

Khaleda’s condition remains unchanged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia remains in critical condition in the intensive care unit of Evercare Hospital in Dhaka, where she has been receiving treatment for the last 22 days.

The former prime minister has been placed on elective ventilator support to rest her lungs and other organs, her doctors said on Thursday.

The BNP Media Cell said last night that her condition remains unchanged. She has developed several additional complications, including infective endocarditis, acute pancreatitis, and severe bacterial and fungal infections.

Khaleda, 80, was admitted to the hospital on November 23 on the advice of her medical board after being diagnosed with infections in her heart and lungs.



A Palestinian woman walks past residential buildings damaged and destroyed during Israel's assault on Gaza City. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Prosecution appeals against ICT verdict on Hasina, Kamal

Seeks enhancement of life sentences to death penalty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution of the International Crimes Tribunal yesterday filed an appeal with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, seeking enhancement of the life sentences of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to capital punishment.

The appeal, based on eight grounds, challenges part of the verdict delivered by ICT-1 on November 17 in a case linked to the July uprising.

While the tribunal sentenced Hasina and Kamal to death on one major charge, it handed down “imprisonment until natural death” for a separate charge. Former IGP Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who turned a state approver, was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment in the case.

Mamun's brother Shamsul Abedin told The Daily Star yesterday that they received relevant documents and are preparing to appeal against the tribunal's judgement soon.

At the tribunal premises, Prosecutor Gazi Monavar Hossain Tamim told reporters that the July uprising crimes amounted to serious human rights violations and heinous offences, deserving capital punishment, while the massive and deadly

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A nation born out of blood and grit

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so much when the end seems inevitable?”

No civil government existed after December 6, 1971. When the Indian Air Force bombed the city, there were no civic agencies available to clear the roads or attend to the injured and wounded persons, Major General Rao Farman Ali Khan, a Pakistani officer present in the Eastern Wing during the war, wrote this in his book “How Pakistan Got Divided”.

“Dacca was a ghost city. Most of the time it was under curfew, out of fear of Mukti Bahini activities. Most of the pro-Pakistan elements were panicking now, be they East or West Pakistani,” he wrote.

Siddik Salik, then public relations officer of the Pakistan army, described the situation of December 14. Yahya sent a message to Malik and Lieutenant General AAK Niazi, the military commander of Pakistan's Eastern Command.

It reads, “You have now reached a stage when further resistance is no longer humanly possible nor will it serve any useful purpose. You should now take all necessary measures to stop the fighting and preserve the lives of all armed forces personnel from West Pakistan,” Salik later wrote in his book “Witness to Surrender”.

Amid the growing speculation of surrender, on December 16 morning

Major General Gandharv Singh Nagra, who was close behind commando troops, held back at the Mirpur bridge and wrote a chit to Niazi.

It said: “Dear Abdullah, I am at Mirpur Bridge. Send your representative.”

Major General Jamshed, Major General Farman and Rear Admiral Shariff were with Niazi when he received the note at about 9:00am.

Farman said “Is he (Nagra) the negotiating team?” General Niazi did not comment.

The obvious question was whether he was to be received or resisted. He was already on the threshold of Dacca.

But the Pakistanis did not have any reserves with which to resist Nagra. Both Farman and Shariff agreed, then, to do what Nagra asks.

Niazi then sent Jamshed to receive Nagra and asked Pakistani troops to respect the cease-fire and allow Nagra a peaceful passage.

“The Indian general entered Dacca with a handful of soldiers and a lot of pride. That was the virtual fall of Dacca. It fell quietly like a heart patient. Neither were its limbs chopped nor its body hacked. It just ceased to exist as an independent city,” Salik wrote later.

Lieutenant General JFR Jacob reached the headquarters of Pakistani forces that afternoon to discuss surrender. Niazi, received Jacob.

“Col [MH] Khara read out the terms of surrender. There was dead silence

in the room, as tears streamed down Niazi's cheeks. The others in the room became fidgety,” Jacob wrote in his book “Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation”.

Rao Farman Ali objected to surrendering to the Indian and Bangladeshi forces. Niazi said what Jacob was asking him to sign was unconditional surrender.

