

# Tales of female martyrs of the July uprising

FARID UDDIN RONY

**Women played a significant role in the July uprising. In the past decade, no other movement saw such a spontaneous presence of women on the streets. From actively participating in protests to strategising and coordinating activities, women contributed at every level. They not only led and organised the student movement but also provided support in various ways—medical professionals treated the wounded, while working mothers and homemakers supplied water to protesters on the streets. A report from the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in December last year mentioned 11 female martyrs. Yesterday, we told the stories of five of them. We are telling the stories of five more today.**



## RITA AKHTER

Rita Akhter was only 17 years old. She wanted to become a doctor and lift her impoverished parents out of hardship.

Her family lived in Talkhur village, under the Punit Union of Kalai Upazila in Joypurhat. Her father, Ashraf Ali, was a rickshaw puller; her mother, Rehana Bibi, was a homemaker. Rita was the middle child among three siblings. Her elder brother had not studied much and now worked as a day labourer. Her younger brother had just completed primary school. Rita was the family's sole hope for a better future.

Determined to give their daughter a chance, her parents did everything within their means. Her mother worked as a domestic help, using her meagre earnings to cover Rita's education expenses.

After Rita passed her secondary exams, her father moved the family to Dhaka so she could attend a good urban college. She was admitted to the science department at Mirpur Duaripara Government College. To make things easier for her, her father rented a small, low-cost home in Mirpur-2, H Block, near the college. He continued pulling rickshaws in Mirpur, while her mother worked in nearby houses.

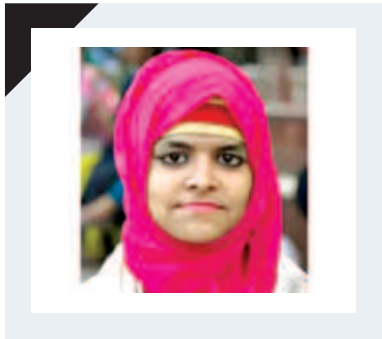
On the morning of August 5, her father left for work with his rickshaw, and her mother went to her job. Around 11 AM, Rita slipped out of the house to join the March to Dhaka protest.

When her mother returned home at noon, she found the house empty. Frantic, she began searching for her daughter. After looking everywhere in the neighbourhood and finding no trace of Rita, she started checking hospital morgues.

She ran from one medical college to another, desperately searching for her daughter. Finally, after 10:00pm, at the morgue of Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, she found Rita's body.

Eyewitnesses later told the family that a bullet had entered one side of Rita's head and exited the other.

She was buried in a local graveyard in her village.



## MOSAMMAT LIZA

Mosammat Liza, 18, came to Dhaka six years ago due to financial hardship, through her elder brother Mohammad Rakib. She started working as a domestic help in Shantinagar while also attending an all-female madrasa nearby to study Arabic.

The apartment where Liza worked was a 14-story building, and she lived on the seventh floor. On July 18, 2024, clashes erupted in the afternoon between protesters and law enforcement, along with members of Chhatra League and Jubo League. Hearing loud noises, Liza stepped onto the balcony to see what was happening. A bullet struck her head, and she collapsed instantly.

Household members quickly carried her to a nearby hospital. Her brother tried to reach Dhaka hearing the news, but was stopped at multiple checkpoints. After much difficulty, he reached Shantinagar on July 20, travelling partly by rickshaw and partly on foot. After a surgery the next day at Popular Hospital, she passed away on July 22.

Liza was the fourth among five sisters and two brothers. In her final days, her brother often spoke to her, trying to convince her to return home. "You're grown up now. Father and mother are looking for a groom for you. Come back home, sister."

In their last conversation, Liza had said, "Just three more months. By then, I'll become a Hafiza. Then I'll go home for good."

She did, but as a corpse. She now lies buried in the family graveyard in Deulashibpur village in Bhola.



## NASIMA AKHTER

Nasima Akhter was 24 years old. In July, she had come to visit her elder brother's home in Dhanmondi, Dhaka. The Science Lab intersection had become a hotspot during the student-led uprising, with daily clashes.

On July 18, her nephews, who were actively participating in the protests, were injured and stayed home the next day. On July 19, the entire household remained indoors. With the internet shut down, they spent time peeking through windows or going up to the rooftop to observe the streets outside.

That afternoon, they repeatedly heard the loud noise of helicopters flying overhead. Tear gas and rubber bullets were being fired from helicopters at protestors across different parts of Dhaka. In the evening, when the situation seemed to have calmed down a bit, Nasima went to the rooftop with her nephew to see what was happening outside.

