

RANA PLAZA Finally, the trial begins

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The trial of the murder case filed in connection with the Rana Plaza collapse began yesterday with the complainant's depositions.

Charges were framed about five and a half years ago.

Judge AHM Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan of Dhaka District and Sessions Judge's Court recorded the statement of Wali Ashraf, complainant of the case.

The court could not complete recording the statement yesterday, said Additional Public Prosecutor Bimal Samadder.

It also fixed February 16 for the next hearing in the case.

There are 594 prosecution witnesses, including Ashraf, in the murder case.

The trial had been stalled for over five years due to the High Court stay orders as some accused filed criminal appeals with it challenging indictment orders in the case, said the prosecution.

At least 1,136 people, mostly garment workers, were killed and over 2,500 others injured as the nine-storey Rana Plaza came crashing down in Savar on April 24, 2013, raising questions about labour and human rights standards in Bangladesh.

Hours after the disaster, Ashraf, then sub-inspector of Savar Police Station, filed the murder case against building owner Sohail Rana, his father, and several others.

On May 24, 2015, the Criminal Investigation Department pressed charges against Sohail and 41 others in the case.

The Dhaka District and Sessions Judge's Court on July 18 in 2016 framed charges against all the accused, including Sohail, also a former Jubo League leader in Savar.

Of the 41 accused, only Sohail is now in jail, 37 are on bail and three others died.

Sohail was sentenced to three years' simple imprisonment in a graft case on August 29, 2017.

First all-EVM UP polls mostly peaceful

Allegations of vote-stealing surface against AL candidate supporters; voter turnout low in 6th phase due to cold wave

STAR REPORT

The sixth phase of the union parishad elections held yesterday was peaceful compared to previous phases.

In this phase, the Election Commission held its first major all-Electronic Voting Machine polls in rural areas.

Many voters said they faced inconveniences when voting through EVMs. The machines were used in 216 of the 218 unions yesterday.

People's lack of experience slowed down voting in several polling centres, while there were allegations that supporters of the ruling Awami League candidates tried to occupy voting centres.

EC Secretary Humayun Kabir Khandaker, however, said voting was peaceful.

About 42 lakh voters of 218 unions in 22 districts were expected to cast their votes, but due to the ongoing cold wave, the turnout of voters was low.

Humayun estimated about 55 percent of the voters cast their votes.

Supporters of AL candidate Khwaja

Khair Sujon allegedly stormed the Ashfaqul Haque Manna Alim Madrasa Centre of Nabipur Union in Noakhali's Senbagh upazila, where EVMs were not used.

"They snatched some ballots and sealed the boat symbol," claimed voters.

Presiding Officer Krishna Gopal Roy said 35 ballots were cancelled due to this. Meanwhile, AL rebel candidate Belayet Hossain's supporters opened fire on law enforcers in front of the centre.

Ikbal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Senbagh police, said they have arrested two men in this connection.

Rajab Ali, a voter of Gopalpur's Alamnagar union in Tangail, went to vote at Joynagar Government Primary School Centre.

"After voters' identities were confirmed to vote using the EVM, agents of the Awami League candidate were seen pressing the button on the boat symbol."

Presiding Officer Prodig Kumar Pal said there was one such incident when voting began, but law enforcers later brought the situation under control.

Voters Habibur Rahman and Sharfun Nahar, alleged that after their fingerprints matched at the Sener Char Government Primary School Centre in Hadira union, Ansar member Kabir Miah pressed the voting button before they could.

Kabir Miah, however, said he only assisted those who could not use the EVM.

Voting was delayed by an hour and half at Shikkha Sadan High School of Kasba upazila's Bayek union and Bhairabnagar Government Primary School of Nabinagar upazila's Bidyakrit union in Brahmanbaria due to technical glitches in the EVMs, according to the centres' presiding officers.

Rashedul Islam Chowdhury, AL rebel candidate at Juidandi union in Chattogram's Anwara upazila, boycotted the election in the morning alleging AL nominated candidates' men "occupied several polling centres" and also drove out his agents from several of them.

AL chairman candidate Mohammed Idris denied the allegations, while Returning Officer Abdus Shukkur said they did not receive any specific complaint of vote rigging.



Pradeep Kumar Das and Liaquat Ali, inset, being taken to jail after a Cox's Bazar court handed them capital punishment yesterday for killing major (retired) Sinha in the district in July 31, 2020.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ALI ZINNAT

Shut all brick kilns in 2 dists: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the government to shut down all unlicensed brick kilns in Dinajpur and Moulvibazar in seven days to curb air pollution and save the environment.

The HC bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Fatema Najib gave the directive following two writ petitions moved by lawyer Manzill Murshid on behalf of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh.

The court also asked the authorities concerned to submit separate reports on the compliance of the directive in two weeks.

