleda Zia and of the party she led. She no longer saw Khaleda simply as a political antagonist nor the BNP as a rival party but the former as someone during whose premiership a highly orchestrated attempt was made to kill her and the ruling party of that time made no serious attempt to get the killers.

This has changed our politics forever and has thrown the prospect of institutionalization of democracy into serious jeopardy. Most importantly this made the cost of losing an election extremely high, including the prospect of getting killed, as the AL experience shows. With such a price for losing election, both parties are now willing to do anything and everything to win, including manipulating the election itself, as we saw in 2014, in which 153 MPs, a majority in a House of 300, were elected without a single vote being cast.

Thus, as I watched the aforementioned elections I couldn't help but wonder, regrettably with a sense of envy, when would we ever have such elections here again, which will be free, fair and festive, and more importantly, losing which will not lead to fearful conse-

Police

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"The commissioner has given it top priority," said a deputy commissioner of DMP.

Top officials of eight crime divisions and officers of 49 police stations have been informed about the people under security threats, he said.

The police officer said special security would be provided to the secular bloggers, writers, and publishers who have received threats, and to those different intelligence agencies think were vulnerable.

Another deputy commissioner of a crime division preferring anonymity said, "We have beefed up our visible and invisible measures following the instruction."

An officer-in charge of a DMP police station said that they have increased patrols and deployed forces in plainclothes. The security details would follow the people under threat and they have permission to shoot if the person they are protecting is attacked, the officer said.

Sharing his experiences with The Daily Star, Bappaditya Basu, an organiser of Gonojagoron Mancha who had been receiving repeated threats, yesterday said policemen from Lalbagh Police Station were giving him security when he is at home, since it was under their jurisdiction.

"But I have to go outside and elsewhere in the capital and nobody protects me then," he said, adding, "The killers may attack me taking advantage of that."

The government has to try the perpetrators of murders to ensure people's security, he said, adding, "The culture of impunity encourages killers."

On October 31, two attacks on publishers, bloggers and writers were carried out in the capital that left publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan of Jagriti Prokashani dead inside his office in Aziz Super Market in Shahbagh and Ahmedur Rashid Chowdhury Tutul of Shuddhoswar Prokashani and two others injured in Lalmatia Shuddhoswar office.

No one has been arrested yet.

Claiming responsibility for the attacks, militant outfit Ansar Al Islam had tweeted and sent emails to different media outlets mentioning some professionals as their next target.

Four secular writers and bloggers - Avijit Roy, Oyasiquir Rahman, Ananta Bijoy Das and Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy -- were killed this year while another blogger, Ahmed Rajib Haider, was hacked to death in February 2013.

Meanwhile, the DMP is planning to introduce three-shift duty plan for its patrol and checkpoint teams from next month to reduce the long working hours of police personnel.

"It will be done subject to availability of additional forces," said Muntasirul Islam, deputy commissioner (media) of the DMP, quoting the commissioner.

The directives came after three attacks on uniformed policemen in which two cops -- an assistant sub-inspector and a constable -- were killed on October 22 and November 4, and a military policeman was injured on Tuesday.

Bangladesh

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has been in London for about two months. She left Dhaka for the UK on September 15 for treatment and celebrating the Eid-ul-Azha with her family members.

Referring to BNP's boycott of the last general election, Hasina, also the Awami League chief, said if a politician makes a mistake in making a political decision, his party men would definitely have to suffer.

Khaleda Zia had to come out of her Gulshan office, surrender before a court and return home after she failed to oust the government by enforcing hartals and blockades for long 93 days early this year, added the PM.

The premier said the people of North Bengal have forgotten the word Monga (seasonal poverty) in the last seven years as her government has ensured food security through boosting crop production.

She pledged to set up a university in Bogra to flourish higher education and asked the youth to pay attention to their studies and stay away from drugs and terrorism.

She also vowed to establish an economic zone in the district to further spur industrialisation, set up rail link from Sirajganj to Bogra and continue dredging of the mighty Jamuna.

