

Huge marlin

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The fishermen salvaged what they could, removing the outriggers, planks and barrels to create a make-shift raft.

"Our water ran out after two days. We waved at passing commercial vessels but no one came to rescue us. But we did not lose hope," the 42-year-old father of one said, adding the crew also ate raw rice and drank some seawater.

"When we were rescued, that was when our tears fell," said Batiller, who has since been reunited with his family in Subic, a port about 80 kilometres (50 miles) northwest of Manila.

The US Navy said the men were lucky to survive, especially given the crew said they had drunk seawater. "On average, death results two to three days after a diet of drinking undiluted sea water or urine in survival-at-sea events as it takes more water than is consumed for the body to process the waste and salt out of the kidneys," Leon Hadley, the civilian chief mate from the ship which conducted the rescue, the USNS Wally Schirra, said.

"Luckily, we were going at a slow enough speed to have spotted the fishermen," the Wally Schirra's master Keith Sauls added.

'Titli' aims

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launches, ferries and speedboats would remain halted on all waterways throughout the country until further notice.

He said the decision was taken as Titli had intensified into a severe cyclonic storm over the West-Central Bay and its adjoining areas.

On the other hand, Chattogram district administration asked a 100 families living at foot of the hills to relocate, fearing landslide following daylong rainfall caused by cyclone Titli.

Mid Elias Hossen, deputy secretary of Chattogram district administration, said they engaged four teams, led by the executive magistrate, to relocate those who were exposed to landslides, adding that at least 100 families have moved from hills, including Motijorna, Batali Hill, AK Khan area and Pahartholi.

Most of the families had taken refuge at their relative's house and others at shelter homes, he said, adding that Shahidnagar City Corporation High School made temporary shelter for people.

In Dhaka and some other parts of the country, the cyclone has caused clusters of clouds in the sky.

The Indian Met Office said Titli may change its course a little and move towards West Bengal after making landfall and would gradually weaken.

'Key plotter'

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Swetchhasebak League. Her photo appeared on many newspapers after the attack.

She was pictured lying among the corpses on Bangabandhu Avenue in a blood-stained golden-silk sari, with a black handbag on her bosom.

At least 24 people, including veteran AL leader Ivy Rahman, were killed and several hundred others injured in the attack.

Then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped with injuries to her ear as party leaders formed a human shield around her.

Yesterday, the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 in Dhaka awarded former state minister Lutfozzaman Babar and 18 others death sentences and Tarique and 18 others life imprisonment.

"The main planner Tarique Rahman was supposed to get a death sentence. As an injured survivor, I am aggrieved," said Nazib Ahmed, a cousin of Hasina, who was among those who created a human shield to save her.

"It was a state-sponsored killing. As then state minister for home, Babar was proven guilty and awarded death penalty. Then prime minister Khaleda Zia, who was in charge of the home and other ministers, should have been accused in the case," he said.

Rashida Akhter Ruma, another survivor with over 700 splinters in her body, asked, "How come Tarique Rahman gets life term when Babar, who worked at the behest of Tarique, gets death sentence?"

"Those who died that day are relieved of the pain we are going through. The pain has increased hearing Tarique's lenient punishment."

Humayun Kabir, elder brother of Abdul Quddus Patwari who died at the scene that day, said he was angry.

"After her long wait for justice, my mother died four years ago. The departed souls of my brother and mother would not rest in peace without the highest punishment of Tarique Rahman."

'WE WILL APPEAL'

Shirin Rahim, wife of then director general of the National Security Intelligence Brig Gen (ret'd) Abdur Rahim.

Rahim was given death sentence along with the 18 others.

After the verdict, Shirin said her husband was innocent.

Shirin said she would appeal to the High Court against the verdict.

Ruckus, outage

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Apart from them, the place was teeming with lawyers and law enforcers.

As the clock struck 10:00am, the lawyers entered the building. But trouble began when journalists tried to follow them in. The police did not allow them entry and soon an argument ensued, after which police allowed entry to one reporter from each media outlet as per a list they had prepared.

The problems did not stop there. The reporters who were allowed entry were then told by police that they would not be allowed inside the courtroom but could stay on the premises.

The newsmen were informed that they would have to hear the verdict through a loudspeaker set up outside the building, a decision to which they expressed opposition.

Given the circumstances, the gathered journalists decided not to cover the verdict. They then spoke to Special Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajol, who said he would take care of the problem.

