

Little progress

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after trial proceedings of the assassination case were completed.

The Supreme Court on November 19, 2009 upheld a High Court verdict, confirming capital punishment of 12 people, including the six, for killing the Father of the Nation and most of his family members in a coup d'état on August 15, 1975.

Five of the convicts -- Syed Farooq Rahman, Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan, Bazlul Huda, AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed and Mohiuddin Ahmed -- were executed on January 27, 2010. Another killer, Aziz Pasha, died in Zimbabwe in 2001.

Those who remain fugitives are Col (dismissed) Khandaker Abdur Rashid, Lt Col (relieved) Shariful Haque Dalim, Maj (retd) Noor Chowdhury, Maj (retd) Rashed Chowdhury, Capt Abdul Majed and Risaldar Moslehdin Khan.

A taskforce comprised of ministers and high officials of the foreign, law and home ministries was formed in 2010 to locate and bring back the six.

The government had also made global appeals in bilateral, regional and international forums to track down the culprits. However, only two of the six could be traced -- Rashed Chowdhury in the US and Noor Chowdhury in Canada.

Two law firms -- in the US and Canada -- were also appointed for lobbying to bring the killers back to the country.

Officials at the law and foreign ministries said the government has been deeply engaged with the US and the Canadian authorities about extradition of the two killers but they have not yet agreed to send them back.

Bangladesh government has repeatedly asked the US government to extradite Rashed, cancelling his political asylum.

The issue was also discussed when Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen held a bilateral meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on the sidelines of the Asean Regional Forum conference in Bangkok on August 2.

"Immediately after meeting him [Pompeo], he said: 'Don't ask me your Rashed Chowdhury,'" Momen told reporters at the foreign ministry after returning from Bangkok on August 4.

That means Pompeo was well aware of the matter, he said.

Momen told Pompeo: "You speak of rule of law. If I cannot implement the court order of my country, how can we do that?"

The US secretary of state replied that he would look into the matter.

The problem is that the subsequent governments, after the killing of Bangabandhu, provided many privileges to the killers, including issuing passports of different categories. Even, they changed their names, Momen noted.

He also raised the issue of extraditing Noor Chowdhury, who is in Canada without any legal papers, when he met Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland.

Canada has so far refused to deport him, as its policies do not approve sending back a person to a country that has the provision for death sentence.

Freeland told Momen that she has no control over Canadian law. Yet, she said, as she goes back, she would look into the matter.

"I said if you shelter the criminals, the murderers, your country would be a hub of criminals. Extraditing them is also important for us to establish the rule of law," the foreign minister said.

He said he was optimistic that the government would be able to get back some of the fugitive killers by next year when Bangladesh would celebrate the centenary of Bangabandhu's birth.

Asked about it, Law Minister Anisul Huq said the government has been trying to bring back the killers through legal and diplomatic channels back to the country.

"I can't give any timeframe, but hopefully we can do it," he told The Daily Star on August 9.

He also said the government has started a process for confiscating the properties of the fugitive killers of Bangabandhu, while considering formation of a commission to identify other conspirators of the assassination.

Dengue

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allow him to go home," said Salma Begum, mother of the fourth grader.

When asked about his Eid, Masum Sardar said nothing in reply.

"It is very tough to keep him home during Eid day, but this year he has no desire to go anywhere," said Salma.

Prof doctor Uttam Kumar Barua, director of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital said the Dhaka North City Corporation mayor provided toys, juice and chocolate to child patients on Eid day.

Though the number of dengue patients fell just before Eid, it has started to increase since the second day of the holidays, said Uttam, adding that now the number of dengue patients in the hospital is 407.

He said they had introduced two new wards (male and female) for dengue patients.

VICTIMS OF AUGUST 15 TRAGEDY



Every eulogy falls short

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of Sukarno, Josip Broz Tito and Simon Bolivar. Like Ho Chi Minh and Mao, he started at the grassroots, had a similar rapport with the ordinary people, and inspired in us a new sense of pride and self-confidence, igniting that crucial spark of courage to dream for freedom. As with Gandhi, Mujib's preferred weapon of political struggle was non-violence till his hands were forced with the start of genocide on the Black Night of March 25, 1971.

Just as in life, so also in his death Mujib stands unique. Few heroes of history met as tragic an end as Bangabandhu. Not only was he so brutally murdered but so also were all his family members except the two sisters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana. The most heart-rending perhaps is the cold-blooded gunning down of his youngest child Russell, who was fired upon as his assailants were making fun of his pleas to go to his mother.

We know Gandhi was assassinated, so also were Kennedy, Indira, Bhutto, Rajiv, Benazir, Allende. Sadly, world history has many leaders who were killed while in power or at the height of their popularity, but Bangabandhu was gunned down along with Begum Mujib, two sons, Sheikh Kamal and Sheikh Jamal with their newly-wedded wives, and the 10-year-old Russell. His brother, Sheikh Naser, was also killed at the same time.

