



The then Gobinda Mosque, now known as Al-Amin Mosque, in Pabna town bears the testimony of the first attack by the Pakistan Army in the district town during the Liberation War in 1971.

PHOTO: STAR

Mosque bears horrific memories of 1971

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Soon after the crackdown by the Pakistan army on the unarmed people of Bangladesh on the black night of March 25 in 1971, the occupation forces started raiding at different places across the country.

But people of Pabna never imagined that the Pakistani forces would launch their first attack in the district during a gathering at a namaz-e-janaza.

The horrific incident occurred on March 27, two days after the crackdown, when people of Gobinda, Krishnapur and other adjacent areas in Pabna town were attending a namaz-e-janaza in front of the Gobinda Mosque, now known as Al-Amin Mosque, to pay homage to Shukur Ali, a resident of Gobinda village.

Shukur, a supporter of Awami League (AL), was killed during a clash on March 25, 1971.

The occupation troops numbering eight to ten reached the mosque premises and opened fire on the innocent people while they were attending Shukur's namaz-e-janaza after the Asr prayer, defying the countrywide curfew on that day.

The firing left Abdus Samad, an inhabitant

of neighbouring Krishnapur village, dead and eight to ten, including the Imam of the prayer, others bullet-hit.

People of Pabna still remember the day and also demand to preserve the memory of the incident for the future generation.

"Local people, who joined Shukur Ali's namaz-e-janaza, never imagined that the Pakistani troops would attack on a janaza prayer," Freedom Fighter Robiul Islam, also an



eye witness of the incident told the Daily Star.

"Before I can guess what was going on, I found Abdus Samad, who was standing beside me during the janaza prayer lying in a pool of blood," added, Robiul, also a writer and senior journalist.

Samad died on the spot while Moulana Ibrahim Khalil, imam of the prayer, and some others including Badiuzzaman and Akkas Ali received bullet injuries in the firing, he said,

adding that almost all the injured victims, however, died carrying the bullet wounds of that day.

"A day after the incident, some villagers recovered Shukur Ali's decomposed body from the mosque premises and buried at his house yard secretly," Shukur's cousin Abdul Bari Baki said.

"The incident was not massive compared to other massacres during the Liberation War, but its intensity is beyond imagination," Baki said.

He also lamented for not taking any necessary steps to preserve the memory of the incident for the future generation.

According to local freedom fighters, it was the first attack in the district by the occupation forces.

"We were running here and there when the firing started. Later, me and my brother Abdur Rashid found our father's bullet-hit body near the mosque," martyred Samad's son Advocate Shawkat Ali said.

My father, a small trader and who had no link with politics, was the first man in the district town to embrace martyrdom, Shawkat said.

BHABADHA'S WATERLOGGING

Farmers defy the odd on their own

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Waterlogging has always remained a perennial problem in Bhabadaha region since 1983, according to the Jashore Water Development Board sources.

Although much efforts have been given to remove waterlogging, a permanent solution to the problem is still a far cry.

Several lakh other people have been suffering due to tidal water that remains stagnant in Bhabadaha area on the country's south-western part for most of the year.

Perennial waterlogging occurred from 1990 to 1996.

But the farmers with their own initiative are trying to defy the odd with boro cultivation. Boro cultivation has started with the construction of embankment with their own funds.

Visiting the areas, it was seen that peasants of Payra, Chalishia, Sundali and Prembagh unions of Abhaynagar upazila under Bhabadaha region have started planting boro by draining out water with their own funds.

Abdul Quddus Tarafdar, president of Kota Chatra Beel Agriculture and Fisheries Project in Chalishia union, said out of 955 hectares of land, 500 hectares of land was embanked at a cost of about Tk 40 lakh.

Water pumps were used to flush out the water from the fields for about a month and the farmers started planting Boro in February, he said.

Boro cultivation could be completed in about 400 hectares of land. Farmers are

dreaming of bumper crops now, he also said.

Prabir Kumar Roy, a farmer from Sundali Union, said, "We have completed Boro cultivation on 300 hectares of land through our own funds."

"The people of the region are living an inhuman life as waterlogging occurs every year due to the short-sightedness of the Water Development Board," he alleged.

A number of farmers Prembagh and

Several lakh people of Bhabadaha area in the country's south-western part have been suffering due to tidal water that remains stagnant for most of the year.

Payra Union said that they were planting boro with a lot of effort.

No government assistance was found to remove water from the beel.

Upazila Agriculture Officer Golam Samdani said boro crops have been planted in 13,000 hectares of land out of 27,000 hectares in Abhaynagar upazila. The rest of the land is still under water.

Farmers of four unions of Bhabadaha area of the upazila have planted boro on their own initiative, he added.



Water pumps are used to flush out the water from the fields in Bhabadaha area of Jashore's Abhaynagar upazila.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangabandhu rejects

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solution to the situation in East Pakistan after the sine die postponement of the National Assembly. Yahya took the decision in consultation with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at a meeting held on March 2.

