

Today Horrifying August 21

Today is the horrifying August 21, one of the cruelest days in the country's political history, when a number of Awami League activists were killed in a violent grenade attack during the BNP-Jamaat tenure.

This day in 2004, grenades were hurled at an AL rally on Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital, killing at least 24 people, including Ivy Rahman, and wounding scores of others.

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina, also then leader of the Opposition, narrowly escaped the barbaric attack, but suffered damage to her right ear.

The people of the country are still haunted by the August 21 carnage even after 16 years of the heartrending incident.

As the clock struck 5:22pm that day, all hell broke loose as assailants hurled grenades indiscriminately at the rally.

There was a makeshift podium on a truck as the BNP-Jamaat government didn't allow the use of any usual podium.

Besides the sound of grenade blasts, there were men and women screaming either in panic or pain after being wounded.

The area was flooded with blood and pieces of human flesh. Sheikh Hasina luckily survived as her party men formed a human shield around her. The grenade targeting her did not explode luckily.

President M Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid rich tributes to the victims of the August 21 grenade attack and prayed for eternal peace of their departed souls on the eve of the 16th anniversary of the heinous grenade attack.

They urged all to come forward being imbued with the spirit of Liberation War to turn the sorrows of August 21 into strength

for building a peaceful and democratic Bangladesh which will be free from terrorism and militancy.

“August 21 grenade attack in 2004 is a mournful day as the killers launched history’s barbaric grenade attacks on an Awami League rally on Bangabandhu Avenue with an attempt to kill Bangabandhu’s daughter Sheikh Hasina,” said the President.

In a separate message, Sheikh Hasina said the barbaric grenade attack was carried out that day under the direct patronisation of the BNP-Jamaat alliance during an anti-terrorism rally of Awami League to kill her.

Terming the grenade attack a ‘stigmatised day’ in the political history of the country, she said, “Our party leaders and activists saved me from the series of grenade attacks by forming a human shield.”

“I survived the attack due to immense blessings of the Almighty but some 22 leaders and activists, including Mahila Awami League president Ivy Rahman, embraced martyrdom,” the premier said, adding that more than 500 leaders and activists, journalists and security personnel were injured.

In a landmark verdict, the court on October 10, 2018 awarded capital punishment to 19 people, including former state minister Lutfozzaman Babar and former deputy minister Abdus Salam Pintu, in two cases filed over the deadly grenade attack.

The other convicts are former NSI chief Brig Gen (rtd) Rezzaqul Haider Chowdhury, former DGFI Director Brig Gen (rtd) Abdur Rahim, BNP leader and owner of Hanif Paribahan Mohammad Hanif, Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) leader Yusuf Butt alias Majid Butt, Kashmir-based LeT leader Abdul Malek alias Golam Mohammad, Harkatul Jihad (HuJi) founder Abdus Salam, and Huji leaders Maulana Tajuddin, Maulana Shawkat Osman, Maulana Abu Sayeed alias Dr Abu Zafar, Abul Kalam Azad alias Bulbul,

Jahangir Alam, Maulana Abu Taher, Hossain Ahmed Tamim, Mufti Moinuddin Sheikh alias Abu Zandal alias Masum Billah, Rafiqul Islam Sabuj, Mohammad Ujjal alias Ratan and Mohibullah alias Mofizur Rahman alias Ovi.

The court also sentenced life imprisonment to 19 persons, including BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, who is now staying in London.

The other convicts are Khaleda's former political secretary Harris Chowdhury, former BNP lawmaker Qazi Shah Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad, BNP leader Ariful Islam Arif, Huji leaders Shahadatullah Jewel, Maulana Abdur Rouf, Maulana Sabbir Ahmed alias Abdul Hannan Sabbir, Arif Hasan Sumon, Hafez Maulana Yahya, Maulana Abu Bakar alias Selim Howlader, Mahibul Muttakin, Anisul Mursalin, Md Khalil, Jahangir Alam Badar, Md Iqbal, Liton alias Maulana Liton, Mufti Shafiqur Rahman, Mufti Abdul Hai and Ratul Babu.