Around 11:20am, a microbus arrived carrying the accused. After exiting the vehicle, they were led up the stairs to confront their fates. Afterwards, the journalists were asked to go up the stairs to the first floor of the building as the court was about to take seat.

However, once upstairs, they found more policemen blocking the entrance to the courtroom. The law enforcers asked the journalists to stand in the corridor and view the proceedings through the doorway. This kicked up another round of noisy arguments.

After a while, the police relented and the journalists were finally allowed into the courtroom, which, by then, was packed with lawyers.

This was not to be the end of the hassles.

Few minutes after the court sat at 11:40am, the electricity connection in the building went out.

The proceedings were not halted though. Amid the darkness, the prosecution gave its opening argument after which the judge delivered the introductory speech.

As the judge opened the file of the verdict at 11:48am, a court staffer shone the light from a mobile phone on the file so the judge could read it.

The faint glow was not enough so a police official gave his mobile phone, which had relatively better lighting.

The judge used the light and kept

Whose order

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separately on the 3km stretch of the Dhaka-Aricha highway from Arpara to the Paturia ghat.

Abid Hasan, who was going to Kushtia, said his bus reached the Paturia ghat around 12:00am, but they could not board a ferry until 12:30pm.

Sufia Akter, who was heading for Khulna in a bus, said she and her two minor children were facing serious problems as they had no food and there was a shortage of toilets.

Sonia Akter, who was travelling on a Jhenidah-bound bus, said the government should not stop ferry service in the name of maintaining law and order ahead of delivering the verdicts in the August 21 grenade attack cases.

Truck driver Ramzan Ali said he arrived at the Paturia ghat around 1:00am, but could not get on a ferry until 12:30pm, he said, adding that nobody knew why the operation of big ferries was stopped.

Shafiqul Islam, manager (commerce) of BIWTC at Daulatdia office in Rajbari, said around 250 vehicles, including 150 goods-laden trucks, had to wait at Daulatdia ghat to board ferries around 12:30pm. However, the situation became normal after evening, he said.

Newborn baby

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a general diary with Rangpur Kotwali Police Station after the hospital staffers failed to find the missing infant despite a frantic search.

Shamim Ahmed, a surgeon at the paediatrics department, is heading a committee assigned to probe the incident and submit a report within seven working days.

Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said police had collected the CCTV footage from the hospital to track down the perpetrators.

He added that a woman was detained for questioning in connection with the incident but did not divulge her identity.

4 Bangladeshis

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inside the building. Three died on the spot and the other after hospitalisation, he quoted the hospital officials as saying.

"From the embassy, we also visited the spot. The Bahrain government is trying to arrange a shelter for the migrants," the official said.

He added that Bangladesh embassy is arranging temporary shelter and food for the affected Bangladeshis.

reading but his voice was barely audible. Intermittent sounds of walkie-talkies and ringing mobile phones, carried by the law enforcers, made hearing him much harder.

"Is it possible to hear anything? It's full of disorder," a journalist was heard telling another.

A charger light was brought at 11:55am as the judge continued the proceeding.

Some of the policemen could be heard discussing the electricity problems over their mobile phones.

The electricity finally returned at 12:05pm, only to go off five minutes later.

A police official then brought a megaphone and placed it before the judge.

The judge continued reading the judgment with the glow from the charger light. The electricity returned again at 12:15pm.

The court completed proceedings at 12:22pm.

Asked about the problem with the electricity, Kabir Uddin, duty officer of Chawkbazar Police Station, said following the directive of a senior police official, they had inquired about the problem.

They had also questioned an official responsible for electricity in the area at their police station and the official said the power had gone out due to a technical problem amid the rain, Kabir said, adding, police would investigate the matter further.

Saudi govt

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and alleged murder, saying he left the consulate on October 2, the day he entered the consulate.

Turkey's government hasn't provided evidence after a spate of anonymous allegations that the Saudi writer was killed inside the Istanbul consulate.

Daily Sabah, a Turkish newspaper with close ties to the government, named and published photos on Tuesday of the alleged 15-member Saudi assassination team accused of travelling to Istanbul on the day Khashoggi disappeared.

Turkish police were looking into two private aircraft that landed at Istanbul's Ataturk airport on October 2 at different times carrying the individuals of interest in the case.

The released CCTV footages showed some of the Saudis arriving in Istanbul after the first plane landed before 0030 GMT on October 2 and the men later checking into a hotel near the consulate. Aksam daily said some of the men went into the Saudi consulate before Khashoggi.

