

Staff Reporter

The trial of fugitive war crimes accused Engineer Abdul Jabbar, a former Jatiya Party MP from Pirojpur, began Sunday in absentia, following opening statement by the designated prosecutor Zahid Imam.

The opening statement over, the prosecution put its witness in the dock to testify against the accused before the International Crimes Tribunal-1, headed by Justice M Enayetur Rahim. On August 14, the three-member tribunal indicted Engineer Abdul Jabbar for his involvement in crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War, after fulfilling the legal requirements of law for trying a fugitive accused, including the appointment of state defence counsel.

On the opening day (Sunday), the prosecution placed 75-year-old Shoebur Rahman Golder, a Liberation War hero, as prosecution witness (PW) No. 1.

Hailing from village Tushkhali of Mathbaria upazila, Pirojpur, Golder told the tribunal that then Pakistan Muslim League leader Abdul Jabbar Engineer, MNA, had formed Mathbaria Peace Committee (collaborator) declaring himself as its chairman and appointed Iskander Ali Mridha as Razakar commander during the Liberation War in 1971. Accused Jabbar also formed the Tushkhali Union Peace Committee, he added.

During the war, the PW-1 said, Jabbar as peace committee chairman along with its members used to launch mass aware campaign in local hats and bazars branding the leaders of Awami League, freedom fighters and members of Hindu community as enemy of Pakistan and called upon the local people to exterminate them to save Pakistan.

Accused Jabbar also issued 'fatwa' (Islamic edict) encouraging people to loot the goods and chattels of Hindus to establish their rights as war booty, said Golder.

The PW further said that Jabbar had declared that the members of Hindu community who want to live in this soil must convert into Muslim.

He said that on May 16, 1971, freedom fighters Abdur Razzaq Biswas and Motaleb Sharif were killed at the behest of Jabbar as he had asked Razakar commander Iskander at a meeting at Tushkhali High School to produce the two freedom fighters before him dead or alive.

The PW-1 added that the same evening, Razakars made raids at Kulupara and Nampara - both Hindu dominated areas -- and burned down their houses after plundering.

Golder told the tribunal that the following day, on May 17, 1971, Pakistan occupation army in association with Jabbar and his Razakar militia stormed Fuljhuri village, carrying out looting and burning down over 360 houses. During the destruction, Sarada Kanta Paik, as he tried to flee, was gunned down by the troops at the behest of Jabbar who had shouted before the army to kill him, using the abusing word Malaun, the PW recalled.

After a week, he said, Razakars carried out an operation in Hindu dominated village Paikbari herding 150-200 people to forcibly convert them into Muslim.

Liberation War hero Golder told the tribunal that on October 6, 1971, Razakars carried out another operation in village Angulkata in which 22 out of 37 captured Hindus were killed on a river bank in village Suryamoni.

The deposition over, PW Golder was cross-examined in part by state defence counsel M A Hasan.

On May 11, the prosecution officially submitted to the ICT Registrar the proposed charge accusing Engineer Jabbar of perpetrating the crimes against humanity during the Liberation War.

The prosecution pressed five counts of war crimes charges against the former Jatiya Party MP, believed living in the USA.

After working for over 11 months, the investigation officer (IO) of the case ASP M Helal Uddin submitted the investigation report to the prosecution on April 29.

The prosecution submitted a list of 44 witnesses (PWs) to prove the charges as proposed against Jabbar.

The investigator 'found' Jabbar's involvement in crimes like killing, genocide, arson, looting and forcefully converting many Hindus to Muslim in then Mathbaria thana of Pirojpur during the war. Jabbar was made chairman of local thana Peace Committee (collaborator) and he organised Razakar outfit in Mathbaria, according to an investigation report.

Octogenarian Jabbar of Khetachhira under Mathbaria was the vice-chairman of Jatiya Party. He had joined the then Muslim League through his father-in-law, Arshed Ali, who was an influential Muslim League leader.

Jabbar later joined the Jatiya Party of Gen (ret'd) HM Ershad and was twice elected Member of Parliament with the party tickets in 1986 and 1988.