The court awarded four years' imprisonment to two former inspectors general of police – Ashraful Huda and Shahudul Haque, Lt Commander (retd) Saiful Islam Duke, nephew of Khaleda Zia, former DGFI official (sacked) Saiful Islam Joarder and Maj Gen (retd) ATM Amin under two sections.

Former Deputy Commissioner (South) of DMP Khan Sayeed Hassan and former DC (East) of DMP Obaidur Rahman Khan were also jailed for six years each under three sections.

The court also awarded five years' jail to former IGP Khoda Baksh Chowdhury, former SP Ruhul Amin and former ASPs of CID Atiqur Rahman and Abdur Rashid.

Earlier, three accused – Jamaat secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan and his associate Sharif Shahedul Alam alias Bipul – were dropped from the cases as they were hanged following their conviction in other cases.

To protect the real culprits, the then BNP-Jamaat government staged 'Joj Mia drama', showing him the prime accused in the grenade attack case.

To mark the day, the ruling Awami League, its front organisations and different political, socio-cultural and professional organisations will place wreaths at a makeshift altar on Bangabandhu Avenue at 9:00am today.

The ruling party alleged that the BNP-Jamaat alliance government had carried out the grenade attack to kill Sheikh Hasina to make the party leaderless.

The incident took place on Saturday. Sheikh Hasina attended the party rally as the chief guest. After the rally, an anti-violence procession was supposed to be brought out. Miscreants started hurling grenades soon after she (Sheikh Hasina) finished her speech with the slogan 'Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu'.

AL leaders and activists and common people got stunned when grenades exploded at the political gathering, killing at least 16 party activists on the spot. Ivy Rahman, wife of late President Zillur Rahman, succumbed to her injuries after fighting for 58 hours in hospital.

Party leaders and activists started screaming and made a human shield to save Sheikh Hasina's life.

Her private security personnel Mahbubur Rahman sacrificed his life while trying to save Sheikh Hasina.

Many Awami League leaders, including Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Kazi Zafarullah, Abdul Latif Siddique, Obaidul Quader, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Maj Gen (Rtd) Tareq Ahmed Siddique, AFM Bahauddin Nasim and Pankaj Debnath escaped death but still haunted over the gruesome incident as they have been living life with splinter injuries.

The government filed two cases – one for the murder and the other under the Explosive Substances Act.

The government is trying to bring back 18 fugitives in the cases to the country through the Interpol. Tarique Rahman is now staying in London while Maulana Tajuddin Ahmed and his younger brother Ratul Babu are believed to be hiding in South Africa.

Kazi Mofazzal Hossain Kaikobad is hiding in Saudi Arabia and Haris Chowdhury moves through the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Singapore, the USA and India.

One of the key accused in the cases, former minister and Jamaat-e-Islami secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed was hanged to death in a case over crimes against humanity during the War of Liberation in 1971 while Huji chief Mufti Abdul Hannan and Shahidul Alam Bipul were hanged in the another case over terrorism.

Two other major suspects – former Major General ATM Amin and former Lt Colonel Saiful Islam Joarder – are believed to be staying in Dubai.

Besides this, Mohibul Mustakin and his brother Anisul Mursalin are now in Tihar Jail in India.

Militant leaders Shafikur Rahman, Mufti Abdul Hai, Maulana Abu Bakar, Iqbal, Khalilur Rahman, Jahangir Alam alias Badar, Maulana Liton alias Zobair alias Delwar, then DCs Obaidur Rahman and Khan Syed Hasan are also staying abroad, sources said.

A total of 225, out of 511, prosecution witnesses gave their depositions before Judge Shahed Nuruddin of Dhaka Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 in the cases.

Ref-Daily-Sun