Pabna UP chairman sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Pabna court yesterday rejected the bail petitions of Bharara union parishad Chairman Abu Sayeed Khan and two of his followers, and sent them to jail over the murder of Yasin Alom, 40, an independent candidate killed in a clash on December 11 ahead of UP polls in the union.

Judge Md Asaduzzaman passed the order in the case filed by Yasin's father against 34 named accused and 40 to 50 unnamed others. Sayeed, nominated by the AL as the chairman candidate, was made the key accused, said Public Prosecutor Abdus Samad Khan Ratan.

'Kishore making anti-govt statements from abroad'

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Staying abroad, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore continues to make anti-government statements on Facebook, the prosecution told a Dhaka court yesterday.

Public Prosecutor Nazrul Islam Shamim made the claim before the Cyber Tribunal of Dhaka which was holding a hearing on a Digital Security Act case filed for spreading rumours and carrying out anti-government activities.

Meanwhile, Kishore's lawyer Jaydur Rahman filed an application seeking an adjournment of the charge framing hearing in the case.

Girl raped in Natore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Promising marriage, a youth raped a ninth grader in Natore's Gurudaspur upazila early yesterday, police said, quoting her family members.

Mehedi Hasan, 22, of Brichapila village had developed a relationship with the victim recently. Around 12:30 yesterday, he asked her to come out of her home over phone. Later, he raped her in a secluded bamboo garden, said OC Abdul Matin of Gurudaspur Police Station. Mehedi was absconding.

Sinha murder case

FROM PAGE 1

AUG 5, 2020

Sinha's elder sister Sharmin Shahria Ferdush accuses Pradeep Kumar Das, then officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station; Liaquat Ali, inspector of the police station; SI Nandadulal Rakshit and six others in a murder case filed with Teknaf Senior Judicial Magistrate Court.

AUG 6, 2020

The court places Pradeep, Liaquat and three others on remand after Pradeep and seven other policemen surrender to the court.

AUG 7, 2020

Pradeep, Liaquat, Nandadulal, Safanur Karim, Kamal Hossain, Abdullah Al Mamun and Liton Mia suspended from service.

AUG 9, 2020

Shipra released from Cox's Bazar jail.

AUG 10, 2020

Sifat released from Cox's Bazar jail.

AUG 11, 2020

Witnesses in police case, Nurul Amin, Nizam Uddin and Md Ayas, presented to court by Rab as suspects.

AUG 18, 2020

Pradeep placed on a seven-day remand. He eventually spends 15 consecutive days on remand. Rab arrests Armed Police Battalion members ASI Shahjahan Mia and constables Rajib and Abdullah.

AUG 30, 2020

Main accused Liaquat confesses in court, detailing his and his associates' roles in the killing.

SEP 10, 2020

The court rejects Sinha's sister Sharmin's plea to accuse the then Cox's Bazar superintendent of police in the case.

SEP 14, 2020

Rab arrests constable Rubel Sharma.

DEC 13, 2020

Rab presses charges against Pradeep, Liaquat and 13 others, naming 83 witnesses; says the three cases filed against Sifat

and Shipra are baseless.

DECEMBER 21, 2020

The court accepts the charges and issues an arrest warrant for fugitive accused Sagar Deb.

DEC 31, 2020

Case filed by Sinha's sister transferred to the court of District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Ismail Hossain; Sifat and Shipra acquitted in three cases filed by police.

JUNE 24, 2021

Fugitive constable Sagar sent to jail after he surrenders.

JUNE 27, 2021

Trial of 15 accused starts.

AUG 23, 2021

Court starts hearing testimonies.

DEC 6 AND 7, 2021

Accused testify in court under section 342 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

JAN 9-12, 2022

The lawyers present their arguments.

JAN 31, 2021

Pradeep and Liakat sentenced to death

Pradeep, Liaquat given gallows

FROM PAGE 1

Sharmin said, "I am happy that the court handed capital punishment to Liaquat and Pradeep. But those who have been acquitted should have been sentenced to different terms in jail," she told The Daily Star.

"I will be satisfied when the verdict will be executed," she said.

Talking to reporters, Public Prosecutor Faridul Alam said, "The accused had committed different offences and filed false narcotics cases. But they were angry after learning that Sinha made videos on their irregularities."

"The accused had threatened Sinha so that he left Cox's Bazar but he did not care about the threats. Later, the accused, in collusion with each other, plotted the murder ..."

He also said, "We are partly satisfied with the verdict. We will go to the

higher court challenging the acquittals."

Pradeep and the other accused were brought to the courtroom from Cox's Bazar jail around 2:00pm.

The court session began at 2:26pm and the judge started reading out the verdict. He was done reading around 4:20pm.

Constable Rubel Sharma's younger brother Rahul Sharma told The Daily Star, "My brother is innocent. He just followed the orders of senior officials. We also want justice."