Jacob assured that they would be treated as soldiers with due dignity and the Geneva Convention would be honoured. That there would be respect for all ethnic minorities.

Niazi passed the document to the others. They wanted some changes. Jacob reiterated that the terms were already very generous and walked out of the room, leaving the Pakistanis to deliberate.

Then the two parties discussed the modalities of the surrender.

Niazi said he would like it to take place in his office. Jacob told him that the ceremony would take place at the Ramna Race Course, now Suhrawardy Udyan.

He felt it would be appropriate to have a public surrender in full view of the people of Dhaka who had suffered so terribly.

Niazi argued that this was not appropriate.

Jacob said Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, commander of the Indian Eastern Command, also chief of

the joint Bangladesh and India forces, would be given a guard of honour by detachments of the Indian and Pakistani armies.

After that Aurora and Niazi would sign the documents. Niazi would then surrender his sword, proposed Jacob.

When Niazi said he did not have a sword, Jacob said that Nazi would surrender his sidearm. Niazi seemed unhappy but kept silent.

Pakistani officers agreed with the Indian terms and Niazi went to Dhaka airport to receive Jagjit Singh Aurora.

It was against this backdrop, on December 16, 1971, in absence of MAG Osmani, the Bangladesh forces commander-in-chief, the government decided that AK Khandaker, deputy chief of staff of Bangladesh forces, would represent the Bangladesh Army at the surrender ceremony.

Officials began looking for Khandaker and finally found him near New Market in Kolkata. They told Khandaker that Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad had asked him to go directly to Dum Dum Airport.

“At that time, I was wearing civilian clothes, that is, a shirt and a sweater, and I did not even have time to change into military clothes,” Khandaker remembered in his book titled “1971 Bhetore Baire.”

After reaching the airport and climbing two or three steps, Khandaker noticed an Indian army jeep

approaching. It stopped at the bottom of the steps and out came Aurora with his wife.

Khandaker moved down the steps to make room for them to board the plane.

“General Aurora put his hand on my back and smiled softly, you are the commander of the Mukti Bahini. You go first.”

After reaching Dhaka, Khandaker travelled with Aurora in his jeep. They passed a sea of jubilant people as they went to the race course, the very ground from where nine months ago, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had announced in his captivating baritone, “...The struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation. The struggle this time, is a struggle for independence. Joy Bangla!”

Niazi gave Aurora a military salute and shook hands.

“It was a touching sight. The victor and the vanquished stood in full view of the Bengalees, who made no secret of their extreme sentiments of love and hatred for Aurora and Niazi respectively,” Salik wrote.

The stage was set for the watershed event, for the dawn of a new history and the birth of an independent nation. In that moment, the flow of time seemed to halt—as if the world itself held its breath, awaiting the arrival of a new dawn.

“The ceremony was simple and it ended within a few minutes,”

Khandaker recalls.

There were only two chairs and a table. Niazi sat on one chair and Aurora on the other. Soon as the clock struck 5:01pm, Niazi signed the surrender instrument, followed by Aurora.

Aurora handed a pen to Niazi to sign, but it did not write.

Aurora took the pen, jerked it in the air, then handed it to Niazi.

“This time the pen worked and Niazi signed the instrument. Later, I learned that Aurora had bought the pen from Calcutta just to sign the surrender document that day,” Khandaker recalled.

Niazi also handed over his sidearm.

Niazi himself said he signed the document with trembling hands as sorrow rose from his heart to his eyes and they brimmed with tears of despair and frustration.

Before the ceremony, a French reporter came to Niazi and asked, “How are you feeling, Tiger?”

“Depressed,” Niazi replied.

With this, around 93,000 Pakistani troops, among the largest assembled anywhere in the world, surrendered as the sun was setting, as if a metaphor for the end of the 24-year Pakistani repression on Bangalees.

As Niazi took out his revolver and handed it to Aurora to mark the capitulation of Dacca, Salik observed in his book, “With that, he handed over East Bangla!”

The indigenous bravery in Liberation War

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stood shoulder to shoulder with their Bangalee brothers and sisters in the Liberation War as fighters, organisers and informants.

