

Dhaka was always her home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A large Bangladesh flag and a pennant emblazoned with the word "Dhaka" hung on the wall of her dorm at Emory University in Atlanta, USA.



Abinta Kabir

Born in Bangladesh, Abinta Kabir, who was a dual passport holder of Bangladesh and the United States, grew up with a strong sense of belonging to her motherland.

It was that sense of belonging which brought her back to the country of her birth during her summer break.

Abinta was growing up to become somebody the nation could be proud of, completing her freshman year with excellent grades.

But a group of fanatics cut her life short.

Abinta, 19, was at Holey Artisan Bakery meeting her friends, Tarishi Jain and Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain, on the dark July 1st day of 2016, when all three were killed by a group of terrorists.

"To Abinta, Bangladesh was always home. She had a steadfast sense of responsibility to the country she was born in, the country where she lived a significant portion of her life," her bio at the Abinta Foundation's website reads.

Abinta was a victim in the worst-ever hostage crisis in the country. After around two years of investigation, police on July 23 last year pressed charges against eight of the 21 militants who were involved with the terror incident.

A tribunal in Dhaka will deliver the verdict in the case today, less than a year after the trial began.

Against the horrific backdrop of what happened, Abinta's patriotism still manages to stand out as a bright spot.

She had grown up to be an exceptional person. Through her

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Verdict today

FROM PAGE 1 charges at the court.

The defence sought its clients' acquittal, claiming that the charges were brought based on confessional statements of six accused who could not be trusted.

The closing argument started on November 6 and ended on November 17.

Earlier, the tribunal recorded statements of 113 out of 211 prosecution witnesses in the case.

During the trial proceedings, which ended in less than a year, several witnesses, including former North South University teacher Abul Hasnat Reza Karim, his wife, owner of the Holey Artisan restaurant, and top police officials narrated the horror that unfolded during the attack.

Hasnat was first shown arrested in the case, but was later relieved of the charges following a probe that found no evidence of his involvement.

On July 1, 2016, armed militants stormed the Holey Artisan Bakery at the diplomatic zone in Dhaka's Gulshan area. The grisly terror attack left 22 people, including 17 foreigners, dead. Two police officers were also killed during the 12-hour standoff that followed.

On July 4 that year, Sub-Inspector Ripon Kumar Das filed a case with Gulshan Police Station under the Anti-Terrorism Act accusing six named and some unknown people of creating "unrest" in Bangladesh and trying to turn it into a "terrorist state".

Police investigation later found involvement of 21 militants in the attack. Five of them were killed in the standoff, eight in anti-militancy drives later.

On July 23 last year, Inspector Humayun Kabir of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of police pressed charges against eight of the 21 militants. The chargesheet said the militants wanted to destabilise Bangladesh through its worst-ever terror incident.

The eight accused, now in jail, are Jahangir Alam alias Rajib Gandhi, alleged recruiter of the café attackers; Aslam Hossain alias Rash, one of the alleged planners; Abdus Sabur Khan alias Sohel Mahfuz, reported grenade supplier; suspected arms suppliers Mizanur Rahman alias Boro Mizan and Hadisur Rahman Sagor; Rakibul Hasan Regan, so-called religious trainer; and Shariful Islam Khaleel and Mamunur Rashid Ripon.

The five gunmen, who held the diners hostage and were killed inside the upscale bakery in a commando operation launched to end the siege, are Nibrash Islam, Mir Sabeh Mubashir and Rohan Ibne Imtiaz, Khairul Islam Payel and Shafiqul Islam Uzzal.

The other eight killed later in different pre-emptive anti-militancy drives are Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury and Sarwar Jahan, top operatives of mainstream JMB and financiers; Nurul Islam Marzan, a Chittagong University student and café attack coordinator; Jahidul Islam, a retired major and trainer, Basharuazzaman Chocolate, a software engineer; Abu Raihan Tarik, a top operative, Tanvir Kaderi, a banker and financier; and Mizanur Rahman alias Chhoto Mizan, grenade supplier.

According to the charge sheet, the suspects carried out the attack to destabilise the country. They also wanted to put the government under pressure, make investors and foreign consultants leave the country and destroy the economy.

The suspects thought if they could kill a large number of foreigners, they would be under local and international spotlight. At the same time, they would be able to draw the attention of global terrorist groups, said the charge sheet.

On November 26 last year, the tribunal framed charges against the eight accused and the trial began on December 3.

Unforgivable

FROM PAGE 1 university, was also there with his family members to celebrate his daughter's birthday.

