

War crimes convict held in Kishoreganj

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Law enforcers arrested a convicted war criminal in Kishoreganj yesterday, 15 months after a special tribunal handed death penalty to him and three others for committing war crimes during the Liberation War.

Hafiz Uddin, 67, of Karimganj upazila in the district, was held in Itna Upazila around 2:00pm, Rezia Sultana Chaman, a prosecutor at the International Crimes Tribunal, told The Daily Star.

Hasan Mustafa Swapan, commanding officer of Rab-14, said acting on a tip-off, a Rab team arrested Hafiz Uddin from one of his relative's house at Borshikura village in remote haor area.

The ICT-1 on May 3 last year found five Kishoreganj raskars guilty of abduction, torture and killings during the Liberation War and handed down death sentences to four of them, including Hafiz, and jail until death to the other.

Hafiz Uddin had been absconding since the tribunal issued an arrest warrant for him and the four others in November 2014. He was tried in absentia as he did not appear before the tribunal even after publication of advertisements asking him to do so.

The three others sentenced to death were Gazi Abdul Mannan, 88, commander of a local Razakar camp, Nasiruddin Ahmed, 62, an army captain who was sent to forced retirement and his brother Shamsuddin Ahmed, 60.

Of them, Shamsuddin Ahmed has been in jail since November 2014 and has filed an appeal against the verdict. Abdul Mannan died in December last year while on the run.

Azharul Islam, 60, of the same upazila, was sentenced to jail until death.

With Hafiz's arrest, 21 convicted war criminals remain absconding since being found guilty of crimes committed in 1971.



Hafiz Uddin



Houses being washed away as floodwater enters Char Kulaghat area of Lalmonirhat. Top right, Akhaura land port in Brahmanbaria gets flooded. Bottom right, a woman trapped in flash flood in AC Land Bosti area by Tangon river in Thakurgaon being rescued by locals. The photos were taken yesterday afternoon.



PHOTO: S DILIP ROY/MASUK HRIDYO/QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT

Heavy rains raise fresh flood alarm

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Surma 11.6cm above the danger mark at Kanaighat point around 8:00pm yesterday.

The Brahmaputra-Jamuna and the Ganges-Padma rivers are likely to continue rising in the next 72 hours, and the Surma-Kushiyara rivers in the next 24 hours.

The rivers are swelling due to continuous downpour in Bangladesh and India, and the onrush of water from the hills, Sarder Uday Raihan, sub-divisional engineer of the FFWC, told The Daily Star.

Weather forecast says light to moderate rain is likely to continue at most places in Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet, and heavy rain may occur at some of the places in the next 24 hours.

In Dinajpur, import and export activities at the Hili Land Port was

halted as the entire port area went under water.

Sohrab Hossain Mallik, public relations officer of the port, said not a single goods-laden truck could go through since yesterday morning as the main road remained submerged.

The flood water left some 2,000 families living in low-lying areas of six upazilas marooned.

In Brahmanbaria, activities of Akhaura Land Port were suspended around 1:00pm after the port area went under waist-deep water.

Shafiqul Islam, assistant customs officer at the port, said only two goods-laden trucks could go through since morning, forcing the authorities to halt export-import activities.

Twenty-five villages in Akhaura upazila were inundated.

In Lalmonirhat, around two lakh people of 145 villages in five upazilas were marooned due to the

onrush of water from upstream and heavy rainfall over the last three days.

Along with their goods and domestic animals, the affected people, especially in the char areas, have taken shelter in high places, like roads and embankments, and their relatives' houses. They are facing crisis of food and drinking water.

"The flood situation in Lalmonirhat has continued to deteriorate, increasing the woes of the affected people as the water level of two rivers [Teesta and Dharla] was increasing," Krishno Kamol Sarker, executive engineer of WDB in Lalmonirhat, told The Daily Star.

Bidubhusan Roy, deputy director at the Department of Agricultural Extension in the district, said "At least 16,000 hectares of cropland have been submerged."

Jamal Hossain, of Aditmari upazila, who along with his family

took shelter on a high road, said, "We are facing a crisis of food and drinking water. We need immediate help."