Sheikh Moni, Bangabandhu's nephew and an important figure of our Liberation War, was killed along with his wife, who was pregnant.

Bangabandhu's brother-in-law Abdur Rab Serniabat was killed along with Baby, his 15-year-old daughter; Arif, 11-year-old son; Sukanta, 4-year-old grandson; and Shaheed, 35-year-old nephew. Rintu, an 18-year-old, who was not member of the family but just happened to be in the house, had to die as well.

A total of 17 members of Bangabandhu's family and extended family were killed on that fateful night in three different houses

-- two in Dhanmondi and one around Minto Road -- showing how well-planned and coordinated the assassins' operation was and proving the massive and inexplicable nature of intelligence failure.

The murder of women, children, expecting mother, newly-wedded brides as well as random people speak both of the brutality and the cavalier nature of the entire killing mission. It was as if "death" was what they were after. They made no effort to distinguish who they were killing and why. They were like mercenaries who had accepted the job of killing and cared little as to who were dying from their relentless bullets.

We, who have lived through that dark night, were soon to realise the true meaning of Bangabandhu's demise. It was the beginning of a concerted attempt to undo 1971 -- what our Liberation War was all about. It was the beginning of the usurpation of the narrative of our struggle, of our slogans, processions, street fights with the police, of our Language Movement, of the various other movements that our valiant students and people in general carried out over the years -- in the very meaning as to why so many of our martyrs made the supreme sacrifice. It was the beginning of the denigration of our freedom fighters, of questioning as to what happened and did not happen during those nightmarish nine months of captivity of our body and soul.

If 1952 was an attempt by the Pakistanis to deprive us of our mother tongue, then 1975 was the beginning of an attempt to deprive us of that crucial "narrative" that gave us confidence, pride, self-respect and, most importantly, courage to tell the world in 1971 that we demand freedom, we demand respect and we will work supremely hard to prove that we deserve both by liberating our War of Liberation.

Since so much of the commemoration of August 15 is government-sponsored, many people now neglect observing the

occasion on their own. Government commemoration will last only as long as the government does it. But in my view, Bangabandhu and his tragic death must be commemorated in our hearts and in our minds, individually as well as collectively.

In our hearts we must feel what he did for us -- the years in prison, the lifetime of struggle, the relentless articulation of the rights of the Bangalees, the uncompromising stances he took over the years and decades and the confidence he invoked in our hearts as someone who will always stand by us, regardless of the temptations and threats.

In our minds we must truly understand the significance of his actions that led to an independent Bangladesh. Because we have it and got it in a span of nine months -- though with an enormous sacrifice -- we perhaps don't fully realise what it means to have a country that is free and independent and one that we can all call our own. We can look at a map of the world and point to one spot and shout, "This place is mine." What a pleasure, what a thrill!

Because we have a country of our own, we are able to flourish in the many ways that we are doing (not to forget the many areas in which we are yet to). Be it in business, agriculture, the various sectors of the SDGs, we are attracting the attention of the world only because we have an independent country which gives us the opportunity to flourish.

Everything that has happened and is happening is because we are a free people with an independent country, and it is Bangabandhu who led us to that freedom and independence by uniting us, motivating us, energising us, disciplining us, making us emboldened, and when the moment arrived, calling upon us to wage our War of Liberation.

It was such a giant who was slain on August 15. Hence, every eulogy falls short.

Mahfuz Anam is Editor and Publisher, The Daily Star.

Pakistan seeks

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Meanwhile, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan used an address celebrating Independence Day yesterday to accuse India of planning military action in the disputed Kashmir region that has long been a flashpoint between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

India revoked the special status of its portion of Himalayan Kashmir, known as Jammu and Kashmir, on August 5 and moved to quell widespread unrest by shutting down communications and clamping down on freedom of movement.

Islamabad retaliated by suspending bilateral trade and all public transport links with India, as well as expelling New Delhi's ambassador to Islamabad.

Khan yesterday travelled to Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, making his first visit to the region since becoming Pakistan's leader in 2018.

In a speech he told the region's parliament that India planned more extensive action than that of

February, when its fighter jets struck inside Pakistan, following a dramatic escalation in tension between the rivals.

"They have made a more horrendous plan to divert world attention from their move in Kashmir, they plan action in Azad Kashmir," Khan said, referring to the portion held by Pakistan.

The Pakistani army is fully aware that they (India) have made a plan of taking action in Azad Kashmir."

Khan also repeated comments comparing the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the ideological parent of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, to the German Nazi Party.

Representatives of India's armed forces and its foreign ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Khan's remarks.

