



The 'Morar Bhita' killing site at Nandipara of Harhar village, in Batajor union of Barishal's Gournadi upazila.

PHOTO:
STAR

MASS KILLING OF 135

Still no memorial at 'Morar Bhita' killing site

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Locals call it 'Morar Bhita' (house of the dead), as at least 135 civilians, mostly women and children, were slaughtered at the place by the Pakistan army in 1971.

But after about 50 years of the massacre, no memorial was made at the site -- in Nandipara of Harhar village, under Batajor union of Gournadi upazila.

On May 15, 1971, the Pakistani occupation forces, with the help of local collaborators, opened fire indiscriminately on the inhabitants, about 400, of Nandipara and killed almost one-third of them. The youngest of the victims was five months of age while the oldest was 85.

Abdus Salam Montu, a freedom fighter from the area, said after finding out that the freedom fighters had set up camps at Ashwini Kumar Secondary School and at Adhuna village in Batajor union, a large contingent of Pakistan army attacked Adhuna village and torched Shubho Sarkar's house.

On way back to their own camp, the troops with the help of several locals -- including Khadem Sarder, Manik Rari, Adom Ali Sarder, Jabbar Sarder and Akkas Bepari -- attacked

Nandipara, one of the remotest places in Harhar village, said Ismat Hossain, another local freedom fighter.

After the enemies were defeated in the war, locals gathered the skeletons and remains of the victims from the spot and buried those beside a Hindu temple in Batajor market area, he added.

Abhilash Nandi, now 53, is one of the survivors of the attack. His mother Nirmala Nandi and a sister Rama



Nandi died during the gunfire. He and another of his sister, Gita Nandi, sustained severe bullet injuries.

When infant Abhilash was rescued after the bloodbath, he was still suckling at his lifeless mother's breast. "I was rescued from a pile of corpses," said Abhilash.

Paritosh Nandi witnessed the mass murder from a hideout nearby. The army would never come to the remote place in Nandipara, surrounded by bushes and jungles, unless they got directions and assistance from the local collaborators.

They counted 92 bodies after the

carnage was over, he added.

The attack on the village started around 11:00am and lasted till around 1:30pm, said Aroti Rani Das, another eyewitness, who is now 75 years old.

She said the Pakistanis sprayed the victims -- including 85-year-old Ashwini Kumar Das -- with hundreds of bullets and when they left the spot, the bodies were lying there beyond recognition.

Some of the victims locals identified were: Ashwini Kumar Das (85), Bipin Singh (60), Nirmala Rani Nandi (55), Rama Nandi (10), Anita Nandi (4), Gayn Nandi (23), Sudhir Gayen, Makham Haldar (45), Sonai Haldar (23), Malati Haldar (26), Archana Haldar (4), Jatindra Karati (32), Basna Rani Karati (24), Sumon Karati (10), Sajal Karati (6), Saraswati Haldar (36), Manoranjan Karati (35), Annada Mandal (60), Keshta Mandal (56), Jatish Karati (30), Sumati Gayen (60), Sunodi Gayen (20), Rabindra Nath Gayen (15), Dhiren Gayen (35), Radhakanta (five months), and wife and son of Kalu Raj.

Contacted, Gournadi Upazila Nirbahi Officer Bipin Chandra Bishwas said they were planning to construct a memorial at the site of the massacre.

150 injured as BNP men clash

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at one stage they started beating up the party men, alleged Ashfaq.

They also fired gunshots and lobbed teargas shells, he added.

It was an exceptional incident as police attacked the party men without any reason and around 100 were injured, said Hazi Israil Mia, another organising secretary of the district BNP who has been leading the procession in Ekrampur area.

The injured party men were taken treatment at different private clinics and hospitals in and outside the district.

Emdad Hossain, 32, joint-secretary of Jubo Dal's Sadar upazila unit convener, sustained bullet wounds at different parts of his body and he was shifted to Dhaka in critical condition, claimed Hazi Israil.

Contacted, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station Abdullah Al Mamun said defying the government's instruction for not holding any public gathering as coronavirus pandemic takes its serious turn, BNP men brought out the processions in Sholakia and Ekrampur areas and they also ransacked several shops on their way.

On information, separate police teams rushed to the spots and asked the party men not to organise any public rally but the unruly BNP men attacked police teams first with brick chunks, and in retaliation, police went on action for the safety of people and their wealth, the OC said.

Denying firing on the party men, the OC also said police fired blank shots and

lobbed teargas to bring the situation under control.