Lalmonirhat Deputy Commissioner Shafiqul Arif said cash and relief goods were being distributed among the victims.

In Kurigram, about 40,000 people of around 150 villages and char areas have been marooned afresh.

Local WDB officials said water of the Dharla river has been flowing 49cm above the danger level at Dharla bridge point in Kurigram Sadar upazila since 3:00pm.

In Sunamganj, authorities of around 893 government primary schools in seven upazilas closed the institutions.

As many as 40 villages of Habiganj were hit by floodwater.

Mina Akhter, a student of class-IV at Jamlabaj Primary School in Sunamganj Sadar upazila, said she

and her classmates were not going to school.

Our Thakurgaon correspondent reported that over 20,000 families in Panchagarh were hit by the flash flood.

Besides, rail communications on Panchagah-Dinajpur route stopped since yesterday morning as water washed away soil and stones on rail tracks in an area between Noyoniburuj and Kismat railway stations in Panchagarh.

During a visit to Thakurgaon municipality area yesterday, our Thakurgaon correspondent saw firefighters and locals rescuing flood-hit people there.

In Gaibandha, Aman seedbeds in Saghata upazila went under rain water following downpour over the last couple of days. Local farmers feared a crop loss.

[Our correspondents in the districts contributed to the report]

Swindling on the rise

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old-fashioned cards [magnetic-stripped] can easily be cloned and fraudsters take this chance. I am surprised to see why banks do not go for chip and PIN cards to ensure customers' security."

The banks are going for more secure methods but apparently not at the desired pace.

Subhankar Saha, spokesman and executive director of Bangladesh Bank, said the central bank warned banks about frauds at POS terminals and ATMs, but security measures were yet to be taken despite a year and a half had gone by since the biggest ever ATM frauds in the country.

Between February 6 and February 12 last year, fraudsters made away with Tk 25 lakh using around 40 cloned cards.

The gang, led by a foreigner, used data skimmed off in six ATMs in the capital to make the cloned cards.

Investigators later detected that the gang had stolen data of over 1,200 cards and had committed more frauds at POS terminals than at ATMs.

A few days after the fraud, Bangladesh Bank asked all banks to

tighten security, including installing anti-skimming devices at their ATM booths. It also instructed banks to make their cards chip-based and phase out the magnetic-stripped cards.

According to a recent survey conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM), 67 per cent ATMs have anti-skimming devices and 52 per cent cards are EMV-compliant.

EMV stands for Europay, MasterCard, and Visa, and is a global standard for inter-operation of integrated chip cards, which are used at POS terminals and ATMs for authenticating credit and debit card transactions.

It said if an EMV-compliant card is used at a non-compliant ATM, the card holder could be vulnerable to identity theft.

The study also shows that the most frequent types of fraudulent activity resulting from a cyber intrusion reported by banks were ATM/Point-Of-Sale schemes (23%).

Bangladesh Bank is aware of the rising identity thefts, but it cannot do anything unless it gets report from

banks.

"We have recently got complaints from some banks about card frauds at a POS terminal of a merchant in Dhaka. We are investigating the issue and have already identified the merchant point," said Subhankar.

He said data of some debit cards were captured at the merchant point and fraudsters took away Tk 3 lakh through six transactions at ATMs.

According to Bangladesh Bank, there are over 30,000 POS terminals in the country.

Abul Kashem Md Shirin, managing director of Dutch-Bangla Bank, said, "The POS terminals are vulnerable because these are not EMV-compliant."

According to industry insiders, fraudsters make counterfeit cards with data skimmed off cards used at the merchants. Most cards that get counterfeited are foreign.

Dutch-Bangla Bank's Abul Kashem said, "E-commerce transactions are becoming risky and dangerous."

The BIBM survey found that 30 per cent banks have Online Payment Gateway Service for e-commerce payment processing. As of December 31

last year, 928 online shop owners and merchants are selling products using bank's payment gateways.

Kazi Saifuddin Munir, managing director of IT Consultants that run Q-Cash, the largest private payment switch in Bangladesh, said the use of cloned cards at merchants was on the rise.