CONFFLICT ZONE
India rules the populous Kashmir Valley and the Hindu-dominated region around Jammu city, while Pakistan controls Azad Kashmir, a wedge of territory in the west. China holds a thinly populated high-altitude

area in the north.

India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir since gaining independence from colonial power Great Britain in 1947. They came close to a third in February after a deadly attack on Indian police by a Pakistan-based militant group resulted in air strikes by both countries.

India's revocation of special status for Jammu and Kashmir blocks the state's right to frame its own laws and allows non-residents to buy property there.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has said old laws prohibiting people from outside Kashmir from buying property, settling there and taking up government jobs had hindered its development.

Restrictions were lifted in five districts of Jammu and nine districts of Kashmir on Monday. India's home ministry said, adding that security would be heightened for both countries' Independence Day celebrations and Muslim Friday prayers.

Tk 100cr rawhide

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Before the Eid-ul-Azha, the commerce ministry fixed the prices of rawhide of cows and buffaloes at Tk 45-50 per square foot in the capital and Tk 35-40 elsewhere.

The price of rawhide of castrated goats was fixed at Tk 18-20 per square foot, while it was Tk 13-15 for that of uncastrated goats.

Commenting on the issue yesterday, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the government is investigating whether any syndicate has been behind the fall in demand for rawhide.

"Action will be taken if anyone is found guilty... no one will be spared," Quader, also Awami League general secretary, told reporters at the Secretariat, reports BSS.

In Chattogram City Corporation areas, seasonal traders dumped more than one lakh pieces of rawhide of cows and buffaloes on the roadside as there were no buyers.

The situation was similar in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Narisingdi, Sylhet, Rajshahi and other districts.

Cowhide was sold between Tk 100 and Tk 150 a piece whereas the usual price was around Tk 2,000, a number of seasonal traders and farmers told our correspondents in different districts.

In many cases, farmers gave small traders rawhide of goats and sheep for free as there was no demand for those.

Many madrasas, which received thousands of pieces of rawhide in donation during the Eid-ul-Azha, failed to sell those due to a lack of demand.

Abdur Razzaq, a teacher at Ehsanul Ulum Madrasa and Etimkhana in Narayanganj, said they sold around 450 pieces of cowhide for around Tk 500 a piece against the usual price of Tk 1,700.

He said that every year they earn around Tk 8 lakh from the sale of rawhide, which is enough to meet almost 70 percent of the madrasa's

PRICE OF RAWHIDE LOW; SMALL TRADERS FACING LOSS



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sacrificial animals had crashed to a 10-year low, dealing a heavy blow to small and seasonal traders.

The situation has worsened this year, he said.

Md Shaheen Ahmed, chairman of Bangladesh Tanners' Association, opposed Delwar's statement and said they paid rawhide merchants Tk 150 crore of the Tk 600 dues before Eid.

He also said tanners would start buying rawhide from merchants on Saturday at the government-fixed rates.

Asked, he said dumping of rawhide by the roads was a very unusual.

Tanners buy 30 percent of the rawhide directly from people. The rest 70 percent are collected from traders and merchants, Shaheen said, adding that 60 percent of the rawhide are collected during Eid-ul-Azha.

Shaheen further said tanners were reluctant to buy rawhide this year as they already had a good stock of tanned leather. Besides, the demand for the leather from international buyers was low as well, he said.

The chairman of the tanners' association also said the recent government decision of allowing export of rawhide would harm the country's tanneries and leather industries.

Md Mofizul Islam, senior



Traders collect truckloads of rawhide in Chawkbazar area of Old Dhaka hours after the cattle were sacrificed on the Eid day. Inset, salt being spread on rawhide to preserve them at a warehouse in Posta area of Lalbagh. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

expenses.

"This time, we have so far managed to get only Tk 2.2 lakh from rawhide sale," he added.

Meanwhile, merchants have blamed a lack of capital for purchasing rawhide and its excessive supply in the market for the poor prices this year.

Delwar Hossain, president of Bangladesh Hide and Skin Merchants' Association, claimed that tanners did not adequately pay their dues to merchants before Eid. As a result, they would not afford to buy rawhide from seasonal small traders.

Talking to The Daily Star, he said tanners buy rawhide from them on credit throughout the year and clear the dues gradually. Till yesterday, the dues stood at nearly 400 crore, he said.

Usually, tanners clear at least 40 percent of the dues before Eid-ul-Azha, but this year they paid only two to five percent of the outstanding amount, he said, adding that two to three percent of the tanners cleared all the dues.

In total, the tanners paid between Tk 30 and Tk 35 crore to the merchants, which was too inadequate to purchase rawhide at the rates fixed by the government, he said.

Delwar said the tanners had paid the merchants Tk 75 crore before Eid last year, when prices of rawhide of

secretary to the commerce ministry yesterday told The Daily Star that the government made the decision to ensure fair prices of rawhide.