The OC also said that three policemen, including sub-inspector Joyanal Abedin and two constables, were injured during the attack and they were given primary treatment.

The situation is under control now and additional police have been deployed in the town to avert the further untoward situation, he added.

In Naogaon town, at least 50 people were injured as the BNP men clashed with the police for almost half an hour yesterday.

The clash ensued at 12:00 noon when several hundred BNP men attempted to bring out a procession at KD's Intersection and the police dispersed them by charging batons.

The police fired teargas shells and rubber bullets while the BNP men regrouped minutes later, threw brick chips toward the police, and tried to set fire on tires on the road, Nazrul Islam, OC of Naogaon Sadar Police Station, said.

The district BNP convener Hafizur Rahman said their men were attacked without any provocation when they brought out a procession as part of their countrywide programme.

BNP activists Mili Akter and Azizul Haque were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital while others were treated at local clinics, he said.

The OC said at least six policemen were also hurt with brick chips in the clash.

Our correspondents in Rajshahi and Mymensingh contributed to this report.

UP Polls: 12 injured in Barguna clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 12 were injured in clashes between the supporters of Awami League (AL)- backed chairman candidate and Independent candidate in Barguna's Amtali upazila on Monday night.

Five motorcycles were also torched during the clashes.

Of the injured, Shanu Hawlader, 50, Shahidul Mallik, 45, Jasim Gazi, 40, Zakaria, 26, Lokman Sikder, 45, Nasir Hawlader, 50, and Abdus Salam, 30, were admitted to Amtali Upazila Health Complex first and later shifted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Locals said 10 to 12 men, led by and upazila Chhatra League President Mahbub Islam, also supporters of AL nominated chairman candidate Akhtaruzzaman Badal Khan, attacked Shanu Hawlader, a follower of Independent chairman candidate Advocate Mohsin, in the Patakata dam area under Chawra Union and vandalized his shop.

Hearing the news, Mohsin's supporters rushed to the spot and locked in a fierce clash with their rivals that left 12 people injured.

Woman found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police yesterday recovered the body of a woman in Ishwarganj upazila.

The victim, Rabeya Khatun, 28, was daughter of Hadis Mia of adjacent Gouripur upazila.

People of Galahar village spotted the body at a paddy field in the morning and informed the police, who recovered it around 10:00am and sent it to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital for autopsy, Officer in Charge of Ishwarganj Police Station Abdul Kader Mia said.

Trials of organisations ever elusive

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line with its electoral pledge.

"We are committed to try any organisation that had committed crimes against humanity and war crimes. A proposal for amendment to the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act, 1973 for trying the organisations is awaiting the cabinet's approval," the minister said.

He said they would take necessary measures to this effect after the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic was over.

But the long delay is utterly disappointing for justice-seekers and war crimes victims and their families who have long been demanding trial of anti-liberation organisations, including Jamaat-e-Islami.

Delivering its verdict in the case against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam on July 15, 2013, the International Crimes Tribunal-1 observed, "...Jamaat-e-Islami, as a political party under the leadership of accused Prof Ghulam Azam, intentionally functioned as a criminal organisation, especially during the War of Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971."

Established by highly controversial Abul Ala Moududi in 1941, the Jamaat had been banned twice before the independence of Bangladesh, in 1959 and 1964, for creating communal violence.

In independent Bangladesh, the party was banned immediately after liberation but was later allowed by the Ziaur Rahman regime to do politics.

Eminent writer and war crimes researcher Shahriar Kabir said it was frustrating that the government was not taking initiative for trying the anti-liberation organisations.

"Only the individual war criminals have been tried so far after the international crimes tribunals were established. But no initiative was taken yet to try the organisations, including the then Pakistan army high command, Jamaat-e-Islami, Razakar, Al Badr, Al Shams who were directly involved in the crimes against humanity and war crimes in 1971, which is not acceptable to the war crimes victims," he told The Daily Star recently.

Shahriar Kabir also said the law minister has been saying since 2014 that the government would amend the International Crimes Tribunal Act to try the organisations but no initiative was taken yet.

He, however, argued that such organisations can be tried under the

existing law.

War crimes investigators in 2014 recommended banning Jamaat and six other organisations for their involvement in grievous crimes committed during the Liberation War.

The six organisations were Islami Chhatra Sangha (ICS), Jamaat's then student wing now called Islami Chhatra Shibir, Shanti Committee, Razakar Bahini, Al Badr Bahini, Al Shams Bahini, and Jamaat's mouthpiece Daily Sangram.

