

DHANMONDI 32

An epicentre of independence struggle

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House 677, Road 32 (old), Dhanmondi, Dhaka. A seemingly ordinary two-storey house.

Although it does not look any different than many other old Dhanmondi residences, its role in Bangladesh's liberation struggle sets it apart.

This house witnessed the birth of numerous pivotal movements, including the anti-Ayub movement of 1962, Six-Point Movement, Agartala Conspiracy Case, the mass uprising of 1969, the 1970 election and finally the Liberation War.

It was from this house that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh in the early hours of March 26, 1971.

BIRTH OF DHANMONDI 32 HOME Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was first elected to the constituent assembly in 1955 and subsequently appointed labour minister. At the time, he used to live at House No. 15 on Abdul Gani Road. That year, the government initiated a land allotment programme for different segments of society. Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib expressed her interest, and Nuruzzaman, Bangabandhu's personal secretary, picked up an application form on her behalf, according to Dr Jagannath Barua's book titled "Bangabandhur 32 Number Bari".

In 1957, a one bigha plot was allotted in the name of Fazilatunnesa in Dhanmondi for a price of Tk 6,000. Sheikh Mujib, then chairman of Pakistan Tea Board, made an initial payment of Tk 2,000 and paid the remaining Tk 4,000 in installments.

During those turbulent times, Mujib faced frequent arrests and was forced to change his location to avoid arrest.

After his arrest in 1958, his family was even evicted from their government-allotted residence in Segunbagicha (house#115), forcing them to rent a house near Siddheswari Boys' School for a monthly rent of Tk 200, according to the book.

In the face of persistent threats from the Pakistan government, the family had to move again and found a temporary shelter at 76 Segunbagicha with the help of poet Sufia Kamal.

By 1960, Fazilatunnesa came to



An undated file photo of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Dhanmondi 32 house. *Inset*, the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum burns on August 5 as it was set on fire after the fall of the Awami League government.

PHOTO: COLLECTED/AFP

realise that they need a permanent place in Dhaka, and asked her husband to begin construction on their Dhanmondi plot.

Mujib began the construction with financial support from friends and a loan from the House Building



Finance Corporation, and moved into the residence in 1961, when a three-room single-storey house was completed, according to a book titled Shiekh Mujib Amar Pita, by

Sheikh Hasina.

By 1965, a two-room second floor was completed. Mujib subsequently converted a significant portion of the ground floor into a library and party office.

CRADLE OF MANY MOVEMENTS

leadership.

Its political journey began with the anti-Ayub movement of 1962. It was from these very rooms that Mujib initiated the challenges against the Ayub regime.

As Jagannath Barua noted in his book "Bangabandhur 32 Number Bari", this house quickly became the epicentre for East Bengal's political aspirations.

After the death of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy in December 1963, the Awami League found itself adrift without a leader. A crucial meeting at this house on January 25, 1964, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish was elected president and Mujib the general secretary of Awami League. This critical gathering marked a turning point for AL, laying the groundwork for its subsequent resurgence, according to Mohiuddin Ahmed's book titled "Awami League: Uthhan Parba 1948-1970".

Outside politics, this house sheltered numerous people during the communal strife in 1964.

The historic Six Points of 1966 were also drafted at this very house.

Following Mujib's public announcement of the Six Points in

Hasina sued for genocide, crimes against humanity

FROM PAGE 1

for telecommunications and IT; Mohammad Ali Arafat, former state minister for information; Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun, former inspector general of police; Harun Or Rashid, former additional commissioner (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP); Habibur Rahman, former DMP commissioner; Harun Ar Rashid, former director general of Rab.

Besides them, some unnamed individuals from law enforcement agencies and AL leaders, the AL, Jubo League, Chhatra League, and other wings of the party were accused as organisations.

The development came hours after Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said the interim government decided to hold the trial at the International Crimes Tribunal for the killings during the mass uprising that toppled the Hasina-led government.

The involvement of the highest position holders of the immediate past government has been examined, and it is possible to put them on trial, he told reporters at the secretariat.

The previous government fell after Hasina on August 5 fled to India amid a mass uprising that began as a student protest for reforming quotas in government jobs.

