



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina places a wreath at Shikha Anirban in Dhaka Cantonment on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day yesterday. She paid tributes to the armed forces personnel martyred during the Liberation War.

Irony of fate

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five to death and make their bodies disappear before the president granted clemency on September 5.

Though Jalal was freed from the concentration camp, Bodi, Rumi, Jewel and Altaf Hossain were killed sometime between August 30 and September 5. Their bodies were never found.

Forty-four years later, a strange turn of fate brought Mojaheed to his knees, seeking presidential mercy, begging for life.

On July 17, 2013, a special tribunal awarded Mojaheed death penalty for two out of five charges including the killing of intellectuals in 1971. This year the apex court upheld his death sentence for intellectuals' killing and rejected his petition for reviewing the death penalty.

In a desperate bid to escape the gallows, the war criminal sought presidential mercy. But it was rejected and he was hanged in Dhaka Central Jail early today.

Rumi's mother Jahanara Imam, who had let her 20-year-old son join the war, never sought mercy to the then Pakistani junta to save her son's life.

On September 5, 1971, she wrote in her diary how she and her husband decided not to seek presidential clemency for Freedom Fighter Rumi, captured by the Pakistani army with the help of local collaborators.

"Trying to save Rumi's life by seeking mercy from the murderous government would be insulting to Rumi's ideals..." she wrote quoting her husband Sharif Imam. [Source: Ekatturer Dinguli (Memoirs of the days of Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971)].

The mother, who had suppressed her grief to herself for two decades, raised her voice for justice not only for the murder of her son but for the thousands of others who were killed by the Pakistani army and their local collaborators.

In 1992, Jahanara Imam initiated a movement calling for the trial of war criminals after Pakistani citizen and war criminal Ghulam Azam was made the chief of Jamaat-e-Islami, which had acted against the country's independence.

She along with 100 renowned citizens constituted "Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee", a platform that till date continues its campaign demanding trial of war criminals and a ban on fundamentalism and communalism-based politics.

Their years-long campaign began to bear fruit after the Awami League came

to power in 2010 and formed the special tribunals to try the war criminals.

Soon after Mojaheed was sentenced to death by a tribunal on July 17, 2013, Rumi's younger brother Saif Imam Jami had told The Daily Star that justice would remain incomplete until the verdict was carried out.

Yesterday, the long wait of Jami and thousand others, who had lost their loved ones to the crimes orchestrated by Mojaheed, finally came to an end.

But the mother, but for whom the justice might never have been served, could not witness it. On June 26, 1994, Jahanara Imam breathed her last after a long battle with cancer.

"I have been waiting for this day since 2013. My mother, martyr's mother Jahanara Imam had started a movement. Now we are witnessing its results and I specially thank Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She [Hasina] had taken the initiative [to try war criminals] and we are now getting the results," Jami said yesterday told a private television channel.

Rumi was one of the first members of the Crack Platoon, a guerilla unit that fought the Liberation War under Sector-2, eventually becoming a group dreaded even by the well-trained Pakistan military.

On August 30, Rumi and his comrades along with his younger brother Jami and father Sharif were picked up from their Dhanmondi residence. Sharif and Jami returned a few days later. But Rumi didn't.

Rumi had secured admission to Illinois Institute of Technology in the USA after completing his secondary-level graduation but he decided to join the fight for his motherland instead of pursuing higher education abroad.

Justifying his choice, he had told his mother: "I may eventually leave [Bangladesh] if you insist on my studying abroad. But it will forever turn me into a hostage to my conscience. I may become a famous engineer on my return from America with a degree, but I will never be strong enough to face my conscience with my head held high."

For complicity in the killing of Rumi and his comrades, both Mojaheed and Nizami were awarded life sentence by the war crimes tribunal. The apex court upheld the sentence for Mojaheed while Nizami's appeal against the judgment is still pending before the Supreme Court.

PHOTO: PID

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Day-2015.