The demand for the trial of Jamaat as an organisation got momentum after youths occupied the Shahbagh intersection in the capital in February 2013 calling for the highest punishment to be handed down to war criminals and a ban on Jamaat and Shibir.

Following the protests, the government amended the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, allowing the state to appeal against inadequate sentencing.

Some legal experts at that time said the Act had no provision for handing down punishment to any organisation and that the law should be amended again before the trial starts.

So far, a total of 100 persons have been tried for 1971 crimes at two separate special tribunals with six of them executed in the last 11 years.

Besides, appeal hearings of a total 22 war-crimes related cases have been pending with the Appellate Division for around 28 months. There is no possibility of quick hearing and disposal of the appeals due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The Awami League-led government formed the first International Crimes Tribunal (ICT-1) on March 25, 2010 in line with the party's electoral pledge to try people who committed crimes against humanity and war crimes in 1971.

The second tribunal (ICT-2) was formed on March 22, 2012, to expedite the trials. But the government kept one of the two tribunals almost dormant since September 15, 2015 following the drop of number of pending cases at the tribunals.

The ICT-1 has delivered a total of 31 judgments on war crimes related cases since February 28, 2013 to February 11 this year, while the ICT-2 has delivered 11 verdicts on such cases since January 21, 2013 to July 16, 2015, according to the information available on their websites.

According to a study of the Law Lab, a law chamber that conducts research

on different legal issues, a total of 100 persons -- including 52 absconding convicted accused -- were tried so far at the two tribunals.

Of them, 67 were sentenced to death, 26 to life imprisonment, five got 20 years in jail, one (Ghulam Azam) was sentenced to 90 years' imprisonment, and one was acquitted.

A total of 34 appeals have been filed with the apex court challenging the war crimes tribunals' verdict, nine appeals were heard and settled and three appeals filed by accused -- Ghulam Azam, Mawlana Abdus Sobhan, and Abdul Alim -- were declared abated following their deaths, advocate Mohammad Shishir Manir, head of the Law Lab, told The Daily Star.

International Crimes Tribunal Registrar Sayeed Ahmed could not be reached for information and his comments on this issue despite repeated attempts over the phone.

Supreme Court spokesperson Mohammad Saifur Rahman said his office has no specific information about the pending appeals filed against the ICT verdicts.

The last war-crime related appeal hearing took place at the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on December 3, 2019. Convicted war criminal Syed Mohammad Qaisar filed it, challenging the death penalty handed to him by a war-crimes tribunal in 2014.

However, law minister Anisul Haq said the progress so far has been satisfying.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina led government was pledge-bound to bring the people, who had committed crimes against humanity and war crimes during the Liberation War, to trial. We are satisfied that the prime minister's commitment has been fulfilled as several war criminals have been convicted and sentenced to death and life imprisonment. Some of them were executed," he said.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin told this newspaper that the government has formed the tribunals in order to fulfil the people's desire and expectations for trying the war criminals.

The tribunals have delivered several verdicts and many of the verdicts have already been executed after the apex court have disposed of the appeals and some appeals are pending with this court.

"I feel the government has fulfilled the people's expectations," he said.

EU set

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declined to comment.

Like the United States, the European Union has an array of sanctions over human rights since 2011 on more than 80 Iranian individuals which has been renewed annually every April. Those will also be renewed today, the three diplomats said.

Asked why the latest measures were being taken now, one of the diplomats said the EU was seeking to take a tougher stance to uphold human rights. This month, the EU sanctioned 11 people from countries including China, North Korea, Libya and Russia.

"Those responsible for serious rights violations must know there are consequences," an EU diplomat said.

The United Nations has regularly complained that Iran arrests political opponents in a clampdown on freedom of expression. On March 9, U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Javād Rehmān, presented a report documenting Iran's high death penalty rate, executions of juveniles, the use of torture to coerce confessions and the lawful marriage of girls as young as 10 years old.

Death toll

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the coup and the violence and called for Suu Kyi's release, and some have imposed limited sanctions. Asian neighbours have been more guarded though Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have spoken out, and Indonesia did so again yesterday, while renewing an offer to help.

"Indonesia strongly denounces this kind of act. It is unacceptable," its foreign minister, Retno Marsudi, said while on a visit to Japan, referring to the surge in violence.

Indonesia has led efforts by members of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), of which Myanmar is a member, to encourage a negotiated solution, despite a bloc principle of not commenting on each other's problems.