Hasina declared that a burn unit will be set up at Bogra hospital.

Earlier, she inaugurated 19 projects and laid the foundation stones of 15 others through unveiling plaques from the meeting venue.

Health Minister Mohammad Nasim, State Minister for Public Administration Ismat Ara Sadique, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, and former Rajshahi mayor AHM Khairuzzaman Liton addressed the rally, among others.

It's all because of war trial

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of attacks taking advantage of a volatile situation, they said.

Some apprehensions made in the SB report matched the deposition of Masud Rana, an activist of Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir, detained over the fatal stabbing of ASI Ibrahim Mollah at a Gabtoli checkpoint on October 21.

Several criminal acts, including the murder of publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan and police constable Mukul, took place after the submission of the report. Also, a prosecutor, several prosecution witnesses and campaigners of war crimes trial have received death threats.

Top police officials and people involved in the war crimes trial said the two convicted war criminals, who have strong followings in and outside the country, would somehow try to destabilise law and order to stop the possible executions.

The recent attacks were part of the last ditch efforts by the two to save themselves, they added.

Contacted, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said they have "evidence of involvement of the BNP and Jamaat in all the recent killings and criminal activities".

"They are carrying out the crimes to jeopardise the ongoing war crimes trial and destabilise the country," he told this newspaper yesterday.

He added, "Jamaat, Huji [Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami] and JMB [Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh] are the same thing. They are doing these [criminal activities] to create unrest in the country."

"ISI CONNECTION" Tureen Afroz, a leading prosecutor in war crimes trial, said the recent attacks are "linked with the trial and execution of war criminals".

"There is no other equation," she told The Daily Star.

Explaining, she said whenever the execution of any war criminal nears, Jamaat-e-Islami and its associate bodies carry out subversive activities or at least try to do so.

"As the execution of the two is imminent, this time the impact is double. Threats on us have also increased," said the prosecutor.

The Jamaat and its wings opposed the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 and collaborated with the Pakistan occupation forces. Its campaigns against war crimes trials have been widely reported.

Tureen said Mojaheed is a powerful leader of Jamaat as he holds the rank of party's secretary general. And, Salauddin Quader is not only an influential leader of BNP, his "connection with ISI [Pakistani intelligence agency] is known to all."

She believes that these two serve interests of different organisations at home and abroad. In return, these organisations will definitely try to save their "close friends".

She observed that such criminal activities may continue to take place until the execution of Salauddin and Mojaheed.

Shahriar Kabir, prominent war crimes researcher and first prosecution witness in the case against Mojaheed, said all the killings -- be it of police or bloggers -- are not isolated. "These are well-orchestrated and masterminded by ISI and executed by its local agents -- Jamaat as well as BNP."

Kabir is the executive president of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, which has been campaigning for the war crimes trial for over two decades.

He added, "Salauddin Quader Chowdhury is the key agent of ISI in Bangladesh while ISI is the main patron of Jamaat."

"Therefore, ISI cannot accept the executions of its top agents as it thinks the executions would mean a major political defeat for it in Bangladesh... That is why it is trying to thwart the war crimes trial

through these [criminal] activities."

MASUD'S STATEMENT

Shibir activist Masud admitted to police that his companion Enamul Haque alias Kamal, ex-president of Adamdighi upazila (Bogra) Shibir, stabbed the ASI dead while the cop was checking Enamul's bag that contained two firearms.

According to a video record of Masud's statement, he along with Kamal came to Dhaka from Bogra as part of a mission to carry out bomb attacks and assassinate six VIPs -- three civil society members vocal for execution of war criminals and three ministers.

A reporter of The Daily Star has watched the clip.

Masud said they brought a consignment of 10 improvised grenades, five of which police recovered from his rented house in Kamrangirchar following his information.

Police said the grenades charged at the Hossaini Dalan Shia gathering in the early hours of October 25 are similar to those recovered from Kamrangirchar.

