

AUG 21 GRENADE ATTACK

18 years on, the road to justice not over yet

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Eighteen years have passed since the gruesome grenade attack was carried out on an Awami League rally at Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka, leaving at least 24 people killed and 300 injured.

Then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped death in the incident on August 21, 2004.

Trial proceedings of the cases filed over the incident, considered to be one of the most sensational political crimes in the country's history, have been finished nearly four years back; and even, the High Court accepted the appeals of the convicts for hearing more than three years ago.

But it is still uncertain when the ultimate justice will be delivered to the victims of the ghastly attack, because the HC is yet to start hearing on the death references and the appeals filed by 19 death-row convicts.

The case documents and judgment reach the HC as death reference as per section 374 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) from the lower court after the latter delivers the verdict for confirmation of death sentence in any case.

No initiative was taken from the state or defence on time for their quick hearing of death references and appeals in the August

21 attack cases due to the pandemic that forced the court to suspend much of the regular activities, court sources said.

A long period of time may be needed for final disposal of the cases, since there are legal options for moving appeals before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, challenging the HC verdict and review petitions before the same court against its judgement in connection with the cases.

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Veteran criminal law expert Khandker Mahbub Hossain told The Daily Star that it cannot be said specifically how much time will be needed for final disposal of the grenade attack cases, as the HC is yet to start hearing on the death references and appeals.

"If the death references and appeals of August 21 grenade attack cases are heard

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Bikers squeeze through the middle of two buses on a road full of vehicles in Gulistan area, risking their own lives along with their pillions'. Despite the fact that numerous accidents take place due to such practices, some riders don't seem to take any lesson from these incidents. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

AUG 21 CASE

Petition filed for hearing appeals, death references

BSS, Dhaka

A petition has been filed to the chief justice to form a bench for hearing the death references and appeals of the accused in the August 21 grenade attack cases.

Attorney General AM Amin Uddin confirmed it to the news agency yesterday.

Amin Uddin said they have applied to the CJ for hearing the cases on a priority basis.

The attack was carried out on a rally of Awami League on August 21 in 2004. A total of 24 AL leaders and activists were killed and 300 were injured in the attack.

Dhaka Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 announced the judgement in the August 21 grenade attack case on October 10 in 2018.

The case is now pending at the High Court for hearing of the death reference and appeals.

According to the court judgement, a total of 19 persons -- including former state minister for home affairs Lutfozzaman Babar, former deputy minister for education Abdus Salam Pintu and the then two top officials of the intelligence agency -- were sentenced to death.

Besides, some 19 persons -- including BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman -- were sentenced to life imprisonment. Eleven others were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment with fines.

Dhaka-Jashore rail project hits a snag

Ballast supply, shifting utility lines new challenges; installation of track on Padma Bridge begins

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY, back from Padma Bridge

Supply issues of ballast for railway tracks and complexities centring shifting utility lines inside Dhaka city are the new challenges facing Dhaka Jashore rail line project, which is already running behind the original schedule.

Besides, rail communication between Dhaka and Narayanganj may have to be kept suspended for one or two months to facilitate physical works of the project. However, the final decision has not been taken yet.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan yesterday talked about the new challenges, as he inaugurated the installation of the rail track on Padma Bridge at Janjira end in Munshiganj.

Meanwhile, the minister said railway is not considering hiking train fares for now, following the record fuel price hike.

"We didn't send any proposal to the prime minister in this regard so far... We are not considering any increase in train fares right now," the minister said.

Padma Bridge Rail Link Project (PBRLP), railway's biggest project, is being implemented to build a 169-km rail line from Dhaka to Jashore through Padma Bridge at a cost of Tk 39,247 crore.

The government approved the project in March 2016, and it was supposed to be completed within June 2022.

But physical works commenced only in July 2018, mainly due to the delay in signing



of the loan contract with Chinese Exim Bank.

In the meantime, project costs climbed to Tk 39,246 crore, and the deadline was extended to 2024.

BR had a plan to launch train and road operations simultaneously, at least on Mawa-Bhanga section, but later changed the decision, as the bridge authority did not hand over the bridge to BR in due time due to "technical reasons".

The double-decker bridge -- with a roadway on top and rail line at the bottom -- was opened to the public on June 26. However, the rail link project witnessed 62 percent progress till July.

PBRLP authorities received the bridge last month, and the minister yesterday inaugurated track installation work. He said installation of ballastless track on the 6.68-km section of the bridge and viaduct may take four months to complete.

They have been working with

a plan to start rail operation on Dhaka-Bhanga section via the bridge by June next year. "We are hopeful about meeting the target," he said.