BANGABANDHU REJECTS INVITATION Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rejected the invitation of Yahya to attend the proposed meeting. He termed the invitation a "cruel joke" since it followed "widespread killing of the unarmed civilian population".

The invitation, according to Kamal Hossain, seemed to be a further provocation since it would mean that Awami League, a party enjoying the absolute majority in the National Assembly, would have to sit with other leaders whose claims and credentials to be at the conference were highly questionable.

It was also feared that participating at such an all-party conference would not only place the Awami League in the position of a minority party, but the province of East Pakistan would also be relegated to a minority position. [Richard Sisson and Leo E Rose, War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh, UCP, 1990, pg. 97]

Kamal Hossain reminisces that there was popular pressure on Bangabandhu to reject the invitation immediately. There were also some voices who suggested for a delayed response. Bangabandhu, however, opted for outright rejection with an immediate announcement. [Kamal Hossain, Bangladesh Quest for Freedom and Justice: pg. 85]

Siddiq Salik, then public relations

officer in the Pakistan army, claims that words about the meeting were sent to Bangabandhu to assess his reaction, and he agreed to join the meeting. Later when asked about his rejection of the roundtable proposal, Bangabandhu, according to Siddiq Salik, said, "What I had agreed to was Yahya's meeting with individual politicians or their small groups. I did not, and do not, favour any form of Round Table Conference where I have to sit at the same table with people like Bhutto who is responsible for the shedding of Bengalis' blood." [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL1997, pg:48]

'DISOWN BHUTTO'

The organising committee of Punjab Pakistan Front, led by Malik Ghulam Jilani, expressed the view that the demand of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for the immediate withdrawal of martial law and transfer of power to popular representatives deserves the support and backing of all lovers of democracy and of Pakistan. They also urged the Punjab people to "disown Bhutto's leadership to wrest back the democratic initiative", at present lost on account of what the committee described as Bhutto's perverse politics.

In the committee's opinion the decision had been forced on the country by the "reckless and insupportable ambition" of one single person who claimed to speak in the name of West Pakistan, although he held a clear majority in barely one of the four provinces of West Pakistan.

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Take legal action against 30

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Bangladesh (HRPB).

In May 2010, HRPB filed the petition seeking necessary directives to save the Buriganga from pollution.

During the hearing, petitioner's lawyer Manzill Murshid told the HC bench that this court on January 3 this year ordered the DoE to lodge separate cases against 30 washing plants in Keraniganj area in 30 days.

The DoE, however, has filed three cases with Keraniganj Police Station against only three companies -- Bismillah, Ahmed and Sun Moon washing plants -- under the Environment Preservation Act, 1995.

The DoE has not taken any steps to arrest the owners of the three companies although their offence is cognizable, he said.

Citing a DoE compliance report, Manzill Murshid said TGTDC and REB had disconnected the supply of gas and electricity to the companies polluting the Buriganga in line with the earlier HC directive.

But, they have given further connection of gas and electricity supply to the

companies in violation of the HC directive, he said.

Lawyer Manzill Murshid prayed to the HC bench to issue a contempt of court rule against the MD of TGCL and chairman of REB.

The 30 factories are Ahmed Hossain, Amena, Sun Moon, Eden, Bismillah, Lotus, Global, Rubel, Anushka, Sotota, Chanchal, Abdur Rob, Dhaka, Ajan, New Sahara, Dohar, Relative, New Nasha, Unique, Mow, Setu, Quality, Joena, Kalam, Water Colour, Par Joar, GM, Cumilla, Achhia, and Lily water plants.

The HC also had ordered the authorities concerned of the government to stop dumping waste into the Buriganga.

The authorities concerned and the local representatives have been directed to monitor the situation so that no one could dump waste into the Buriganga and to take appropriate legal action if any individual or organisation pollutes its water and environment.

Lawyer Amatul Karim Swapna appeared for DoE during the virtual hearing of the petition.

Khaleda Zia

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different "flawed points" brought against Khaleda in the first information report of the case.

As the hearing could not be completed, the judge set March 18 for the next hearing.

Khaleda Zia, who is now out of jail following an executive order from the government, is unwell and cannot leave home due to the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the defence.

The Anti-Corruption Commission filed the case in December 2007, accusing her and several others, of abusing power to award a gas exploration and extraction deal to Canadian company Niko when she was the prime minister between 2001 and 2006.

The anti-graft body pressed charges against Khaleda and 10 others in May 2008. Two months later the High Court stayed the proceedings of the case.

On June 18, 2015, the HC cleared the way for the trial proceedings to resume and ordered the BNP chief to surrender before the trial court within two months after a copy of the HC verdict reached it.

Churchill's

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"Aside from its distinguished provenance, it is the only landscape he made" during the war, it added.

The work eventually found its way into the hands of actress Angelina Jolie, who recently put it up for sale.

After frenzied bidding, much of it carried out over the phone, the gavel eventually came down at £7 million, smashing the pre-sale expectations of £1.5 to £2.5 million.

Christie's said in a tweet that the sale figure with commission was £8.2 million.

Two more of his paintings also went under the hammer, with the three works together fetching £9.43 million.