Tahmid Hasib Khan, who arrived in Dhaka from Canada in the morning, was sitting down in the gazebo near the lake with his friends Fairuz Maliha and Tahana Tasmia.

The kitchen chefs and stewardesses were busy preparing and serving foods. Conversations were flying around amid the clink of the cutlery. No one had the slightest idea that they would face the worst nightmare anyone can ever have.

Around 8:45pm, five youths, each with a backpack, appeared at the restaurant's main gate. As they were entering it, guard Nur Alam enquired about their identities. As they tried to go in ignoring him, the guard again asked, "Where do you want to go?"

"Get lost," shouted one of them, punching Alam in the right eye. They stormed the premises, shouting "Allahu Akbar!".

Dressed in jeans and T-shirts, they burst through the door. Carrying weapons including semi-automatic rifles, grenades and machetes, they stood with their backs to each other and fired indiscriminately as they continued shouting "Allahu Akbar!".

All hell broke loose. Shrieks and screams broke through the air. Panicked and bewildered, the diners dived under tables and chairs. Staffers scamped for safety.

"You don't have to get scared. We will not kill Muslims; put your heads down on the table," the gunmen said.

The worst-ever hostage crisis would then unfold before the nation. The countrymen stood aghast at the extent of terror not seen in Bangladesh ever before.

The chilling siege ended after around 12 hours, but brought shockingly grim news for the country and beyond: nine Italians, seven Japanese, two Bangladeshis, one Bangladeshi-American and one Indian are dead.

During the siege, the militants held the diners hostage and sorted out targets through a test of reciting verses from the Holy Quran and launched a killing spree.

The Italians were the first victims of the mindless firing. Then the militants shot other foreigners dead. They used the victims' phones to publish images of the bodies on social media.

Law enforcers could not initially fathom the gravity of the situation. As they tried to close in on the place, the gunmen opened fire and hurled grenades, sending a wave of panic in the high-security area. Two police officers were killed in the attack.

freshly opened Holey Artisan Bakery, said he along with eight other staff had taken refuge in the restroom after the militants got inside. Finding this out around 2:30am, the attackers had them come out.

Then he saw bodies lying in a pool of blood. "Don't be afraid. We will not kill you. Listen to me," Nibras had told them, adding that the mission was to kill foreigners.

Delwar said, "I spent the night cringed in fear as I listened to the sounds of firing and haunting screams of diners. I still shudder at the thought of the horrific night," Delwar told this newspaper on Saturday.

The manifestation of brutality of the eight accused and the trial began on December 3.

Around 12:30am, the five gunmen put out lights in the hall room and started hacking the guests -- both Bangladeshi and foreigners -- lying on the floor, said the charge sheet.

It also mentioned the brutality of the attackers as described by Sat Prakash, a survivor.

He heard a woman groaning in excruciating pain. "She is still not dying," said the attacker while hitting the victim with a sharp weapon.

Twenty-year-old Faraaz, a student at Emory University's Goizueta Business School in the US, was killed along with his friends -- Abinta, a Bangladeshi-born US citizen and also a student at Emory University, and Tarishi, an Indian student of the University of California.

As the night wore on, the militants asked the chefs to cook and serve food to the hostages and also the staffers. They were using mobile phones, tablets and laptops and reading news from mobile phone and laughing.

As the day dawned, the gunmen allowed several hostages to walk out of the restaurant. But they didn't release the staffers, who were rescued later by para commandos.

The five terrorists and a chef of the café were killed in the commando operation. Another injured staffer later died in hospital.

Following the café siege, law enforcers launched a massive crackdown on terror networks and eliminated a number of militants.

Since then, law enforcers carried out 28 high risk anti-militancy operations at militant dens where 79 militants were killed and a huge stash of explosives were destroyed or seized. Besides, more than 250 other militants have been arrested, said officials of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of DMP.

"We have tried to submit a flawless charge sheet...We are hopeful that we will get expected verdict," said Monirul Islam, chief of CITEC unit.

HOLEY ARTISAN VICTIMS IN OUR HEARTS, IN SILENCE

BANGLADESHIS



FARAAZ AYAAZ HOSSAIN, 20 He was the grandson of Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group and Shahnaz Rahman, and son of Simeen Hossain, managing director, Eskayef Bangladesh Limited, and Muhammad Waquer Bin Hossain. He was completing his undergraduate studies at the Emory University in Atlanta, USA, and came to Dhaka on May 18 to spend his summer holidays.