Within minutes, they came under fire. A bullet struck her nephew and then hit Nasima. She collapsed face down.

Inside the house, there was chaos. Rehana Akhter, Nasima's sister-in-law, was beside herself with panic—one moment she was tending to her wounded son, and the next, she was hearing that her sister-in-law had been shot on the rooftop. They rushed both of them to hospital. The two were admitted to the ICU. The son survived, but Nasima passed away the next day.

The following day, her body was taken to Majdee, Noakhali. She was buried in the family graveyard.



## MAYA ISLAM

July 19, 2024. After lunch, little Musa, just seven years old, begged his father for ice cream. His father said, "I'm heading out now. Come with me, get your ice cream, and then go back home."

They lived in a rented apartment in Rampura's Banasree area. Musa held his father's hand as they went downstairs. His grandmother, Maya Islam, 60, followed them to bring him back home after he got his ice cream.

Just as they were returning a bullet struck Musa's head. The same bullet passed through his skull and hit his grandmother in the lower abdomen.

Wounded, Maya tried to climb back up to the second floor but collapsed unconscious on the stairs. Neighbours rushed in and carried both of them to a nearby hospital in Banasree.

While her grandson was still fighting for his life in the hospital, Maya died the next day at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. She was buried in her ancestral home in Mirzapur, Tangail.

Musa survived, but is still under treatment in Singapore.



## MEHERUN NESSA TANHA

Meherun Nessa Tanha, 22, was a third-year honours student at Hazrat Shah Ali Women's College in Mirpur. Her father, Mosharraf Hossain, was a driver, and her mother, Asma Akter, a homemaker. Alongside her studies, Meherun worked part-time to support herself. Their family lived in Mirpur.

Initially, Meherun was not deeply involved in street protests. But on July 19, her cousin Rabbi joined a demonstration on Mirpur Mazar Road after Jum'ah prayers. During the protest, police shot and killed him. Rabbi's body was also withheld at the medical morgue, with the family facing unnecessary hurdles before they were allowed to take it three days later.

Furious over her cousin's killing, Meherun and her younger brother Tarif took to the streets, demanding justice. She held up a placard that read, "I will not let my brother's blood go in vain."

Her father recalled, "We could not keep them inside the house no matter how hard we tried. They would say, 'Our brother is a martyr. We cannot just sit at home. We must go out and demand justice for his killing.'"

On August 5, after Sheikh Hasina fled, people across the country took to the streets in celebration. Meherun and her younger brother also joined the jubilant rallies. After attending the festivities near the Ganabhaban and the Jatiya Sangsad, Meherun started heading home around 7:30pm, while her brother remained outside.

As she reached Notun Bazar in Mirpur 13, she found herself near ongoing clashes between students, the public, and the police. She managed to slip past the violence and get inside her home safely. Once in her room, she called her brother to warn him about the unrest, advising him to take a different route home.

But as she stood near the window, a bullet struck her. She collapsed instantly.

She was rushed to the nearest hospital, where doctors pronounced her dead. That night, around 11:00pm, Meherun was laid to rest at the Purbabaistake graveyard in Mirpur.

## Army denies being directly contacted

FROM PAGE 1

Army leadership," the statement said.

Reiterating its adherence to national security directives, the rule of law, and human rights principles, the army said Türk's statement had been taken out of context by certain quarters, misrepresenting the army's role and potentially damaging its reputation.

The statement further highlighted the army's long-standing commitment to neutrality, citing historical events such as the democratic transition of 1991. It also referenced its role during the July-August 2024 protests, where it ensured public safety without bias or external influence.

As the second-largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, the Bangladesh Army is globally recognised for its professionalism, the statement added.

It noted that peacekeepers receive a small portion of foreign earnings, approximately Tk 27,000 crore generated over 23 years, which has contributed to the national economy.

The army reaffirmed its strong ties with the UN human rights body and urged that concerns regarding its role be addressed through open dialogue and constructive engagement.

## Govt fast-tracks recovery efforts

FROM PAGE 1

said, adding that the task force is targeting to freeze the foreign assets linked to the priority cases by the end of the year.

It is also aiming to have the British government slap sanctions against Bangladeshi individuals who have laundered money to the UK within six months, and to accelerate the filing of domestic cases against the accused individuals.