Neighbours press for Suu Kyi's

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Speaking to reporters in Jakarta, the minister, Retno Marsudi, called for the release of political detainees and for the restoration of democracy, while pledging that Asean countries would not break their pledge of not interfering in each other's affairs.

"Restoring democracy back on track must be pursued," Retno said.

"Indonesia underlines that the will, the

interest and the voices of the people of Myanmar must be respected."

Asean groups Myanmar, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam.

It called on all parties to refrain from instigating further violence in Myanmar and to seek a peaceful solution following weeks of protests after the military seized power.

Conduct probe, review DSA

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Mushtaq died on February 25 after he was transferred to a hospital for treatment from Kashipur jail. He spent nine months in pre-trial detention for publishing an article and sharing Facebook posts critical of the government's Covid-19 response.

The government has announced it is investigating his death, which triggered demonstrations and protests from all walks of life demanding the DSA be revoked. On Sunday, 51 eminent citizens demanded a judicial probe into the death and abolishment of the law.

On February 26, thirteen heads of foreign missions in Bangladesh, including of the US, the UK, EU, called on the government to conduct swift, transparent and independent enquiry into the death, and sought to engage with the government on their governments' wider concerns about the provisions and implementation of the DSA, as well as questions about its compatibility with Bangladesh's obligations under international human rights laws and standards.

UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said there needs to be an overhaul of the DSA under which Mushtaq was charged and many were detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression.

The High Commissioner also expressed serious concern at allegations that another man detained on similar charges, cartoonist Ahmed Kishore, has been subjected to torture or other ill treatment.

She reminded the authorities of their obligation to promptly and effectively investigate the claims and to ensure his safety and well-being.

Mushtaq and Kishore were among 11 individuals arrested in May last year in a case filed under the DSA.

The two were repeatedly denied bail and remained in pre-trial detention for nearly nine months before they were officially charged on January 20 this year for posting "propaganda, false or offensive information, and information that could destroy communal harmony and create unrest".

They were brought before a court on February 23 where Kishore alleged that he had been subjected to torture by two Rapid Action Battalion officers and reportedly appeared visibly injured.

The government must ensure that any allegations of ill-treatment of other detainees are also immediately investigated, Bachelet said, adding that allegations of torture and ill-treatment by the Rab have been a long-standing concern.

The UN Committee Against Torture in 2019 recommended that the Bangladesh government commission an independent enquiry into allegations that members of the unit have carried out torture, arbitrary arrests, unacknowledged detention, disappearances and extrajudicial killings as a matter of routine policy, and to ensure that the personnel conducting the inquiry receive effective protection from harassment or intimidation.

The High Commissioner also expressed concern at reports that police had allegedly used excessive force during protests demanding justice over Mushtaq's death.

Another activist, Ruhul Amin, has also reportedly been arrested under the DSA for a post on Facebook over Mushtaq's death.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) also called for a full investigation into his death in custody and the urgent repeal of the DSA, which it said is being abused to arrest critics.

IFJ General Secretary Anthony Bellanger said, "We stand in solidarity with our colleagues in Bangladesh as they mourn the loss of Mushtaq Ahmed. This writer should have never been imprisoned, let alone die in a high-security jail."

"This is a crime against freedom of expression. The long list of incarcerations against journalists and activists is evidence enough that the DSA must be urgently repealed."

'VIOLATION OF DIPLOMATIC ETIQUETTE'

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said the statements of foreigners over Mushtaq's death violated diplomatic etiquette, reports BSS.

"Some ambassadors gave statements over the death and that violated diplomatic etiquette. There is law in their own countries, arrests are made and punishments are given in line with the law," he said.

The minister was talking to reporters after addressing a programme marking the second founding anniversary of the daily Somoyer Alo in the capital.

Libya arrests

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his "crime" under questioning, the ministry said, without revealing his identity.

"Just after the tragic attack of May 2020, I ordered the local authorities in Mezzdah to issue arrest warrants against those responsible for the murders," Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha told AFP.

"The arrest of the main suspect is a major victory," he said, calling it "proof" that such crimes could not be committed with impunity in Libya.

The affair had caused outrage in Bangladesh, which demanded Libyan authorities investigate the murders, bring the perpetrators to account and compensate relatives.

A Bangladeshi accused of heading a trafficking ring with "links to international traffickers implicated in this incident" was arrested in Dhaka in June last year.

The episode highlighted the trafficking of young people from Bangladesh, via Libya and onwards on death-defying boat journeys towards Europe.

Tens of thousands of Bangladeshis have attempted to cross the Mediterranean in recent years, giving Libyan smugglers a large market for extortion.

Years of chaos following the 2011 ouster and killing of dictator Moamer Gaddafi have made Libya a key launchpad for migrants from Asia, East Africa and the Sahel seeking to reach Europe.

Several thousand are stranded in deplorable conditions in Libya.

Singer

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sing 4,000 songs in his career, including hits like "Ekti Gondomer Lagiya", "Ishkul Khuleche", "Amar Antora", and "Boishakhe Tomar Shathe" among many others.