The PM hoped Bangladesh would be a middle income country much ahead of 2021 and a developed one by 2041. "We will build a golden Bangladesh Inshallah by fulfilling the dream of the Father of the Nation."

Paying rich tributes to the martyrs of Liberation War, Hasina said people would always remember the contributions of the armed forces in the war.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had taken the responsibility of building a war-ravaged country, she mentioned.

Bangabandhu had established the military academy, combined school, training schools and institutions for development of the training and

organisational structure of the armed forces. The very existence of the present armed forces of Bangladesh is based on that foundation, noted the PM.

Lauding the role of the armed forces at home and abroad, the premier said they have brightened the country's image in the United Nations through their relentless services.

Members of the armed forces have earned people's confidence and they are playing a very significant role in building infrastructures and expediting socio-economic development in the country, she added.

Hasina said the Father of the Nation had formulated Bangladesh's defence policy in 1974. In light of that policy, the Awami League government has prepared the Forces Goal-2030 and

implementing it in phases.

Efforts are underway to equip the army, navy and air force with modern training and equipment. The government has taken steps to constitute a full-fledged division in the southern part of the country, said the premier.

The government has taken steps to build the navy as a three dimensional force. Two submarines would be inducted in the navy by next year, she told her audience.

The AL government has been continuing its efforts to build modern armed forces and it would continue with this in future, the PM added.

About the country's current socio-economic scenario, she said the poverty rate has come down to 22.42 percent while abject poverty rate has

reduced to 7.92 percent. People's per capita income has increased to \$1,314.

Bangladesh now exports food. People's life expectancy is 70.7 years. The country's average growth rate is 6.5 percent. Its export has grown by three times while the foreign exchange reserves have soared sixfold, said Hasina.

After addressing the programme, the PM exchanged pleasantries with the guests.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Chief Justice S K Sinha, Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad, former president H M Ershad, cabinet members, parliament members, chiefs of the three services, political leaders, professionals and diplomats were present.



Family members are going to meet Salauddin Quader Chowdhury. Right, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed's family leaving the Dhaka Central Jail after meeting him for one last time.



PHOTO: STAR

Hanged, together

FROM PAGE 1
martyrs and gloated over his role as a Razakar, also became adviser of parliamentary affairs of Khaleda Zia in her 2001-06 government.

Mojaheed made a most audacious comment in 2007 that there were no war criminals in the country, drawing widespread criticism.

With the hangings of these two convicted war criminals at the Dhaka Central Jail at 12:55am today, Bangladesh once again proved that it would not forgive these unrepentant murderers, that they have no place in a country whose birth they opposed and that justice shall prevail.

With their executions, the country once again paid back a little bit of the immeasurable debt it owe the three million martyrs and the millions more who went through a harrowing time to snatch victory.

Mojaheed, 67, is the third Jamaat leader to have died for war crimes, after Abdul Quader Mollah in December 2013 and Muhammad Kamaruzzaman in April this year.

Salauddin, 66, is the first BNP leader to have walked the gallows for war atrocities.

This is for the first time in the country that two ministers have been hanged for war crimes.

There was no immediate reaction

from the BNP, but Jamaat called a nationwide daylong hartal for tomorrow, protesting the hanging of Mojaheed.

"They [Mojaheed and Salauddin] walked the gallows around 12:55am about the same time," Brig Gen Syed Iftekhar Uddin, inspector general (prisons), told The Daily Star by phone minutes after the hanging.

Four ambulances, two of them carrying the bodies of Mojaheed and Salauddin, came out of the Dhaka Central Jail under police protection around 2:50am and headed for their village homes in Faridpur and Chittagong.

Mojaheed will be buried at Ideal Cadet Madrasa premises at Pashchim Kabashpur area of Faridpur, said Nazim Uddin, officer-in-charge of Faridpur Sadar Police Station.

Salauddin will be buried at his family graveyard at Gohira in Raozan, said Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Raozan Police Station.

