



Families numbed by state's silence

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All the families, like Suman's, have poignant stories to tell.
"Ever since we heard that there'll be another programme to press home our demands, mother has started counting days," shared Arju, elder brother of Masum.
"We've shifted to a new house. So, we had to pack Masum's clothes in a separate box. Whenever mother sees it, she starts crying," he said.
In addition to writing to the home ministry, the families formed human chains and arranged press briefings several times, seeking help from the government to know whether they were detained or dead or alive. But all

their efforts went in vain.
Nur Khan, director of rights body Ain O Salish Kendra, said it was the responsibility of the state to find out the eight, and if they were in custody, proper legal steps should be taken or they should be freed.
Despite repeated pleas, no visible steps had yet been taken by the government over any incident of "enforced disappearance", he said.
"We're saying the country is doing well. At the same time we hear the news [of enforced disappearances]. It makes a dark contrast," Nur observed.
According to family sources, Sajedul, general secretary of ward-38 of BNP's Dhaka city unit, had been staying out of

home fearing arrest. They said he sometimes used to spend nights at his cousin Tanvir's house.
On the evening of December 4, Sajedul was hanging out with Tanvir, Russel, Masum, Rana and Al Amin beside a road near Tanvir's under-construction building at Block-I in Bashundhara.
"Around 8:00pm, some 15 Rab personnel reached there and picked up the six," Sajedul's sister Sanjida said, quoting a construction worker who claimed to have witnessed the whole incident.
Al Amin's family lodged an abduction case against some unidentified people with Bhatara Police Station on January

26. This is the only case filed in this connection.
His relative Yakub said there was no progress in the investigation and deeply frustrated, they stopped asking about it.
"Al Amin's parents are passing the worst time. But we could not do anything for them," said Yakub.
Rana, who was from Rangpur, had been staying at his sister's place in the capital and preparing for the BCS exams at the time of the incident.
One of his relatives, who also live in Dhaka, told The Daily Star that they had looked for him in every possible place. They had gone to the law enforcers as well.
"But we've always returned empty-

handed," he said, wishing anonymity.
Adnan and Kawsar were allegedly picked up from their Shaheenbagh houses.
According to Adnan's family, a group of seven to eight people carrying firearms entered their house and took Adnan away, saying they needed to interrogate him for some information. They used two vehicles and one of those had 'Rab' prominently inscribed on it.
Adnan's father Ruhul Amin still believes his son is alive and will come back to him someday.
Contacted, Lt Col Tuhiin Mohammad Masud, commanding officer of Rab-1, denied that Rab was

involved in picking them up.
He, however, said they had received allegations from some of the victims' families about these disappearances.
"We enquired into the allegations but could not trace them out," he said, adding they are still trying to find them out.
According to Ain O Salish Kendra, in 2013 as many as 68 persons were abducted reportedly by law enforcers. Last year the number was 88, 42 of whom never returned while bodies of 23 were found later.
Between January and October this year, as many as 47 persons have been picked up allegedly by law enforcement agencies, says the rights

Misconduct their code

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persons for submission of nomination papers. The code also bars use of any government facilities for election activities.
Election Commission Secretary Sirazul Islam said they were yet to receive any allegation of code violation. "We will take action if such allegations are found true."
Polls to 235 municipalities will be held on December 30, marking the start of the country's first local government polls on party lines. Independent candidates are also eligible to run.
At Dhamrai municipality in Dhaka, local lawmaker MA Malek along with several hundred party activists and leaders brought out a procession in favour of AL-nominated mayor candidate Golam Kabir Mollah.
Witnesses said Golam Kabir Mollah went to the upazila complex around 11:00am with hundreds of his supporters and waited there till 2:00pm for the MP who later joined them.
The MP, however, denied the allega-

tion, saying he went to the upazila office for work, not for electioneering.
In Savar, AL mayor hopeful Abdul Goni staged a showdown and brought out a procession before submitting nomination papers around 12:00noon.
Dhaka Zila Parishad Administrator Hasina Dowla and Savar upazila Panel Chairman Parvej Dewan joined the procession with their office cars.
Asked about the violation, Hasina said, "I did not know the rules properly. When the returning officer told me about the rules, I immediately left the place."
In Sadar municipality of Natore, AL candidate Uma Chowdhury came to the RO's office with a procession of around 200 party leaders and activists led by local MP Shafiqul Islam Shimul around 1:00pm
In Narail Sadar, the AL backed mayoral aspirant Jahangir Biswas staged a motorcycle showdown on his way to submit the nomination paper, reports a correspondent.

In Tarabo municipality of Narayanganj, AL candidate Hasina Gazi went to the RO's office to submit the nomination paper with a motorcade of over 150 buses and minibuses and over 50 motorbikes around 12:00noon.
But Hasina denied the allegation of violating rules, saying people came on their own to show their support.
Such violation by AL men also took place at Golapganj, Kanaipur and Jakiganj of Sylhet; Harinakunda and Shailkupa of Jhenidah; Sadar and Madhobdi of Narsingdi; Sreepur of Gazipur; eight municipalities in Tangai; and Sadar and Mirkadim municipalities in Munshiganj.
BNP mayor candidates staged showdowns at Jakiganj in Sylhet and three municipalities of Narsingdi.
For both the parties, however, rebel candidates will pose a big challenge.
Many rebel candidates from the AL and the BNP submitted nomination papers for mayor posts yesterday, the last day for submission.