He said fraud of debit cards is tough as it is directly linked to the core banking system of banks. However, compromise between merchants and bankers could make fraudsters' lives easier.

"The central bank should introduce a chip-based card that will be used only domestically," he said, citing example of Malaysia, Hong Kong, China and India where domestic cards have been introduced to ensure security.

According to BIBM, banks spend too little to ensure security. Their budgets' cyber security expenditure slightly increased to 5.2 per cent in 2016 from 4.7 per cent in 2015.

Only two banks in Bangladesh comply with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) as of December last year, it said.

Tone down rhetoric

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then noted maybe that statement "wasn't tough enough". On Friday, the president said the military was "locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely".

China, North Korea's biggest ally and trade partner, has been voicing concern at the angry exchanges and a state-run newspaper suggested that Beijing should stay neutral if Pyongyang struck the US first.

Previously accused by Trump of not doing enough to rein in the authoritarian regime, China voted in favour of a series of wide-sweeping UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea last weekend.

According to the Chinese foreign ministry, Trump told Xi over the phone that he "fully understands China's role in the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula". Trump is expected to visit China later this year.

A commentary published in the North Korean state-run newspaper Minju Joson called the warnings from Trump and "other ruffraff of the US... the last-ditch efforts and hysteric fit of those who are in the grip of despair" over the "tragic doom" of the "American empire".

The sabre-rattling has sparked worldwide concerns that a miscalculation by either side could trigger a catastrophic conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

A chorus of international voices -- including Russia, Germany, France and the UK -- have urged restraint in the crisis, while Seoul expressed appreciation for Xi and Trump's phone call yesterday.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow was "very alarmed" at Trump's tough talk, and said Washington should take the first step toward cooling tensions.

"When a fight has nearly broken out, the first step away from the dangerous threshold should be taken by the side that is stronger and smarter," Lavrov said.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said diplomacy was the answer.

French President Emmanuel Macron echoed her call for talks, saying the international community needed to work to get Pyongyang to "resume the path of dialogue without conditions".

Meanwhile British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson blamed Pyongyang for the stand-off, saying on Twitter that the "North Korean regime is the cause of this problem and they must fix it".

All eyes on court

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flooded the media.

The victims include Narayanganj City Corporation panel mayor Nazrul Islam and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker. Before being murdered, they were abducted from Dhaka-Narayanganj link road on April 27, 2014.

Today the High Court will deliver its verdict on the death reference and appeals in cases over the seven-murder as the family members of the victims wait impatiently to see the perpetrators get due punishment for the crime.

"We would never get back what we have lost. All we want now is justice. We want to see criminals punished on this very land," said Abul Khayer, father of Tajul Islam Russel, one of the victims.

Taking out a passport-size photograph of 27-year-old Tajul from his wallet, he said, "It is very difficult to accept that a young son left home before your eyes and never returned."

"Deaths from natural causes can be accepted. But the sheer savagery inflicted by the murderers upon my son and others by killing and dumping their bodies is in no way bearable," he told this newspaper at his office in Mouchak of Siddhirganj.

The loss of the eldest among three sons made the mother, Taslima

Khatun, mentally unstable.

"She is like a dead person now. Sometimes she behaves normally but most of the time she is abnormal," said Abul Khayer.

The incident not only left the seven families shattered but also earned a bad name for a disciplined force -- Rapid Action Battalion -- because of the involvement of its members in such a grievous offence.

Three Rab men -- the then commanding officer of Rab-11 in Narayanganj Lt Col Tareque Sayeed Mohammad and the then company commanders of Rab-11 Maj Arif Hossain and Lt Commander Masud Rana -- were withdrawn from Rab on April 29, 2014 for their alleged involvement in the abduction.

A day after the abduction of the seven, Nazrul's wife Selina Islam filed an abduction case against six people, including the then NCC councillor Nur Hossain.

Another case was filed by Chandan's son-in-law Bijoy Kumar Paul over the abduction and the killing.

The family members and relatives of the victims mobilised public support and waged a movement demanding justice.