Over 550 people, including students and law enforcers, were killed in violence during the uprising, Hasina and several top AL leaders – some of them already arrested – have been accused in several other cases.

The Hasina-led government in March 2010 formed the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) to try those who committed crimes in 1971. A second ICT was formed later. Five Jamaat and a BNP leader were executed following the verdicts of the two tribunals.

THE COMPLAINT

The complaint, a copy of which was obtained by The Daily Star, was filed under section 3(2) and 4(1) (2) of the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act-1973.

Section 3(2)(a) of the act says, "Crimes against humanity; namely, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, abduction, confinement, torture, rape or other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population or

persecutions on political, racial, ethnic or religious grounds, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated."

Section 3(2)(C) says, "Genocide: meaning and including any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, religious or political group, such as: (i) killing members of the group; (ii) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (iii) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (iv) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (v) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

Section 4(1) and 2(2) deals with the liability of crimes.

According to the compliant, the accused, with an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the unarmed students and people involved with the anti-discrimination movement by indiscriminate shooting committed genocide and crimes against humanity.

Copies of different newspapers published from July 16 to August 6 were submitted as evidence.

The complaint said students and job seekers started quota-reform protests on June 1 and held different programmes to press home their demands.

Hasina, then prime minister, made inciting remarks at a press conference and directed law enforcers and leaders and activists of the AL, Jubo League and Chhatra League "to destroy, in whole or in part, the protesting students and general people", reads the complaint.

Quader and several other ministers, state ministers, and lawmakers also made inciting comments.

Following the directives of Sheikh Hasina, Obaidul Quader and other accused, leaders and activists of Awami League, Jubo League and Chhatra League and law enforcers attacked the protesting students and people, shot and hacked them to death, and therefore, committed crimes against humanity and genocide, the complaint reads.

Following the directives of Palak and

Arafat and other accused, genocide was committed keeping the internet service shut across the country in an attempt to hide the offence and spread rumors. The accused "forcibly controlled the electronic and print media" to keep people from knowing about the genocide, it adds.

As the DB chief, accused Harun mentally and physically tortured many, including the organisers of the student protests, and kept them confined to the DB office, it reads.

As per the directives of the named accused, 286 "false cases" were filed against 4.5 lakh people, and over 12,000 were arrested and then tortured in prisons, reads the complaint.

MORE CASES AGAINST HASINA

Yesterday, another murder case was filed against Hasina and 23 others over the death of college student Faizul Islam Rajon, 18, in the capital's Kafrul on July 19.

Rajon's brother Rajib filed the case with Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Court.

The other accused include former ministers Asaduzzaman, Quader, Anisul, former IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, former DB chief Harun, former DMP commissioner Habibur Rahman, and former DMP joint commissioner Biplob Kumar Sarkar.

The court asked the officer-in-charge of Kafrul Police Station to register the case.

Another case was filed against Hasina and four others over the abduction and torture of Supreme Court lawyer Sohel Rana in February 2015.

The other accused are Asaduzzaman, Anisul, former IGP Shahidul Haque, former Rab DG Benazir Ahmed, and 20-25 unnamed others.

A court asked the OC of Uttara West Police Station to register the complaint.

Sohel Rana mentioned in the complaint that members of law enforcement agencies in plainclothes abducted him from Uttara in 2015 and released him after over six months.

A total of four cases have been filed against Hasina so far.

‘The architect of default culture’

FROM PAGE 1

With Tk 5,245 crore loans to seven banks at that time, Beximco, in a letter to the central bank, called for urgent debt restructuring to survive. On January 29, 2015, the Bangladesh Bank issued a new large loan restructuring policy, under which the central bank entertained applications from borrowers of Tk 500 crore and above.

Some 11 business groups quickly grabbed the opportunity and restructured about Tk 15,000 crore of their defaulted loans – and Beximco alone accounted for a third of the amount, according to a report published by this newspaper at that time.

The borrowers were given a lenient rescheduling benefit of only a 1-2 percent down payment instead of the usual 10 percent and a maximum repayment tenure of 12 years. The policy allowed banks to withdraw the facility if any borrower failed to repay two consecutive installments.