UN to carry on dialogue

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of the housing facility.

The government has already relocated some 13,000 Rohingyas to Bhasan Char from Cox's Bazar in phases since December last year. It is in the process of relocating more in the coming days.

The UN team included five officials from the UNHCR, four from the World Food Programme, three from the Food and Agriculture Organisation, two from United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund and one official each from the IMO, WHO, UN Population Fund and UN Department of Safety and Security.

After the visit, the delegation, in a statement, said, "A United Nations team completed its first visit to Bhasan Char from March 17-20 in 2021. The team was made up of 18 experts from different UN agencies engaged in the Rohingya refugee response in Bangladesh. The visit was facilitated and accompanied by officials of the government of Bangladesh."

It said, "The UN team travelled by boat from Chittagong to Bhasan Char and back. During the visit, the UN team appraised the needs of Rohingya refugees living on Bhasan Char, including through meetings with Rohingya men, women, boys, and girls. The UN team also met with members of the local authorities and security agencies working on the island, as well as some of the NGOs and traders operating there."

UNHCR official Mostafa said the UN team also visited the infrastructure and facilities on Bhasan Char. "This included the accommodation, health facilities, multi-purpose structures, police and fire stations, transport infrastructure, power and telecommunications systems and the flood embankment."

The delegation, led by Fumiko Kashiwa, assistant representative of the Bangladesh chapter of UNHCR, will submit its report on

Kushtia reclaimed

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parliament, on the government to do something. The demand for recognising Bangladesh as an independent state was also quite strong. But Indira's government took a cautious approach. Indira insisted on following "proper international norms" since any hasty step against Pakistan, a member of the UN, would be unlikely to find favour internationally.

Over the next two weeks, India's policy on the Bangladesh crisis began to take shape within this cautious framework. [Srinath Raghavan, 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh, Permanent Black, 2013, pg. 61]

TAJUDDIN ENTERS INDIA

Tajuddin Ahmad and Amirul Islam crossed over to India in the early hours of March 30, 1971. They met senior Border Security Force (BSF) officer in West Bengal, Golok Majumdar, at the border post. Tajuddin briefed on the situation in Bangladesh and handed over a list of Awami League leaders and members of the National Assembly.

the trip to the foreign ministry.

Government officials expressed optimism that the UN would be involved in the relocation of Rohingyas after the visit, as the facilities on Bhasan Char are much better than those in Cox's Bazar.

Bangladesh Navy implemented the Tk 3,100 crore housing project after some 750,000 Rohingyas had fled a military crackdown in Myanmar's Rakhine state in 2017 and took shelter in camps in Teknaf and Ukha.

Apart from the risk of landslides in the hilly terrain, the government cited issues such as drug peddling, human trafficking, gender-based violence, conflicts between factions of the refugee communities in Cox's Bazar, and environmental degradation as major reasons for the relocation.

The UN had raised concerns over risks of tidal surge and cyclone at the remote island, but the government said with 120 brick-built cluster villages and 120 cyclone shelters, flood protection embankments, facilities for education, farming and fishing, hospitals and playgrounds, the Char is a much better living place than the Cox's Bazar camps.

The UN said it wanted to send one of its technical teams to the island to assess the housing facilities. Asked by the government, it even submitted the terms of reference for the visit in December 2019. The move got stalled after that.

Project officials said separate buildings for the UN and other international aid agencies have also been constructed on Bhasan Char.

After relocation of the first batch of Rohingyas in December, some 44 NGOs volunteered to go there and started providing humanitarian assistance to the refugees. There were concerns over how funds needed for 100,000 Rohingyas would be managed after their relocation.

Sources said it seems that the UN team is happy seeing the facilities and its report would be positive.

Later they were driven to the airport in Kolkata where they met Director General of BSF KF Rustamji, who had arrived posthaste from Delhi.

BLOOD TELEGRAM

On March 30, 1971, American Consul General Archer K Blood in Dhaka, sent a telegram to the US State Department. After providing gory details of the Pakistan army's brutality in Dhaka University, the telegram read: Question of whether university professors subject of pre-planned purge still unanswered although actively being looked into. Academics met since military crackdown fearful for safety and in hiding. They believe they [are] subject to elimination. Systematic destruction of academic records at university suggests campaign underway to erase all traces [of] current "trouble making" generation at Dhaka university. Figure of thousand dead at university nonetheless strikes us as exaggerated, although nothing these days is inconceivable.

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