Masud added he and Kamal were sent to Dhaka by some Jamaat-BNP leaders of Adamdighi upazila.

Masud had come to the city 21 days before he was caught for the first time. He used to recce the places of targets, posing as an egg seller.

From his possession, police seized a map that clearly directs the roads to different key point installations and areas where VIPs live.

"Based on his [Masud's] information, we raided several dens of the groups, but they had fled immediately after the arrest of Masud," said a senior police officer who led the raids.

"At some places we even found rice, cooked a day earlier but untouched," he said, wishing anonymity.

In his statement, Masud also said six other groups came to the capital on similar missions.

SB RECOMMENDATIONS

The agency report recommended ensuring strong security at all important installations like airports; public gatherings; bus, rail and river terminals; power stations; gas distribution centres; industries and factories; entertainment places; and offices and residences of foreigners.

It suggested setting up security wall and installing adequate lights at airports, seaports and all the KPIs. It also urged the government to ensure full-time watch at these installations by setting up control rooms or watch tower.

"Considering the matter with utmost urgency, adequate monitoring will have to be in place immediately," said the report, requesting all members of police and other law enforcement agencies to remain on high alert.

Families

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murders," he said.

On April 27 last year, Nazrul Islam and his four aides, and a senior lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver were kidnapped from the Dhaka-Narayanganj link road in broad daylight.

All of them were killed and their bodies were recovered from the Shitalakkhya River on April 29 and 30.

The other victims were Moniruzzaman Swapna, Tajul Islam, Liton, Jahangir and Ibrahim.

Nur Hossain, a former councilor of Narayanganj City Corporation, is the prime accused in the murder case.

Another victim Moniruzzaman Swapna's brother Mizanur Rahman Ripon said, "We are yet to know why they were killed. We neither know how much money was paid to the killers nor the people who provided the money."

He said the Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) officials who confessed to their crimes had only revealed how they had abducted the victims and killed them while the rest of the story was still unknown.

Target: war crimes trial

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Although Ansar Al Islam said these persons have taken a stance against Islam, none of them, except one or two, actually had written anything against Islam or the Prophet. One of them is, in fact, a prominent figure in the war crimes tribunal. Rather, the majority of them have actually been very vocal against the anti-liberation force including Jamaat, Shibir and the Razakars.

They, through their numerous writings, had demanded the trial of war criminals, who essentially make the highest echelon of Jamaat-e-Islami, the party that stood against the independence of Bangladesh and joined hands with the Pakistani forces to carry out genocide and other atrocities.

Even when the country was under the rule of BNP-Jamaat, these writers were relentless in expressing their views.

We have gone through the Facebook posts of these relatively less prominent names on the list and the same pattern emerged.

For example, one has posted the Ansar Al Islam list and wrote: Threats will not work. The war criminals will be hanged. Two others also wrote against war criminals.

Another online activist wrote against Islamic militancy and the rise of Hindu extremism in India. Some

other's posts mostly dwelled on Sharia and the change of character of the constitution with the inclusion of Bismillah and Islam as state religion.

All this actually went against Jamaat, many of whose leaders are now on the dock for war crimes trial. Its top leader Ali Ahsan Mojaheed is facing death as his trial is nearing an end.

There is the other criminal, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, who is also facing death and may have to walk the gallows once his last straw, a review petition, is rejected.

It is exactly in such a context that we see a sudden appearance of terrorist activities and the purported claims from ISIS and Ansar Al Islam. These groups suddenly seem to be desperate to swing into action. Their hit list also reflects the marauding interest of Jamaat and the war criminals.

So, will it not be logical to connect the two together and conclude that much of what is happening now is related with the war crimes trial? We can see a clear link. The militants have grown stronger on various platforms under the shadows of different political interests and now they seem to have got an urgent call to action with the top war criminals facing death.

The only answer to their effort will be to hunt them down and put them on the dock too.