The Daily Star contacted AL and BNP leaders in around 200 municipalities across the country yesterday and found that the AL has 116 rebel candidates and the BNP has 54 in some 90 municipalities.
Top leaders of both parties, however, hope that the rebels will pull out.
The AL has already warned of tough organisational actions against party dissidents, including expulsion.
The ruling party yesterday formally unveiled its candidate list at a press conference at the party president's Dhanmondi office.
"If anyone violates the party decision, he will have to face maximum punishment, I mean expulsion," said Mahbulul Alam Hanif, AL joint general secretary, at the press conference.
A BNP leader, who is a member of the party's nomination board, said they would try to convince party dissidents to support to party-backed candidates. "At some places, we have fielded some dummy candidates as part of our electoral strategy."

Protect rights

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Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC).
Mentioning that the people with disabilities are the part of this society and country, the PM called upon teachers, students and their guardians not to neglect them, rather to be always sensitive and supportive of them.
Reassuring her government's firm commitment to continue to stand beside the physically-challenged people, Hasina said the monthly allowance of some 6 lakh such people would be raised further from the existing Tk 500.
Hasina said the number of physically-challenged people across the globe is about 100 crore. The United Nations has been observing the International Day of People with Disabilities since 1992. Responding to the UN call, she said Bangladesh has also been observing the day.
Lauding the role of international autism expert and her daughter Saima Wazed Hossain, the prime minister said the present government under the guidance of Saima undertook various steps for the rehabilitation of the countrywide physically- and mentally-challenged people.
She said the government has reserved 1 percent quota for them in all grade-I jobs, including BCS ones, while 10 percent quota in the grade III and IV posts for the physically-challenged people and orphans, which has widened their opportunity for getting government jobs.
Besides, out of about 14,82,716 physically-challenged people, some 6 lakh are getting Tk 500 each per month as allowance from the government while 60,000 physically-challenged students are getting stipends.
The government has already set up 103 service and help centres for the physically-challenged people across the country where they are getting therapy, other related materials, hearing test and counselling.
Hasina said an initiative is also there to set up a national disability complex with all amenities.
Finance Minister AMA Muhith spoke on the occasion as the special guest chaired by Parliamentary Standing Committee Chairman on Ministry of Social Welfare Dr Mohammad Mozammel Hossain.
Speaking there, Muhith said separate budget for the physically-challenged people will not be possible in the next national budget, but it could be within the tenure of this government.
Earlier, the PM distributed laminated ID cards among some of the physically-challenged people. After delivering her speech, she also witnessed a cultural

programme there organised by the physically-challenged people and children.
The prime minister yesterday inaugurated the countrywide mobile therapy van service for the welfare of autistic and other physically-challenged people.
She formally opened the service on the premises of BICC through unveiling plaques pressing a switch.
She then saw a van and was appraised about its various features. Later, the PM addressed the function yesterday.
Admission tests on X-mas Day at 2 Pabna schools
Local Christians irked
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A move to hold class-III admission tests at two government high schools in Pabna on December 25, a public holiday for Christmas, has sparked criticism among the local Christians.
The schools are Pabna Government Girls School and Pabna Zilla School.
The Christians have urged the authorities concerned to change the exam date "for sake of religious festivity".
"December 25 is the Christmas Day which is the biggest religious festival of the Christian community. It is a holiday everywhere across the globe," David Ratna Das, pastor of Pabna Baptist Church, told The Daily Star yesterday.
He said any exam on that day would just be an obstacle to their "spontaneous" religious celebrations, and demanded that the exam date be changed immediately.
Stephen Sarker, general secretary of the Baptist churches in the district, said they were worried learning about the matter, and had already verbally asked the district administration to change the date.
Jaidur Rahman, headmaster of Pabna Government Girls High School, said the decision to hold the exams that day was taken earlier and the notice in this school had already been declared.
He said the school authorities do not fix such dates. The decision is taken by the deputy commissioners (DCs) who are the chiefs of the governing bodies of public schools.
Contacted, Munshi Moniruzzaman, acting deputy commissioner, told The Daily Star the deputy commissioner was in Russia on a government tour, adding the date might be changed on his return through discussions.



Six suspected members of militant outfit Mujahid of Bangladesh are being paraded before the media at the media centre of Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday, a day after they were arrested in the city's Motijheel.

PHOTO: STAR

Genocide plot conceived at duck shooting trip

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1971, wrote in his book 'The betrayal of East Pakistan': "Bhutto was not willing to sit on the opposition benches. He started behaving like a leader whose party had won the majority and was about to form the government."
But Bangabandhu was firm in his resolve that the power must come to the Bangalis.
So Yahya came to Dhaka on January 12 and held talks with Mujib. Wary of his own future, Yahya wanted to continue as president even after Mujib's ascend to power. But as Bangabandhu turned the proposal down, General Niazi writes, a "disillusioned Yahya flew into the waiting arms of Bhutto. He along with his coterie went to Larkana for a duck shoot, where the Larkana conspiracy was planned."
The plan was that power would never be handed to Awami League and the Pakistani rulers would play for time until the military could strike the Bangalis.
Accordingly, a military operation named Operation Blitz was prepared on February 22 in a meeting convened by Yahya with the military leaders in Islamabad.