ISHRAT AKHOND, 45 She worked as a human resources director at ZXY International FZCO and Arts Provocateur at Institute of Asian Creatives, Dhaka. According to her relatives and friends, she was always jolly, cheerful and loving. On June 26, 2016, Ishrat updated her Facebook status: "Key to happiness is to stay away from negative people, even if you know them for long. Stay blessed."



ABINTA KABIR, 19 A US citizen of Bangladeshi origin, she was a student of Oxford College of Emory University in the US. She came to Dhaka on June 27 to visit her family and friends on summer vacation. She is the daughter of the chairperson of Elegant Group that owns Lavender Superstore in Gulshan.



RABIUL KARIM, 34 Rabiul Karim, assistant commissioner, DB, is one of the two officers who got killed as they responded to the hostage crisis immediately. He established a kindergarten named "Kabi Nazrul Bidyasiri" and a school named "Blooms" for physically-challenged children at his village. He used to bear all the cost of the schools. Splinters hit him in his chest during the attack.



SALAUDDIN KHAN, 49 The officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station suffered splinter wounds in his throat. He bled excessively, which led to his death. He left behind his wife Remkim, two children and a host of well-wishers. Born in Bankpara village of Gopalganj Sadar in 1967, Salauddin joined the police as a sub-inspector in August 1991. He was posted to Banani Police Station in 2015.



TARISHI JAIN, 19 She was an Indian citizen in Bangladesh. She was studying Economics at the University of California, Berkeley. She was in Dhaka on summer vacation and was among those trapped inside the café.



MARCO TONDAT, 39 He was a young businessman in textile sector of Cordovado (Pordenone) and worked for StudioTex Ltd. He was the father of a six-year-old daughter.



VINCENZO D'ALLESTRO, 46 A native of Caserta, Piedimonte Matese, he moved to Acerra (Naples) in October 2015. He was born in Wetzikon, Switzerland.



NADIA BENEDETTI, 52 Benedetti, managing director of StudioTex, a company with headquarters in London and a branch office in Dhaka, had been living in Bangladesh for 25 years. She had previously lived in Italy and Kenya.



MARIA RIVOLI, 33 Rivoli of Lombard lived in Solza with her husband and three-year-old daughter. She worked in textile sector and was on a business trip. She was in Bangladesh for several months before the attack.

ITALIANS



ADELE PUGLISI, 50 Adele, from Catania worked at Arsana as the quality control manager. She was planning to travel back home on July 2 (the day after the attack).



CLAUDIO CAPPELLI, 45 For over five years, Italian worked in Bangladesh with his textile company, which produced T-shirts, clothing and bedding. He lived in Vedano al Lambro in the province of Monza.



CRISTIAN ROSSI, 47 The Italian lived in Bangladesh for 15 years before going back to Italy. He was on one of his occasional business trips. He had intended to return home the day before the attack, but had to delay his departure to finalise a business contract.



CLAUDIA MARIA D'ANTONA, 56 She was the managing director of Fedo Trading Ltd, an Italian textile company operating in Bangladesh. She lived in Dhaka for over 20 years with her husband, Gian Galeazzo Boschetti, the sole Italian survivor of the attack.



SIMONA MONTI, 33 Monti, who worked in a textile firm, was seven months pregnant. She was supposed to return home soon from a long vacation. She lived in the town of Magliano Sabino in Rome.

JAPANESE



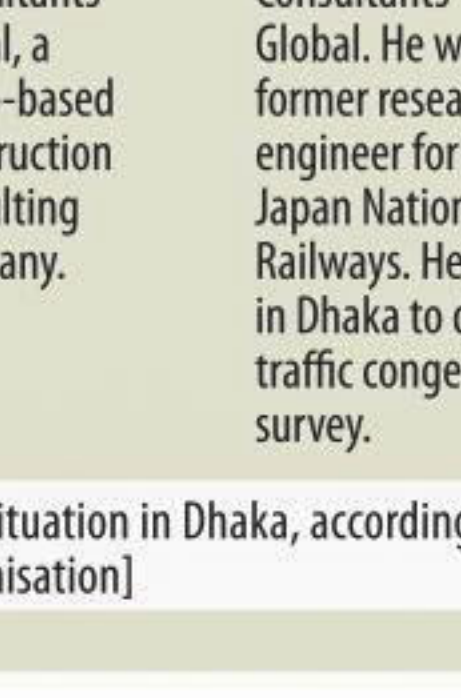
KOYO OGASAWARA, 56 Ogasawara of Katakira & Engineers International was an environmental impact assessment expert. He was scheduled to return home on July 5.



MAKOTO OKAMURA, 32 He was a transportation systems expert. He worked for ALMEC Corporation, a consulting company in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.