However, a railway official on Friday told this correspondent that construction work from Kamalapur to Gendaria in Dhaka city is taking more time, as some new structures including an underpass are being constructed there. So even if the project authorities can complete construction work within June next year, they may not start train operation within June, the official said.

Because, after construction of the rail line, project authorities have to install a signalling system and go for trial, which would take at least two months, the official added.

Asked about the challenges the project is facing now, the minister said the major challenge is the supply of construction materials.

He said they have been collecting ballast from Maddhapara Granite Mining Company Limited, but in recent times, they are not getting enough ballast from it.

So, they have to search for an alternative source, and the search is ongoing, he said.

Contacted, Project Director Afzal Hossain said ballast supply from Maddhapara has remained suspended for around four months. So, they are now trying to bring it from different sources in India.

"We will require around 7 lakh tonnes of ballast, and this will have to be brought from abroad," he told The Daily Star last night.

"We would not have to spend more for ballast because it is the contractor who would bear the expenditure but it may have an adverse impact on timing," he added.

Meanwhile, the minister said the second challenge is to shift different utility services from Kamalapur to Gendaria. Besides, they have to build an underpass at the capital's TT Para area.

Another BR official, seeking anonymity, said they are facing issues to recover their land from the lessee to build the underpass at TT Para. This is the main problem. Apart from a dual-gauge line under PBRLP, the existing metre-gauge line from Dhaka to Narayanganj is being turned into dual-gauge double lines.

The minister said they may suspend rail operation on Dhaka-

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'He practiced journalism with courage and conscience' Amit Habib remembered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amit Habib lived his life independently as a journalist, journalism was his passion and he never thought about anything else, said Habib's colleagues and relatives at a memorial programme of the late editor of the Bangla daily Desh Rupantor.

Creative Dhaka Publications organised the event titled "Onirnitto Amitda" [undefined Amitda] at Bishwa Sahitya Kendra auditorium on Friday.

Habib passed away on July 28 while undergoing treatment at Bangladesh Institute of Neurosciences and Hospital.

He was 59 years old. "Amit Habib spoke about our liberation. He upheld the spirit of liberation... He used to practice journalism with conscience and utmost courage," said eminent historian Prof Syed Anwar Hossain.

His friends, colleagues shared their experiences narrating how much they learnt from the veteran journalist and grew up as a journalist under his supervision and cordial cooperation.

Sumona Sharmin, feature editor of the Prothom Alo, said many of their colleagues are now leading the journalism sector in the country and people like Amit Habib and Pulak Gupta played a huge role in building such a generation.

"Not only they helped us learn journalism, they

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AL the root of all crises: Fakhrul Slams foreign minister for seeking India's 'support' to keep Hasina in power

UNB, Dhaka

Criticising the foreign minister for seeking India's "support" to prop up Sheikh Hasina's government, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said those who stay in power at the mercy of others have no right to rule Bangladesh.

"The current government does not believe in the independence and sovereignty of the country and they're giving proof of this one after another. When the people of Bangladesh feel proud to identify themselves as an independent (nation), the foreign minister sought help from the Indian government to keep Sheikh Hasina in power," he said.

Speaking at a human chain, Fakhrul said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen's comment has manifested that the Awami League government has been in power with the help of the Indian government.

He said the foreign minister gave an explanation of his statement on Friday but did not budge from his position and he reaffirmed what he said earlier.

At a Janmashatami programme in Chattogram on Thursday, the foreign minister reportedly said that he urged the Indian government to back Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina so that she can stay in power.

Accusing the government of indulging in widespread plundering, Fakhrul said this government has become isolated from the country's people. He said the country is facing various problems as Awami League is in power. "This is the root cause of all our crisis."

Restriction on vehicular movement today

UNB, Dhaka

Vehicle movement will be limited in the city's Press Club, Paltan and Zero Point areas today due to day-long political programme at Bangabandhu Avenue.

Traffic division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) requested the city dwellers to use alternative roads avoiding traveling in those areas, says a senior officer of the DMP.

Awami League has organised a day-long political programme at Bangabandhu Avenue in memory of those killed in the grenade attack on August 21, 2004.

On the occasion, traffic will be limited in Press

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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Construction materials for the BRT project, kept in front of Dhaka Airport Railway Station, are not only causing commuters a great deal of difficulty on the road, but are also putting them at risk of accidents. This photo was taken yesterday.



Dengue death toll 18

Total number of patients 4,344

430 still undergoing treatment

Number of recovered patients 3,896

116 more hospitalised yesterday

SOURCE: DGHS

PRAYER TIMING  
AUGUST 21

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 4:25 12:45 4:45 6:38 8:00  
JAMAA 5:00 1:15 5:00 6:41 8:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION