

Bangladesh War Crimes Tribunal: 'Nizami led Al Badr during 1971 war'

Tuesday 28 August 2012, by [bdnews24](http://bdnews24.com) (Date first published: 26 August 2012).

Dhaka, Aug 26 (bdnews24.com) — The first prosecution witness against Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizami has said that the Jamaat leader had led the Al Badr vigilante militia during the 1971 Liberation War.

Himself a former member of Jamaat's student wing Islami Chhatra Sangha, Misbahur Rahman Chowdhury, currently heading a faction of Islami Oikkya Jote (IOJ), told the first war crimes tribunal of Bangladesh that Al Badr was set up with Jamaat student cadres.

The vigilante groups like Al Badr, Razakar and Al Shams are said to have been widely responsible for war crimes during the Liberation War.

The 57-year old witness said Al Badr was not like other anti-liberation militia groups. "The members were trained by the Pakistani Army and they were, in a way, above other groups."

The International Crimes Tribunal-1, set up to try crimes against humanity during the nine-month War of Independence, indicted Nizami on May 28 for 16 war crimes.

The witness said the second in command in Jamaat, the party's Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujaheed, was also his deputy in the student wing during the war, and both of whom later led Al Badr.

He said Al Badr was a "regimented organisation of educated youth that could wield some influence over Al Shams and Razakar".

The vigilante group, he said, actively collaborated with the Pakistani Army and also participated in the elimination or killing of pro-liberation forces and individuals.

Roots

Misbahur Rahman Chowdhury's association with Jamaat began at the age of 10 when he joined the Shaheen Fauj in 1965, the children's organisation of the party.

He went on to head his local unit and was automatically given a membership in the party's student wing Sangha, which turned into Islami Chhatra Shibir several years after the Liberation War.

Misbahur was a devout young man and held a strong belief that his party — Jamaat — would always stand for justice and against oppression. "But instead they joined the Pakistani Army in their massacre of Bengalis on Mar 26, 1971."

His initial contact of Jamaat, one Sirajul Islam Matlib who had introduced him with Shaheen Fauj, called at his house twice during the war. "But not having found me, he left two chits."

A photocopy of one of those handwritten letters were produced in the court and submitted as an

exhibit.

Misbahur Rahman said that in that letter, Sirajul Islam had urged him to join Al Badr, which would make Nizami 'very happy'. "Nizami bhai will be elated personally, the letter said."

"This of course referred to the Sangha chief at that time."

Although a Muslim Leaguer, Misbahur Rahman's father had much respect for Jamaat politics but he did not like the tone of the letter.

So, Misbahur said, his father had whisked him out of his native Moulvibazar and sent off to London. "It was very risky at that time to denounce or quit the Chhatra Sangha."

However, the witness had to return to Bangladesh within two months as his mother was sick while the war still raged on. He again went to the Great Britain after the war and studied at a college in Wales where he founded a Muslim students' organisation.

Witness points at Jamaat leaders

Misbahur Rahman's testimony implicated a number of other Jamaat leaders besides Nizami.

He saw Jamaat guru Ghulam Azam, also a former party chief (during 1971), at the court of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia after the Liberation War where the witness had gone to visit the Saudi King as a young leader of a Muslim students' organisation.

"I saw that Ghulam Azam and his brother Moazzem were already there and the professor (Ghulam Azam) was telling the king that freedom fighters had destroyed mosques."

He said he heard the Jamaat guru tell the Saudi king that madrasas had been closed and Qurans had become scarce and asked for funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

"His brother Moazzem was most probably the king's personal physician," Misbahur said.

"Afterwards, I protested what Ghulam Azam had stated pointing out to the king that most of the freedom fighters were Muslims and thus would not have damaged or destroyed mosques."

The witness also mentioned Jamaat's chief defence counsel Abdur Razzaq, one of the assistant secretary generals, in his deposition of over two hours.

He said the senior lawyer sometime after 1976 had asked him to join a certain meeting where Ghulam Azam was also present.

"I was rather disappointed with Abdur Razzaq for having invited me to this meeting. But I realised after hearing Razzaq speak at that meeting that he was also part of Al Badr and had held an office in close association with the Pakistani Army."

He said he left that meeting before it was wrapped up.

Azharul Islam's bail rejected

Earlier the first war crimes tribunal rejected a bail petition for acting Jamaat Secretary General A T M Azharul Islam saying that it had previously rejected other bail applicants whose health condition was 'far worse' than that of the instant applicant.

The tribunal, however, directed the jail doctor to perform an MRI and a CT scan as recommended earlier and make sure that all medical treatment is accorded to Azharul Islam. The court directed that if needed Azharul Islam be taken to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical University.

At the second tribunal, Shahriar Kabir, a long time activist calling for the trial of suspected war criminals, testified as the first prosecution witness against Jamaat Secretary General Mujaheed.

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