"If following order is a crime in service, then the juniors in the force will think twice before executing any order...," he said.

ABUSE HURLED AT PRADEEP

While the verdict was being delivered, locals gathered in front of the court demanding capital punishment to Pradeep and Liaquat.

When the police were taking Pradeep back to the prison van following the verdict pronouncement, locals hurled abuses at him. At one point, some stones were thrown at the van.

Police detained one Berek, 32, in this connection, said Munir Ul Ghash, OC of Cox's Bazar Sadar Police Station.

Cox's Bazar Awami League's Organising secretary Naznin Sarwar Kaberi distributed sweets among locals following the verdict.

On December 13, 2020, investigation officer from Rab-15 Mohammad Khairul Islam pressed charges against the 15 accused.

The charge sheet was placed about five months after Sinha was killed in police firing at a checkpoint in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila on July 31, 2020.

Local police said

Inspector Liaquat's team had taken over the checkpoint from three APBn officers before the incident.

Sinha was shooting videos for his YouTube channel at Marishbunia village right before he was shot. He had been residing in the area for a month for filming.

The law enforcers claimed they tried to search Sinha's vehicle but Sinha aimed his pistol at them, prompting them to shoot in self-defence.

They also claimed they found drugs in his car. Witnesses, however, gave a different account of the incident.

They said Sinha got down from his car with his hands over his head, and then the police members shot him.

After the killing, police had filed three cases - two cases with Teknaf Police Station and one with Ramu Police Station.

Sinha's family termed the incident a murder in cold blood and launched the legal battle seeking justice.

Five days later, Sinha's sister Sharmin filed a murder case accusing Pradeep, Liaquat and seven others.

The cases were handed to Rab for investigation.

Two German police officers shot dead

AFP, FRANKFURT

Two German police officers were shot dead yesterday after pulling over a car during a routine traffic stop, prompting police to launch a major manhunt.

The shooting happened at around 4:20 am (0320 GMT) in the Kusel district of western Rhineland-Palatinate state during a routine patrol.

Israel strikes Hezbollah positions

AFP, Beirut

Israeli strikes early yesterday hit a military outpost and weapons depot operated by Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement near the Syrian capital Damascus, a war monitor reported yesterday.

"Sites operated by the Lebanese Hezbollah group... in the east Qalamoun region, northeast of Damascus, were hit by Israeli strikes at dawn," the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The war monitor, which relies on sources inside Syria, said that the attack sparked fires "in military outposts and arms depots belonging to Hezbollah".

The Observatory said there were believed to be casualties but it did not offer a toll.

Manufacturing crossfire

FROM PAGE 1

him to ensure what direction the car was taking.

The verdict states that he then called Inspector Liaquat at 8:47 pm. Liaquat and Nandadulal then positioned themselves at the APBn checkpoint at Shamlapur - after removing the three men manning it.

The three APBn members were ordered to help Liaquat and Nandadulal put up a barricade of oil drums at the checkpoint.

At 9:25 pm Sinha's car reached the checkpoint. He stopped the car and identified himself.

At that point, Liaquat aimed his gun at Sinha and hurled a stream of verbal abuse at him. In response, Sinha and his partner Shaheedul Islam Sifat got down from the car with their arms in the air, the verdict said.

It was at that moment that Liaquat shot two rounds of bullets at Sinha. He took a step and then shot

two more rounds, making Sinha fall to the ground.

Liaquat then instructed Nandadulal to handcuff Sinha, while sub-inspectors Shahahan Ali and Rajib Hossain tied up Sifat.

Following this, Liaquat instructed assistant sub-inspector Liton Miah and constables Abdullah Al Mamun, Kamal Hossain Azad and Safanur Karim to come to the spot from Baharchara investigation centre.

On arrival, they were asked to guard the area so that eye-witnesses could not enter the scene.

The four were acquitted yesterday.

Liaquat called Pradeep at 9:30 pm and 9:54 pm, and the latter arrived at the spot at 10 pm, the judgment said. He spoke privately with Liaquat, spoke on the phone with his higher officials and then approached Sinha.

"When a dying Sinha wanted water and begged

for his life, Pradeep verbally abused him and stomped on the left side of his chest and his neck until he died," the court judgement said.

To hide their activities, they blindfolded Sifat and pushed him inside the APBn check post and waterboarded and physically tortured him, it added.

To stage a drug recovery, Sifat was then taken to the hotel where he and Sinha were put up at.

The charge sheet stated

that a few minutes before 10 pm, constables Abdullah and Kamal arranged for a small pick-up van and Sinha's body was loaded at 10:40 pm to be taken to the hospital.

The charge sheet prepared by the prosecution said they intentionally delayed taking him to the hospital.

He was brought into Cox's Bazar District Hospital at 11:55 pm where he was declared as "brought in dead".