Shah Jamal

HOW THE INCIDENT UNFOLDED

After appearing before a Narayanganj court in a criminal case on April 27, 2014, Nazrul along with his three co-accused Moniruzzaman Swapan, Tajul Islam and Liton and Swapan's driver Jahangir

Alam was returning to Dhaka on a microbus.

As they reached Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium at Fatullah, another microbus waylaid them. The five were abducted.

Lawyer Chandan and his driver Ibrahim were also abducted and killed apparently because they witnessed the abduction of Nazrul and others.

The murderers cut open the victims' bellies and tied the bodies to sacks full of bricks before throwing them into the river. They were blindfolded, and their hands and legs were tied, police say.

Six bodies were found afloat on the Shitalakkhya on April 30 and the other the following day.

Nazrul's father-in-law Shahidul Islam alleged that Nur had given some Rab men Tk 6 crore to kill Nazrul with whom he had a longstanding political feud.

Lt Col Tareque, son-in-law of

DEATH PENALTY

(For Abduction, Killing and Hiding Bodies)

(CIVILIANS)

Nur Hossain, Mizanur Rahman Dipu, Selim, Sanaullah Sana, Shah Jahan, Jamal Uddin, Mortuja Jaman Churchill, Ali Mohammad, Abul Basher and Raham Ali.

(EX-RAB OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS)

Tareque Sayeed Mohammad, Arif Hossain, Masud Rana, Abdul Alim, Mohinuddin Munshi, Hira Miah, Sipahi Abu Toiyob, Asaduzzaman Nur, Purnendu Bala, Arif Hossain, Al Amin, Tajul Islam, Enamul, Belal Hossain, Shahid Uddin and Emdadul Haque.

IMPRISONMENT

17-Year Jail (For Abduction and Destroying Evidence) -- Habibur Rahman (former Rab member)

10-Year Jail (For Abduction) -- Mokhesur Rahman, Ruhul Amin, Nuruzzaman, Abul Kalam Azad, Babul Hasan, and Kamal Hossain (All are ex-Rab members)

Seven-Year Jail (Destroying Evidence) -- Bazlur Rahman and Nasir Uddin (Both are former Rab members)

Disaster Management and Relief Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, and Maj Arif and Lt

Commander Masud were forced into retirement on May 6, 2014.

Following a High Court order of May 11, law enforcers arrested Tareque and Arif on May 17 and Masud the next day.

Nur fled immediately after the murders. He was detained in Kolkata on June 14 for trespassing and possessing an illegal firearm. He was brought back to the country in November next year.

According to a charge sheet, Nur Hossain had enmity with Nazrul Islam over issues related to the city corporation. He paid the Rab officials to abduct and kill Nazrul.

Being the chief of Rab-11, Tareque ordered his subordinates to abduct and kill the persons and hide the bodies for financial benefits.

Arif and Masud directly took part in the crime, and the other members of the force, whose names were mentioned in the charge sheet, participated in the offence at different stages.

Charge sheets in the two cases were submitted in April 2015.

Following the charge framing on February 8 last year, the court recorded testimonies of 106 witnesses and heard arguments from both the prosecution and the defence before fixing January 16 for delivering its verdict.

Both the cases were tried simulta-

neously. **NARAYANGANJ COURT VERDICT**

On January 16, Narayanganj District and Sessions Judge's court found 35 people, including 25 former Rab officials and Nur Hossain, guilty of abduction and murder of seven people and destroying evidence.

It handed down death penalty to 26 people and jailed nine other accused for various terms, from seven to 17 years.

Of the 26 sentenced to death, 16 are former Rab members including Tareque, Arif and Masud. The rest include prime accused Nur Hossain and his cohorts.

When the verdict was delivered, 23 were in jail while 12 on the run.

Later, three surrendered before the Narayanganj court and two were arrested reducing the number of fugitives to seven.

After concluding the hearing on the death references and appeals, the High Court bench of Justice Bhabani Prasad Singh and Justice Mustafa Zaman on July 26 fixed August 13 (today) for delivering its verdict.

During the hearing, Attorney General Mahbub Alam prayed to the court to uphold the trial court judgment while defence counsels sought acquittals of their clients.