Niazi writes about this military plan: "Yaqub (who commanded the Pakistan forces in then East Pakistan) was given a *carte blanche* to execute plan 'Blitz' in case Mujib failed to modify his stance on the Six Points. After the conference Yaqub visited General Hamid [army chief] in GHQ, who offered him an extra brigade to deal with any new development. Initially, Yaqub told that adequate troops were in East Pakistan to deal with any contingency. Yet, three battalions [usually a battalion consists of 300 to 800 soldiers and is typically commanded by a lieutenant colonel -ed] of the brigade reached Dhaka later."
About Blitz, General Khadim Hussain Raja, the man who carried out the genocide outside Dhaka, in his book 'A stranger in my own country' writes: "In January and early February Yahya visualized the possibility of a military crackdown."
"I had shown this operation instruction to my brigade commanders," Raja continues, "and directed them to have detailed plans ready for their respective areas of responsibility. In essence, Operation Blitz meant the suspension of all political activity in the country and a

reversion to Martial Law rule. This meant that the armed forces of the country would be permitted to move against defiant political leaders and to take them into protective custody."
According to the plan, troops moved out to strategic towns on February 27 and on March 1 president Yahya Khan suddenly suspended the National Assembly.
As Raja writes, "the news was electrifying to the common man in East Pakistan and particularly so in Dhaka. In no time at all, there were crowds on the streets of Dhaka."
Bangabandhu called a province wide non-stop general strike that paralysed the country. The impact of this strike was so great that the Pakistani rulers were overwhelmed. They knew their limited military operation Blitz would not work. They needed a total annihilation of the Bangalis. And for this they needed more time.
They devised the plan that president Yahya would pretend to hold negotiations with Bangabandhu while the military would prepare for the strike. Their special concern was the presence of East Pakistan Rifles and East Bengal

Regiment who were mainly staffed with Bangali troops.
Yahya arrived at Dhaka again on March 15 and sat with his military top brass. But not everyone agreed to the military adventure as Khadim Raja writes: "Air Commodore Masood, commander of the air force, then took the floor and spoke against military action as the solution." His concern however was not the killing of the innocent Bangalis but the uncertainty that the Biharis would face.
But the hawkish Pakistani generals did not like such softies and so the 'doves' were quickly replaced with ruthless generals. As Khadim wrote: "He (Yahya) was replacing the 'doves' with the 'hawks' in East Pakistan."
Air Commodore Masood was relieved of his duty. Admiral Ahsan, who had been appointed earlier as governor of East Pakistan, was replaced by Lt Gen Yaqub. General Niazi later wrote: "He resigned as Governor and Commander, Eastern Command saying that he 'could not kill his Pakistani brothers'.
Lt Gen Tikka Khan, nicknamed the Butcher of Baluchistan, was brought into the theatre as the head of East Pakistan

army. After all, he had been successful in ruthlessly putting down the rebellion previously in Baluchistan.
About Tikka, General Khadim Raja wrote: "He had landed hard on the Baloch tribes who had raised their heads in revolt, causing them to lay down their arms or flee the country."
Major General Iftekhar Janjua and Major General AO Miha were brought in as "possible replacements for Khadim and Farman (Rao Farman Ali, who was in charge of the civil affairs in East Pakistan) in case they refused to crack down," Raja wrote. "General Hamid had even gone to the extent of questioning Khadim's and Farman's wives to assess their husbands' views on the subject. Both the generals, however, assured Hamid that they would faithfully carry out the orders."
With all the necessary ruthless commanders in place, Yahya arrived at Dhaka on March 15 and started his sham talks with Bangabandhu.
Meanwhile the military commanders were going on with their plans. Tikka Khan sat with General Rao Farman Ali and General Khadim Raja on March 17 and told them that Yahya's talks with Mujib were not progressing well, Raja

writes: "The president therefore wanted us to be ready for military action and to prepare a plan accordingly."
So Operation Searchlight was conceived in a meeting between these two generals on March 18. General Rao Farman Ali was to carry out the genocide in Dhaka and General Khadim Hussain Raja in the rest of the country.
Yahya, as planned, secretly flew out of Dhaka for Karachi via Colombo on a Pakistan International Airlines flight on the evening of March 25. A few hours later, tanks rolled out of the cantonment firing cannons and machine gunning the sleeping civilians of Dhaka.
General Niazi, who took over command from Tikka Khan in April and continued the killings, himself described the March 25 genocide as follows: "General Tikka Khan struck. Peaceful night was turned into a time of wailing, crying and burning. General Tikka let loose everything at his disposal as if raiding an enemy, not dealing with his own misguided and misled people. The military action was a display of stark cruelty more merciless than the massacres at Bukhara and Baghdad by Changis Khan and Halaku Khan or at Jallianwala