Grenades

FROM PAGE 1

Majed, who was given death sentence by the court yesterday and is now behind bars, said the grenades came to Chattogram by a ship from Pakistan. After that, the grenades were sent to Dhaka.

"The grenades in Tajuddin's possession were used to attack the Awami League rally on August 21," Majed said in his confessional statement, adding that they used to bring grenades and bullets from Pakistan to Bangladesh and then send those to India.

Tajuddin was involved in sending the ammunition to India through land routes in exchange for money from Hijbul Mujahidin.

The court, in its verdict today, said a series of meetings were held at Pintu's Dhanmondi residence before the August 21 attack and Pintu gave assurances that he would provide security and administrative assistance to Mufti Hannan and the other attackers.

The court said that on August 20, a day before the attack, Mufti Moin alias Abu Jindal and Ahsan Ullah Kajal took 15 grenades and Tk 20,000 from Pintu's residence.

Mufti Hannan and others carried out the attack afterwards.

The court also said that on August 18, 2004, Mufti Hannan and two others went to Pintu's Dhanmondi residence where Pintu's brother Tajuddin, Arif Commissioner and the owner of Hanif Paribahan Md Hanif were present. They also assured Hannan and his cohorts of providing all sorts of assistance.

Quoting Majed's confessional statement, the court said he had a meeting with Tajuddin, Hafez Abu Taher, Maulana Abdus Salam and Mufti Hannan in Saat Masjid at Mohammadpur in March, 2004, where Tajuddin said they would face difficulties in carrying out their organisational work if AL came to power.

Majed said Tajuddin told him that AL would not be able to come in power if Hasina were killed as the party would weaken. They would then be able to strengthen their activities in Bangladesh and India.

Majed first came to Dhaka in January, 2000, after which he went back to Pakistan and stayed there for several months. He returned to Bangladesh again in 2002. Using a Bangladeshi passport, he went to Pakistan in 2006, only to return to Bangladesh in November 2006.

In 2009, he was arrested in Dhaka on suspicion of his involvement in the grenade attack and was sent to jail.

'State-backed crime'

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state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and 18 others were given death penalty on charges of killing through criminal conspiracy.

All of these 38 accused were also sentenced to life term imprisonment for causing grievous injuries to the survivors.

The special court also found Tarique, Babar and 36 others guilty in the case filed under the explosives substance act and handed down punishments ranging from death sentence to 20 years in prison.

The conviction of these once influential politicians, former top officials of police, DGFI, NSI, CID and top Huji militants exposes the meticulously-devised plan and abuse of state machinery to not only carry out the attack, but also to mislead the investigation.

The latest conviction of Tarique, which comes just months before the national election, is likely to deal a heavy blow to the BNP.

In February this year, Tarique and his mother Khaleda Zia were sentenced to 10 years in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. Khaleda is in jail since February 8 in this case, and is struggling to secure bail.

Tarique, who has been living in London since September 2008, was also sentenced to seven years in jail in a money laundering case in 2016.

With Khaleda in jail, he is now acting as the BNP chief.

Yesterday's verdicts, pronounced in a packed courtroom amid tight security, highlighted the abuse of the state power to carry out the attack on the afternoon of August 21, 2004, on Bangabandhu Avenue.

"The specialised deadly Arges grenades that are used in wars were blasted at the Awami League's central office on 23 Bangabandhu Avenue in broad daylight with the help of the then state machinery," said Judge Shahed Nuruddin of Speedy Trial Tribunal-1.

"The prosecution has been able to prove that the accused held meetings to conspire in different places before the incident and blasted grenades in a planned manner," he said.

After the assassination of the Father of the Nation on August 15, 1975, four national leaders were murdered inside the jail as part of a conspiracy. But the conspiracy did not stop there, it rather continued, the court noted.

"Later, an evil effort was made to make the Awami League leaderless on August 21, 2004."

Quoting the testimony of prosecution witness Abdur Rashid, who was junior vice president of Al-Markazul Islami Bangladesh, the court said accused Sheikh Farid, Hannan, Abu Taher, Tajuddin and the witness himself went to Hawa Bhaban, known to be the alternative centre of power, in Banani in mid-August of 2004 on a microbus.

A little later Tarique showed up there, reads the judgment.