The Bangladesh Bank added that the lenders may sue the borrowers in case of failure to repay the loans. The subsequent actions of Beximco showed that it did not bother.

Under the policy, state-owned Sonali Bank had restructured Tk 1,070 crore in Beximco's loans for 12 years to 2027 at an interest rate of 10 percent, which was much lower than the 13-14 percent interest rate prevailing then.

After a year's grace period, effective from September 2016, the borrower was supposed to pay Tk 57.4 crore each quarter to Sonali. By December 2017, the borrower was obliged to pay six installments, but Beximco made only two payments. And it became a defaulter at the end of December 2017.

Sonali did not withdraw the facility, nor did it sue Beximco.

Rather, it rescheduled the loans given to Beximco again in March 2018. In doing so, Beximco was not required to make any down payment although the central bank's rules said at least a 10 percent down payment of the defaulted loans was necessary to restructure the loans.

"Salman F Rahman has become synonymous with a loan defaulter

despite his contribution to the industrial sector," said Faruq Mainuddin, a banking sector analyst.

"When Beximco began, it was the first conglomerate to establish a corporate culture in Bangladesh," he said, adding that the company's loan default culture goes as far back as the regime of the late military ruler HM Ershad.

"But it enjoyed leverage everywhere because of its enormous industrial presence," said Mainuddin, noting that banks were shy of taking legal steps against Salman's company.

Beximco has operations and investments across a wide range of industries, including textiles, pharmaceuticals, ceramics, real estate, food, information and communication technology, media, DTH, financial services, and energy. Beximco Group employs over 70,000 people worldwide and generates \$2 billion in revenue a year, according to the company's website.

HIS DARK PAST IN GMG AIRLINES Salman's dark past in GMG Airlines is a textbook case of manipulation. GMG had been sliding financially since starting operations in 1998, accumulating a loss of Tk 42 crore until 2006. In 2007, it started making a trivial annual profit of Tk 1 crore. Then it got a messiah. Beximco suddenly bought half the equity stake in GMG in 2009, and things started looking up since.

The profit of GMG jumped to Tk 79 crore in 2010 without any discernible reason, and it showed a golden dream to the public by offering Tk 300 crore in a private sale at a 400 percent premium with the promise that it would soon be traded on the stock markets. New planes would be bought and GMG would fly to new skies.

None of them happened though. The Securities and Exchange Commission discovered financial fraud in the company's books and found its profits fictitious. It did not allow GMG to offer IPOs. Those who bought its shares in private placements never got back their money.

Sonali Bank, which lent GMG Tk 247 crore with a guarantee from Beximco, also never got back its

Take ‘concrete action’ to protect minorities

Amnesty urges interim govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amnesty International yesterday urged the interim government to take "concrete action" to protect the Hindus and other minority communities in Bangladesh.

It also urged the Bangladeshi authorities to conduct a swift, thorough, impartial and independent investigation into the crimes against the minority communities and associated incidents of mob violence and ensure that those responsible are prosecuted in fair and transparent trials.

The statement came a day after Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's address to the minority communities in Bangladesh.

"The call for ensuring human rights and freedom of expression for all is a welcome first step by the interim government in Bangladesh but it must be urgently followed up by concrete actions to ensure justice, reparations and guarantee of non-recurrence," said Babu Ram Pant, deputy regional director for South Asia at Amnesty International.

"The new interim government must ensure the rights to equality, non-discrimination, and bodily integrity of everyone and bring an end to the revenge culture of attacking political opponents that Bangladesh has witnessed in the past," he said.

Rokeya Prachi attacked at Dhanmondi-32

Says the actress

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Award-winning actress Rokeya Prachi was attacked as she and others were lighting candles at the historic residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi-32 yesterday evening.

In commemoration of Bangabandhu's death anniversary on August 15, Prachi planned to lit the candles.

The actress told The Daily Star, "Around 7:15pm, we were suddenly attacked. We were protesting, but then we were surrounded and beaten up."

Earlier in the morning, Prachi staged a silent protest at Dhanmondi 32. The house, once a symbol of national pride, was set on fire after the fall of Hasina-led government.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5