YUKO SAKAI, 42 The Japanese was an engineer of ALMEC Corporation, a consulting company in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.



RUI SHIMODAIRA, 27 He was an engineer of ALMEC Corporation, a consulting company in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.



NOBUHIRO KUROSAKI, 48 He used to work for Oriental Consultants Global, a Tokyo-based construction consulting company.

[The seven Japanese were involved in the work to improve the traffic situation in Dhaka, according to NHK, Japan's national public broadcasting organisation]

A light shines in darkness

FROM PAGE 1

On the fateful evening, Faraaz went to the restaurant to meet his friends Abinta Kabir, an American citizen of Bangladesh origin, and Tarishi Jain from India.

Abinta got enrolled in Emory University in 2015. She had come to Dhaka just after completing summer courses. Jain, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, was also in Dhaka on summer vacation, according to a webpage dedicated to the memories of Faraaz.

Around 8:45pm, a group of heavily-armed militants stormed the café and held everyone hostage there. Police came under heavy gunfire as they attempted to enter the restaurant.

The militants had targeted non-Muslims and foreigners. When the militants learnt that Faraaz was a Bangladeshi Muslim, they asked him to leave. He asked if his two friends could come with him. As the terrorists refused to let the two go, Faraaz chose to stay by their side till the end, according to witnesses who were inside the café during the siege.

After nearly 12 hours of the standoff, special forces of the army succeeded in breaking the siege. The bodies of 20 victims, including Faraaz, Tarishi and Abinta, were found inside the café.

While studying in the US, Faraaz was determined to return home and contribute to the development of the country, following in the footsteps of his mother Simeen Hossain, managing director of Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd, as well as the footsteps of his grandparents Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom Group, and Shahnaz Rahman.

Though that dream remained unfulfilled, the rare example of his courage, friendship and humanity, which has been recognised globally, remains a beacon of hope for humanity.

Milan-based non-profit organisation Garden of the Righteous Worldwide, in cooperation with the Italian foreign ministry, honoured Faraaz by setting up a "Garden of the Righteous" at the Italian embassy in Tunisian capital Tunis in July 2016.

He is the only non-Arab Muslim who has been inducted into the Garden for standing up against the

current spate of terrorism. The Harmony Foundation of India in November 2016 posthumously conferred on Faraaz the Mother Teresa Memorial International Award for Social Justice -- an award that was given to persons like the Dalai Lama, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Baroness Caroline Cox and Malala Yousafzai.

In recognition of his valour, Distressed Children & Infants International (DCI) -- a US-based child rights organisation -- in February 2017 posthumously gave Faraaz the DCI 2017 Humanitarian Award.

To promote the values demonstrated by Faraaz, PepsiCo INC. in 2016 launched annual "Faraaz Hossain Courage Award" for the next 20 years.

In one of his articles in 2016, veteran Indian journalist and columnist Kuldeep Nayar wrote, "Just as statues of Bhagat Singh have been erected all over India, Faraaz should also be remembered in the entire subcontinent and I am confident that people would name their sons and statues after him, not only in Bangladesh but also in India and elsewhere."

CIID quizzes 32 more importers

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on sales to the large traders. And if needed we will talk to them," said CIID Director General Shahidul Islam while briefing reporters at his office.

"Our objective is to ensure that no one hoards onions so that the bulbs go to market without delay," said Shahidul, adding that they expect the prices of onions to come down within a couple of days.

Dhaka trusts

FROM PAGE 1 officially.

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh detained 32 people on Sunday while entering Bangladesh from India through Doulatpur border in Jashore's Benapole.

The detainees include 13 women and two children. There are issues among neighbouring countries in other parts of the world, and there are some minor issues with India, but major ones were resolved in a very mature way, Momen said.

"Minor issues in the process will go away." In September, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina that the NRC in India would have no impact on Bangladesh, and there was no need to worry.

In August, India published the final citizenship list in Assam, excluding nearly two million people amid fears they could be rendered stateless, reports AP.

The list, known as the National Register of Citizens, intends to identify legal residents and weed out illegal immigrants from the state. Around 31.1 million people were included in the list, leaving out 1.9 million people, according to a statement from the Assam government.

More than three years after the massacre, the survivors still recount the gruelling hours of the siege. "It was a horrific night. I did not think I would be alive," Delwar Hossain, who was the assistant chef of the restaurant, told The Daily Star on Saturday.

Delwar, who got re-appointed in

[This narrative is based on witness accounts and description of the incident in the charge sheet of the Holey Artisan attack case]