In his confessional statement, Hannan also said they went to Hawa Bhaban on a microbus of Al-Markazul Islami Bangladesh and met Tarique, Haris, Babar, Mojaheed, Rezzakul and Rahim there.

They were assured of all kinds of administrative support in the meeting when Tarique told them to carry out the plan and be in touch with Babar and Pintu, according to the verdict.

The prime target of the attack was AL President Sheikh Hasina, then opposition leader. But Hasina, now the prime minister, narrowly survived as some of her party leaders protected her by forming a human shield around her. She, however, suffered injuries to her ear.

CHARGES AND PUNISHMENTS

Then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, former deputy

minister for education Abdus Salam Pintu, former director of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) Brig Gen (ret'd) Rezzaqul Haider, former DG of National Security Intelligence (NSI) Brig Gen (ret'd) Abdur Rahim and 15 others were found guilty on charges of killing through common intention, planning and criminal conspiracy. They were each sentenced to death and fined Tk 1 lakh.

On the same charges, Tarique; Abul Harris Chowdhury, political secretary to the then prime minister Khaleda Zia; Kazi Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad, a BNP lawmaker at the time; and 16 others were given life terms. They were also fined Tk 50,000 each. If they fail to pay the fine, the convicts will have to serve an additional year in jail.

Tarique, Babar and 36 others, who were given either death penalty or life term, have also been found guilty of other charges. Each of them was sentenced to life imprisonment for causing grievous injuries through common intention, planning and criminal conspiracy. They were also fined Tk 50,000 each over these charges.

In the explosives case, Babar and 18 others, who were given death penalty in the murder case, were also found guilty of killing by throwing and exploding grenades and abetting in committing the offences. Each of them was given death sentence in this case as well and fined Tk 1 lakh.

For the same offence, Tarique and 18 others, who got life term in the murder case, have been convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Each of them was also fined Tk 50,000.

Also in the explosives case, Tarique, Babar and 36 other accused were found guilty of grievously injuring victims through common intention, planning and criminal conspiracy. Each of them was sentenced to jail for 20 years with a fine of Tk 50,000.

OTHER CONVICTS IN THE KILLING CASE

Former Inspectors General of Police (IGP) Ashraful Huda and Shahudul Haque were sentenced to two years in jail and fined Tk 50,000 for harbouring the offenders. They will have to serve six months more in prison if they fail to pay.

The court handed down the same punishment to the two former top cops for protecting the offenders.

Lt Commander (ret'd) Saiful Islam Duke, also nephew of Khaleda; Saiful Islam Joarder, former DGFI official (sacked); and Maj Gen (ret'd) ATM Amin, former top DGFI official, were also given four years in jail in two counts -- two years for each -- for harbouring and protecting the offenders.

Another former IGP Khoda Baksh, SP of CID Ruhul Amin and ASPs of CID Abdur Rashid and Munshi Atikur Rahman were found guilty of misleading the investigation and cooking up the "Joj Mia" story. They too were sentenced to two years in jail each.

They were also sentenced to three years in prison for failing to investigate the attack properly.

All convicts will serve their jail terms concurrently.

The convicts were given a month to appeal. The jail term of the fugitives will start from the day of their arrest or surrender.

THE ATTACK AND THE AFTERMATH Hasina was the last speaker of the rally, which was organised, among other things, to protest against violence and terrorism.

As soon she ended her speech and posed for photos at the requests of journalists, grenades started raining down all around.

A day after the attack, police filed a case with Motijheel Police Station against unnamed people.

A few months later, senior CID officials made up the farcical "Joj Mia" story and detained the man from Noakhali along with 20 petty crimi-

nals.

Joj Mia and two others were forced to give statements confessing their "involvement" in carrying out the attack, investigations later found.

The actual identities of the detainees were later revealed by the media and the ludicrous nature of the investigation was exposed by the end of 2004.

After the caretaker government took office, the CID submitted two separate charge sheets in June 2007, accusing 22 people, including Huji chief Mufti Hannan and Abdus Salam Pintu.

The trial began after charges were framed against them in October that year and the court recorded testimonies of 61 prosecution witnesses.

But, following the prosecution's petition, the court in August 2007 ordered further investigation and a new investigation officer was assigned.

The CID in July 2011 submitted supplementary charge sheet, accusing 30 more people, including Tarique and Babar, taking the total number of accused to 52.