Though the exact number of fighters from indigenous communities has never officially been recorded, their contributions have been documented in several books, including “Muktijuddhe Adibasi” by Ayub Hossain and Charu Haque, and “Adibasi Muktijoddha” by Tapon Kumar Dey.

According to these books, hundreds of indigenous youths from the Oraon, Munda, Kora, Kol, Mahali and Rajuar communities of Rajshahi's Barendra region and Chapainawabganj joined the war at the call of indigenous leader Sagram Majhi.

From Rangpur and Dinajpur to Sylhet and Netrokona, indigenous men and women from both plains and hills fought as combatants, spies and organisers.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, resistance took an extraordinary turn when an indigenous king opened his palace to refugees and freedom fighters, transforming royal privilege into a weapon of war.

In search of their stories, this correspondent travelled across several districts, including Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Khagrachhari, Mymensingh and Netrokona, and interviewed at least 40 indigenous freedom fighters, elderly residents, and members of royal families.

Their accounts tell stories of the valour and sacrifice of the indigenous communities, though most remain unrecognised.

Liberation War researcher Afsan Chowdhury says, “During the war, Pakistanis inflicted greater damage on indigenous peoples than on Bengalis. From the very beginning of the war, indigenous communities became one of the primary targets of the Pakistani Army. Yet, even after being completely dispossessed, indigenous people sacrificed everything and took part in the war. Far less work has been done on the contributions of indigenous peoples to the Liberation War than was necessary – almost none at all.”

BARENDRA REGION

Sagram Majhi was born in Kendubuna Para village in Godagari union of Rajshahi's Godagari upazila. Today, it is known as Sagrampur.

Elected to the provincial assembly in the 1954 Jukto Front election, Sagram was known among indigenous people as a key organiser of the war.

From Sagrampur alone, at least 25 indigenous youths joined the war; none are alive today. Indigenous youths from almost every village in nearby Gogram, Rishikul and Matikata unions also took part.

One such fighter is Narayan Chandra Murari, 72, of the Munda community from Bottoli village under Gogram union. In April 1971, local Razakars looted Bottoli. To save his life, Narayan, then 17 or 18, fled to India with others.

“In India, we took shelter at the refugee camp in Hatnagar Colony of Baharampur. We were given ration cards. A few days later, Sagram babu came to the camp, gathered the youths and said, ‘Everyone must now go to war. There is no other way to survive.’”

Santals like Naika Kislú, 78, from Mohammadpur village of Tanore upazila, recalled how Sagram went to every camp enrolling indigenous people for training. “After training at Gourbagan Youth Camp, I fought in the Mehedipur sub-sector.”

Among the Santal fighters, platoon commanders Bishwanath Tudú and Chompae Soren made significant contributions.

From the Oraon community, the lone platoon commander was Rampada Oraon, now 83.

He told The Daily Star that his platoon, having around 30 fighters, fought battles in Poragram, Rohanpur, Shibganj, Radhakantapur, Godagari, Tanore and Mohonpur.

“We launched three attacks on the Tanore and Mohanpur police stations. In the final three-pronged assault on Tanore on November 29, the station was liberated on November 30. One indigenous freedom fighter was martyred, and another was seriously wounded,” he said.

Shortly after, Pakistani soldiers and Razakars looted and burned their villages, and after independence, fighters returned to destroyed homes.

According to the Liberation War Affairs ministry, 62 indigenous people from Godagari thana in Rajshahi are officially recognised, though the actual number is believed to be higher.

NORTHERN BENGAL

One major front for indigenous resistance was Rangpur.

According to “Bangladesh Independence War: Sector-Based History, Sector 6”, after massacres in Rangpur city, the cantonment and EPR headquarters on March 25-26, Santal leader Joyram Soren and Oraon leader Budu Oraon met political leaders Sheikh Amzad Hossain, Mujibur Rahman Master and others. They decided to capture Rangpur Cantonment on March 28.

Thousands of Santal and Oraon

Joyram Soren stands at the Rangpur Cantonment entrance.

DINAJPUR REGION

Meanwhile, over 100 people from the Santal, Munda, Kora, Oraon, Mahali and Turi communities of Ranipukur union in Biral upazila of Dinajpur district joined the war.

