

Little progress

FROM PAGE 1
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 (ret'd) Noor Chowdhury, Maj (ret'd) Rashed Chowdhury, Capt Abdul Majed and Risaldar Moslehuddin 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.

VICTIMS OF AUGUST 15 TRAGEDY



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman



Fazilatunnesa Mujib



Sheikh Kamal



Sheikh Jamal



Sultana Kamal



Sheikh Russell



Sheikh Naser



Abdur Rab Serniabat



Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni



Rosy Jamal



Colonel Jamil Uddin Ahmed



Shaheed Serniabat



Baby



Arzu Moni



Arif



Sukanta



Rintu

Every eulogy falls short

FROM PAGE 1
the likes of Sukarno, Josip Broz Tito and Si-mon 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, Bhut-to, 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 a 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 Dhan-mondi and one around Minto Road -- showing how well-planned and co-ordinated the assassins' operation was and proving the massive and in-explicable 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 -- of 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 country.

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.

Tk 100cr rawhide

FROM PAGE 1
Rawhide was sold at significantly low prices over the last 11 years as merchants didn't buy it at the government-fixed rates, he told journalists at his Rangpur residence.

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.

Around one crore sacrificial animals are slaughtered on the occasion of the Eid-ul-Azha every year.

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 parts of Dhaka, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Sylhet, Rajshahi and many 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

PRICE OF RAWHIDE

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between Tk 30 and Tk 35 crore, which was too inadequate to buy rawhide at the government-fixed rates, he said.

Delwar, however, said a few tanners had cleared all the dues before the Eid.

He further said tanners had paid the merchants Tk 75 crore before the Eid last year, when rawhide prices crashed to a 10-year low, dealing a heavy blow to seasonal traders.

The situation has worsened this year, he added.

Contacted, Md Shaheen Ahmed, chairman of Bangladesh Tanners' Association, opposed Delwar's statement on the outstanding amount, and said they paid rawhide merchants Tk 150 crore.

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

Shaheen mentioned that tanners buy 70 percent of the rawhide from merchants and the rest from small traders. And around 60 percent of the rawhide is collected during the Eid-ul-Azha, he said.

Replying to a query, he said tanners were reluctant to buy rawhide this year as they already had good stocks of tanned leather. Besides, the demand in the international market was low.

About a recent government decision to allow export of rawhide, the tanners' association chairman said



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



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 used to get around Tk 8 lakh from the sale of rawhide, which could meet almost 70 percent of the madrasa's expenses.

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

Talking to this newspaper, a number of rawhide merchants blamed a lack of capital and excessive supply of rawhide for the fall in demand.

Delwar Hossain, president of Bangladesh Hide and Skin Merchants' Association, claimed that merchants had to stop buying rawhide from seasonal traders as tanners had paid the merchants only a small portion of their dues before the Eid.

Tanners buy rawhide from merchants on credit throughout the year and clear the dues in phases. The dues stood at around 400 crore as of yesterday, he said.

Delwar mentioned that tanners usually pay at least 40 percent of the outstanding amount before the Eid-ul-Azha every year, but this time they paid around 5 percent of the sum.

Tanners had paid merchants

the move could harm the tanneries and leather industry in the country.

The industry might not get adequate rawhide if it is exported, added Shaheen.

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, Md Mofizul Islam, senior secretary of the commerce ministry, said the government took the decision to allow export of rawhide to ensure fair prices.

"We will allow shipment of rawhide if anybody wants," he said.

About dumping of rawhide by seasonal traders, he said, "It was an irresponsible act. They should have applied salt on rawhide to preserve it."

Nasir Khan, vice president of Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association of Bangladesh, said tannery owners were cautious about purchasing rawhide as prices of finished leather goods were showing a downturn in the international market.

Nasir, also managing director of footwear maker Jennys Shoes, expressed doubt whether the government decision to allow export of rawhide would bring positive results for the sector.

The export may lead to a rawhide crisis in the country, he added. In the newly-established tannery estate in Savar, 131 of the 155 tanneries are in operation.

Two killed in clashes over debt payment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Two people were shot dead and 15 others injured as two groups clashed over a financial loan in Kishoreganj's Bajitpur upazila yesterday.

The dead were Sharif Mia, 35, and his paternal cousin Forkan Ali, 29, both residents of Shyampur village. Sharif was the younger brother of Bakkar Mia, a member of Majjchar Union Parishad, who had a rivalry with Faruq Mia. Faruq lived in the same village as Bakkar.

Bakkar was the guarantor of a loan Faruq took from another villager. Bakkar put pressure on Faruq to pay the money back but Faruq kept refusing to, said Officer-in-Charge of



Army Chief General Aziz Ahmed, right, unveiling a terracotta wall with a mural of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman titled History My Pride at the Army Golf Club in Dhaka cantonment yesterday.



Dengue spoils Eid

FROM PAGE 1
Begum, mother of Tasnuba.

Like them, dozens other dengue-infected children in the 650-bed hospital came to spend the Eid day in the park. Surrounded by trees, the main attractions there for children were the swings, slides and see-saws.

This kind of facility, however, is not available in every other hospital. "My son Masum Sardar has been undergoing treatment in the hospital for the last five days but still he is not risk free for which doctor did not 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 Suhrawady 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.

PHOTO: ISPR