

Essay on War Crimes on Trial in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, four decades after the violent struggle that led to independence from Pakistan, is planning to hold trials for those accused of committing war crimes.

Bangladesh officials say those facing trial allegedly sided with Pakistan during the 1971 war of liberation. The government says defendants will be tried for crimes against humanity, genocide, murder, rape, and arson.

Hasina's election pledge about trying war crimes has uplifted the spirits of not only the party workers but has given hope to the entire nation despite its growing disillusionment from past experience of successive governments including the AL's, of ignoring this popular demand. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government had initiated the trial of the war criminals but could not continue due to the horrific events of 1975. The onus had been on all the governments that followed, some of which assumed power illegitimately or some legitimately. Sadly, even the elected governments did not make the trial of war criminals a priority.

Hasina is pledge-bound to try the war criminals now as her election pledge about war crime has been endorsed by the ballot. There is little doubt that it was her promise to try war criminals that helped her to bag people's landslide mandate. After the Grand Alliance's landslide victory she said, "People have already 'tried' the war criminals and the anti Liberation forces through ballots, but our government would obviously take legal steps to try them." This, together with Hasina seeking support from the UN to bring war criminals under trial, has given people the hope that she is committed to her promise and intends to carry it out. War criminals

who actively collaborated with Pakistani occupation force in brutal killings of innocent civilians, raping of helpless women, looting and arsenal were even made ministers. They moved in cars with national flags for which millions made supreme sacrifice. These obnoxious weeds conspired against our war heroes, dreamers of liberation war and were involved in killing many of them. They have grown like mushroom and now have their roots firmly anchored. Many businesses, commercial banks are owned by them. They have infiltrated everywhere and planted their cadre in Army, Police, Civil Administration and even in a foreign mission. Fortunately, Sectors Commanders forum could lead a massive propaganda mission this time and could motivate the masses to vote out the criminals. So among other issues trial of war criminals must rank among the top priority national agenda of the new government.

Tens of thousands of people in what was then East Pakistan took up arms to oppose Bangladeshi independence. Others who expressed loyalty to Pakistan were deemed as collaborators but were granted amnesty following the war.

The war – in which India, located between West and East Pakistan, provided financial aid and military support for the rebels – is believed to have left three million people dead. Bangladesh says millions of people were displaced by the nine-month guerilla conflict and 200,000 women were raped.

Ms. Hasina's father, Bangladesh's founder and independence war hero, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had intended to hold such trials before he was assassinated in a 1975 coup.

Prime Minister Hasina has long contended some of those behind the coup would have faced trial for war crimes. The subsequent government freed more than 10,000 war crime suspects.

There are concerns, however, that the tribunal could be used to exact revenge on opponents of the governing Awami League.

The government has set the stage to start the trial of the war crimes in Bangladesh about 40 years after the war fought for the liberation of Bangladesh. It formed the tribunal, fixed the prosecutors and assigned people to inquire into the allegations.

The Government in its first stage listed 25 people, 23 of whom are from Jamaat-e- Islami and 2 from BNP, most of whom are among the top leaders of the parties.

The listed 25 are also present in the list of 50, which was prepared earlier by the Sectors Commanders Forum. The Chief of the Tribunal assures that no innocent will be punished.

People from different sectors expressed their satisfaction over the event. The Law Minister said that the process may take a little longer time to maintain the transparency and international standard.

The trial must be a fair one, transparent and of international standard. The accused also should fight the case legally and at best politically but in no way they should take arms to create violence to jeopardize the legal procedure.

The trial of War criminals must proceed in a proper manner. A special tribunal may be set up by a decision of the parliament in its first session. A special cell must collect and collate all information on war crimes and evidence from various published reports. The victims family and knowledgeable persons must provide all evidence. All victim families must be given state protection as the agents of criminals will try to make a desperate attempt to sabotage the trial process. No alleged criminals should be allowed to leave Bangladesh

till the crimes against them are established with documentary evidence. As soon as the trial starts the criminals and their linked terrorists will try to carry out terrorist activities to destabilize the country. All must remember that they have huge money, regimented cadre. Police, Rab, and intelligence agency must remain alert and vigilant.