They trained at Shivbari camp in Gangarampur under retired EPR soldier George Das, fighting first under sub-sectors and later under George Bahini.

From the endangered Kora community of Haljaj village, at least 14 men joined. Only one, Kina Kora, is alive. “To stop the Pakistanis from moving freely, we decided to destroy the bridge in November. Under George da's leadership, 20 of us planted 40

and was captured, tortured and killed during reconnaissance for the Madhabpur operation.

In Sylhet's tea gardens, over 600 indigenous people were killed. One massacre was the May 1 killing of 47 workers in Sreemangal's Bharaundra Tea Garden, according to the book.

Soldiers killed Nakula Hazra first, then shot around 60 workers near the Kali temple, witnesses said.

Survivor Bijoy Hazra said, “The Punjabis slaughtered innocent people like birds. My father and brother were among the martyrs. Another brother survived despite being shot.”

CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, while Chakma and Bomang royal families opposed the war, Mong king Mongpru Sain stood apart.

He opened the Mong Palace and royal granary to refugees and fighters, handed over his weapons and vehicles, and turned the palace into a shelter and medical centre.

Hundreds of Marma and Tripura youths joined his call, while he himself fought on the front lines, notably in the Battle of Akhaura.

Freedom fighter Chai Uri Mong said, “In May-June, the king went camp to camp urging indigenous people to join.

“I fought in the Manughat sub-sector. In August, we attacked the Pakistani headquarters at Andharmanik, killing a Pakistani captain and a Junior Commissioned Officer. On September 9, an ambush on a Pakistani boat convoy at Panchhari left 25 Pakistani soldiers dead.”

Meanwhile, despite the Chakma king's opposition, many Chakma fighters made heroic contributions. KK Roy of the royal family joined the war, while Ramaniranjan Chakma was martyred in Ranggarh, and EPR sepoy Hemranjan Chakma in Bogura, according to the book “Muktijuddhe Adabasi”.

At the war's outset, provincial assembly member Manabendra Narayan Larma began organising the Jumma people.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN WARRIORS

Among the three women awarded the Bir Protik for heroic contributions during and after the Liberation War, Kankan Heninchita, a Khasi tribal woman, was the only indigenous recipient.

Her story, along with those of other women fighters, is documented in “Bangladesher Shadhinota Shongram O Nari Muktijoddha Volume 1” by Meherunnessa Mary.

Before the war, she was married to Majid Khan, a Pakistani EPR soldier who deserted during the war. Later, her sister and brother-in-law were martyred by Pakistani forces. While searching for her husband, Kankan was detained on suspicion of being a Mukti Bahini spy and brutally tortured. After tracing Majid Khan, the Pakistanis forced her to work as a spy inside Mukti Bahini camps.

But having lost her family and dignity, Kankan decided to take revenge. She contacted Captain Helal Uddin, commander of the Laxmipur camp, and became a spy for the Mukti Bahini instead. Using the trust of Pakistani soldiers, she stole weapons and ammunition and delivered them to freedom fighter camps.

In August, despite great risk, she personally carried explosives and mines for the operation to destroy the Jardia Bridge in Sunamganj. Based on her intelligence, the Mukti Bahini carried out attacks and fought at least 20 successful battles, including Basrai Tengra Tila, Betingaon-Nurpur, Teblai, Mahabbatpur, and Silairpar.

Indigenous women served both on the front lines and in medical services. Two Garo freedom fighters, Sandhya Rani Sangma and Veronica Sangma from Mymensingh and Netrokona, joined the war after training at the nursing centre of the Joyramkura Christian Missionary Hospital in Halaughat.

Speaking to this correspondent, Sandhya said, “We began working as nurses at the Bagmara Field Hospital under Sector II in May, later moving to Bakshiganj in Jamalpur in October. We set up tents and treated wounded fighters amid mortar shelling by razakars, which we narrowly survived.”

Rakhine freedom fighter Princha Kheyo also worked as a nurse while engaging in espionage, and despite being captured and severely tortured by Pakistani forces, she did not reveal any information, the book noted.



Kankan Heninchita
Bir Protik



Sagram Majhi



Rampad Orao