DAY OF JUSTICE

The trial proceedings lasted 1,754 days. Finally on September 18, the court fixed the date for delivering the verdict yesterday.

Security in and around the court was tight centring on the verdict. Hundreds of law enforcers, police and Rab, were deployed on Nazim Uddin Road, where the special court is located.

A microbus carrying Lutfozzaman Babar reached the court premise around 11:20am. Babar, in a white shirt and grey trousers, walked to the first floor of the building where the court was set up.

After a while, the remaining 30 accused were brought in by two prison vans.

The court sat at 11:40am. A minute later, the power went off. Amid the blackout, the judge gave a short speech, thanking the prosecution, defence, journalists and law enforcers.

With flashlight of mobile phone, the judge started reading out the summary of the verdict at 11:50am, mentioning the 14 points he took into consideration to reach the verdict. Then an emergency light (charger light) was placed in the courtroom.

The accused were standing in the dock at one side of the courtroom.

As the judge left the courtroom at 12:22pm, the convicts spoke to each other and to their lawyers. However, the Huji members seemed nonchalant.

Lutfozzaman Babar spoke to some reporters at the courtroom and claimed he was implicated in the case for political reasons.

"I leave it to the almighty. Allah will try those who implicated me in the false and politically-motivated case," he said.

Babar's lawyer SM Shahjahan told The Daily Star that they were aggrieved and would appeal before the High Court.

The prosecution will consider its next move after receiving the full text of the judgment.

"We appealed for maximum punishment for all, but the court saw it fit to hand down death penalty to some and life sentence to others," Syed Rezaur Rahman, chief prosecutor of the cases, told reporters.

"We will offer our reactions after analysing the full text of the verdict," he said. "We will also decide on filing an appeal after going through the full text."

Some survivors and family members of those killed said they were not fully satisfied as Tarique was not given the highest punishment although he was the mastermind.

Law Minister Anisul Huq said the government would seek "greater punishment" for Tarique.

18 convicts still at large

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and Obaidur immediately after submission of the charge sheet. Maulana Tajuddin was served a red notice on February 5, 2015, Tarique Rahman on April 13 that year, Harris Chowdhury on November 31 that year, and Ratul Babu on February 13 last year.

Maulana Tajuddin was arrested by South African police in line with the red notice of Interpol and released on bail. But he is now facing trial as a trespasser in South Africa.

"The court declared them [18 convicts] fugitive, and 31 others are in jail while three convicts have been hanged," Syed Rezaur Rahman, chief public prosecutor of the August 21 grenade attack cases, told BSS.

Three convicts of the grenade attack cases former minister and Jamaat-e-Islami secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed was executed for war crimes, while Huji chief Mufti Abdur Hannan and another leader of the militant outfit Shahidul Alam Bipul were hanged for the grenade attack on British envoy Anwar Chowdhury.

The heinous attack was carried out

during an anti-terrorism rally of Awami League on August 21 in 2004 on Bangabandhu Avenue. AL President and incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped with an ear injury.

Then Mohila Awami League president and late president Zillur Rahman's wife Ivy Rahman was one of the 24 killed in the deadly grenade attack. Many AL leaders and activists were critically injured.

Two separate cases -- one for murder and another under the explosives act -- were filed with Motijheel Police Station the next day.

During the last caretaker government's tenure, the first two charge sheets in the cases were placed before the court on June 9 in 2008 against 22 people, including former deputy minister of BNP-Jamaat alliance government Abdus Salam Pintu and 21 Huji leaders and activists.

Later, on July 2, 2011, the CID submitted two separate supplementary charge sheets in the cases against 30 people after a fresh investigation. With the 30 accused, the number of the charge-sheeted accused in the cases rose to 52.

Conduct

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commissioned its own probe.

Suu Kyi agreed Tuesday on the importance of an "accurate and appropriate" investigation. She defended the government-commissioned panel as free and effective, and its members — one each from Japan and the Philippines and two from Myanmar — as experts on human rights and international issues.

"I welcome Japan's support for our efforts for the refugees' return," said Suu Kyi, who is in Tokyo for a six-nation Mekong regional summit hosted by Japan.

But Yanghee Lee — who has been barred from entering the country since December — said the government has shown little capacity for an unbiased probe into the violence, saying it has taken "limited and insufficient steps."

"[Myanmar] is unable and unwilling to discharge its obligation to conduct credible, prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations and prosecutions," Lee said in a report she published via her Twitter account on Monday.