As the news of their executions reached the Shahbagh intersection, Gonojagoron Mancha activists, who were there since yesterday morning, erupted into joyful cheers.

The executions came three days after the Supreme Court rejected their petitions for reviewing the death sentence.

tences on Wednesday, bringing an end to a five-year-long legal battle.

In her instant reaction, Shyamoli Nasrin Alim Chaudhury, the widow of martyred intellectual Alim Chaudhury, said, "The agonising wait for 44 years has finally come to an end. We were deprived of justice. Finally we got that with their executions."

She said Mojaheed was the kingpin of Al-Badr responsible for killing the intellectuals. "As a member of the martyred intellectual family, I am very happy to see the first-ever execution of a murderer of intellectuals."

Prafulla Kumar Sinha, whose father Nutan Chandra Sinha was killed by Salauddin and Pakistani army, said, "My father's soul will now find peace. We are relieved of the agonising pain we have been in for the last 44 years."

He expressed his gratitude to the prime minister and people, including lawyers and investigators involved in the trial process.

FACES OF THE RUTHLESS TRAITORS

Mojaheed was the president of Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing, and towards the last part of 1971 and became the chief of infamous Al-Badr Bahini.

During the war, he visited many districts and held meetings with his followers and instigated them to annihilate freedom fighters as well as pro-liberation people, according to court documents.

And only days before the liberation, Al-Badr men, under his leadership, traced houses, systematically rounded up, tortured and brutally killed the brightest of the luminaries -- professors, literateurs, journalists and doctors -- to cripple the country intellectually once and for all.

After independence, Mojaheed went into hiding and resurfaced after the political changeover in the country with the assassination of Bangabandhu. In time, his political clout would grow, and would become minister.

Salauddin, a self-proclaimed brigadier of Chittagong in 1971, was not involved in politics in 1971, but he actively took part in the election campaign of his father Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, the then president of anti-liberation Convention Muslim League in 1970.

During the war, Salauddin, along with his men and Pakistani occupation forces, unleashed a cold-blooded savagery on five Raozan villages in Chittagong, killing 111 Hindu men. His father and he blamed the Hindu

men for his father's defeat in 1970.

Salauddin did not even spare Natun Chandra Sinha, a social worker and philanthropist. He and his men killed Natun, dragging him out of a temple where he was praying at the time. He also accompanied the Pakistani army men when the abducted Awami League leader Mozaffar Ahmed and his son, who were later found dead.

Turing their Goods Hill house as a torture centre, Salauddin and his men tortured freedom fighters and pro-liberation people during the war.

Towards the end of the war, he first fled to Pakistan and from there went to London. He returned to Bangladesh in 1974 and joined politics after 1975 political changeover and became lawmakers several times. He became a minister during the Ershad regime.

HANGED, FINALLY

The countdown of their execution began after the Supreme Court dismissed their review petitions. Members of both the families met them at Dhaka Central Jail the following day.

On Friday, when the jail authorities asked Mojaheed and Salauddin if they would seek presidential clemency, they took time to give their decisions. Lawyers of both the convicts filed

petitions to meet them but the jail authorities did not allow them.

Since yesterday morning, there had been indications that the two would be executed by last night.

Security was tight throughout the day around the Dhaka Central Jail where the two convicts were kept, and it was further beefed up in the evening when additional police and Rab and members were deployed.

All shops and establishments around the jail area were ordered to shut down by 8:00pm and onlookers were asked to clear the area. The road leading to the prison from Chawkbazar was closed around 7:40pm. Only journalists were allowed to pass through the area to go near the jail gate, that too after verifying their ID cards.

The convicts sought presidential clemency yesterday, which was turned down by President Abdul Hamid, said Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal.

Around 8:00pm, the jail authorities called family members of the two to meet the Salauddin and Mojaheed. The family members went to the Dhaka Central Jail around 9:00pm.

Finally, they were hanged at 12:55am.

[Shaheen Mollah and Rafiul Islam contributed to this report.]