A total of 124 bank accounts, amounting to Tk 635.14 crore, belonging to Hasina, her family members and connected organisations have been frozen or attached. Additionally, a 60-katha plot in Purbachal, valued at Tk 1.8 crore in official documents, has been identified.

However, each katha of land in that

area is worth about 4 crore, according to the government's estimation.

Furthermore, eight flats and 10 decimals of land worth Tk 8.85 crore have also been traced. Six cases have been filed on charges of fraud and forgery.

Investigations for the six cases have been completed, and charge sheets have been submitted, Shafiqul said, adding that seven members of Hasina's family have an international travel ban on them.

About Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, Shafiqul said international media reports show that he had bought block after block abroad using money stolen from the people of Bangladesh.

The National Board of Revenue is investigating 11 cases of tax evasion by Saifuzzaman and individuals and

organisations connected to him.

The court has attached four properties worth Tk 20 crore, while petitions have been filed to attach two plots and 31,594.39 decimals of land.

Additionally, 39 bank accounts with a total balance of Tk 5.27 crore and shares worth Tk 102.85 crore have been frozen following court orders.

Information about owning 228 properties in the UAE, seven in the US and 343 in the UK was sent to the respective countries through the foreign ministry. Furthermore, a travel ban has been imposed on two members of Saifuzzaman's family.

For 10 cases, assets worth Tk 1,717 crore were either frozen or attached. Meanwhile, 188 BO accounts having shares worth Tk 15,500 crore have been frozen.

implementation method, which has six options for response -- "before the election through an ordinance", "before the election through a referendum", "during the election through a referendum", "through a Constituent Assembly", "after the election through constitutional amendments", and "through a parliament elected as both a Constituent Assembly and a Legislature".

Besides, a section for comments has

been provided alongside each proposal.

"We hope that political parties and alliances will submit their feedback by March 13. If any questions arise or explanations are needed in the meantime, the commission is always ready to answer and discuss them," Prof Riaz said.

In addition to political parties, arrangements will soon be made through a website to collect public opinion on key proposals, he added.

## 4 held for harassing, assaulting women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have detained two men and arrested two others for harassing and sexually assaulting women, including a US national, in separate incidents in Dhaka, Savar and Cox's Bazar.

One of the men named Rinku was detained from Dhaka's Lalmatia for questioning on Sunday night, DMP Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Ibne Mizan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Legal action would be taken against him on allegations of harassing two young women for smoking at a tea stall in Lalmatia on March 1, Mizan added.

Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki also announced the detention of Rinku, identifying him as "the harasser of Lalmatia" on Facebook yesterday.

Another man named Rasel Hossain was arrested from Motijheel yesterday by the Cyber Crime Unit of DMP's Detective Branch on charges of assaulting women near Dhaka's Shyamoli Square recently, said Talebur Rahman, Deputy Commissioner (Media), DMP.

Rasel recorded and shared videos of him making hateful remarks about women and exhibiting aggressive behaviour in the Shyamoli Square area.

In Savar, police arrested Mohammad Khalid Mahmud, also known as Hridoy Khan, from the Aminbazar area for harassing women and publishing videos of the incidents on social media.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5

## BSF killed 305 Bangladeshis in 10yrs: HRSS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 305 Bangladeshis were killed and 282 more injured along the Bangladesh-India border by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel in the last 10 years, according to the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS).

In a media statement yesterday, the rights group condemned and protested recent killings of Bangladeshis along the border.

According to HRSS statistics, based on media reports and its own findings, 26 Bangladeshis were killed by BSF and another 25 were wounded last year.

In 2024, 47 Bangladeshis were shot by BSF and 158 arrested.

As of March 8 this year, four Bangladeshis were killed, 10 injured, five shot, and 15 arrested by BSF personnel in 15 incidents.

According to the HRSS, since 2015, the highest number of Bangladeshis killed by BSF in a single year was 51 in 2020, and the number was the lowest, 15, in 2018.

The HRSS said the incidents indicate a fragile border security. Despite repeated

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

## Thief's phone ends mystery behind murder of woman

OUR CORRESPONDENT,

Thakurgaon

The mobile phone of a suspected thief unravelled the mystery behind the murder of a woman almost two months ago.

The dismembered body of an unidentified woman was found on the Panchagarh-Thakurgaon rail line in Atwari upazila of Panchagarh on January 14.

Although police suspected that the woman was raped and murdered before her body was dumped on the rail lines, they could not identify the perpetrator.

That changed on Saturday night after locals caught Rifat Bin Sajjat, 23, for attempting to steal a battery-powered

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5