

Pakistan-born Swedish judge's Bangladesh citizenship is reward for his 1971 role

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Online Desk: Muktijoddha Maitri Awardee Pakistani origin Swedish judge Syed Asif Shahkar's Bangladesh citizenship attainment is a reward for his contribution to the country's 1971 Liberation War, said Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque.

"Asif Shahkar deserves it. It was our responsibility too to fulfill his dream to be a Bangladesh citizen. Bangladesh perfectly rewarded its 1971 friend by fulfilling his wish," Mozammel told BSS.

He added: "I think Shahkar is also a freedom fighter. Our prime minister properly honored a true supporter of our Liberation War. We also expressed our gratitude to those from all over the world including Pakistani-origins who had worked in favour of our war in different ways."

Through this recognition, Pakistani commoners now will be able to properly know the massacre and genocide carried out by Pakistani occupational forces on the unarmed Bangalees during the Liberation War and took stance in favor of Bangladesh, he hoped.

Abul Kalam Azad, an eminent journalist and Managing Director and Chief Editor of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), said when Pakistani oppressors were carrying out brutality and massacre on innocent Bangalees in 1971, Pakistan-origin Syed Asif took his stand in favor of Bangladesh.

"It is a unique example of Asif's humanitarian qualities. I think the citizenship provided by a pro-Liberation war government to a true supporter of our Liberation War is a perfect reward to him," Azad said.

National news agency BSS was first to uphold Asif's appeal and wish to be a citizen of Bangladesh by publishing a news and subsequently Liberation War based organization 'Amra Ekattor' applied to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Foreign Affairs Ministry on behalf of Asif.

Later, valiant freedom fighter Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) Quazi Sazzad Ali Zahir, Bir Pratik, spearheaded the entire process to provide citizenship to Asif.

Talking to BSS, Zahir said Asif Shahkar is a courageous man of the time with a great soul. Very few of West Pakistanis took stance against genocide carried out by Pakistani army on unarmed Bangalees during the great Liberation War and Syed Asif Shahkar is one of them.

Braving repression and injustice, Asif Shahkar took stance against genocide and appealed to Pakistani common people to favor the masses of Bangladesh, he added.

At one stage, Asif Shahkar was jailed for taking stance favoring Bangladesh as well as his family also boycotted him, Zahir said, adding though Bangladesh achieved victory in the war, he faced extreme hostility in his own country Pakistan that forced him to take political asylum in Sweden.

Asif Shahkar even extended heartiest support to Bangladesh always from Sweden as well, he said.

After 41 years of independence, Justice Shahkar was conferred with Liberation War Friendship Award on December 15, 2012, he noted.

"I myself wrote the citation and certificate bestowed on him," Zahir said, adding since then, he maintained regular communication with Shahkar.

Bangladesh's another friend of Liberation War British citizen Julian Francis, a Muktiyoddha Maitri recipient, is also friend of Zahir.

The freedom fighter also managed everything, including communicating with the premier, to provide citizenship to Julian Francis as per his wish.

In the same way, Zahir arranged all process to provide citizenship of Asif Shahkar this year.

In a letter of the Ministry of Home Affairs signed by its Additional Secretary Md Saiful Islam, it was said Asif Shahkar was provided the citizenship certificate on November 1.

Md Saiful Islam said BSS Managing Director and Chief Editor Abul Kalam Azad, Special Correspondent Mahfuza Jasmine, Liberation War organizer and Liberation War based platform "Amra Ekattor" chairperson and valiant freedom fighter Mahbub Zaman and its chief coordinator valiant freedom fighter Hilal Fayezi played the key role in providing Bangladesh citizenship to Justice Asif Shahkar.

"Amra Ekattor" chairperson Mahbub Zaman and chief coordinator Hilal Fayezi termed the awarding of Bangladesh citizenship to Asif Shahkar as a historic and joyful incident and expressed gratitude to the prime minister and her government.

Earlier, Shahkar wrote a letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina seeking Bangladeshi citizenship and expressing his desire to be buried in Bangladesh soil.

As per the article 4 of the Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order, 1972 (P.O. No. 149 of 1972) and under the said order, he got the citizenship.

While talking to BSS, he said: "Today, I have been reborn as a citizen of Bangladesh. Today, I have been reborn as a citizen of a country, which and whose people I have loved since 1971."

"I am very happy today because I can breathe my last among the martyred and valiant freedom fighters of Bangladesh," he added.

Expressing his firm determination to follow the footsteps of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he saluted the greatest Bangalee of as well as the great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Through Bangladesh Support Bureau, an organization of Bangladeshi Diaspora in The Netherlands, Chairperson Bikash Chowdhury Barua and Justice Asif Shahkar communicated with BSS and Amra Ekattor.

Bikash Chowdhury said, "It is pleasant news that Asif Shahkar got Bangladesh citizenship"

Asif Shahkar was born in Panjab and he was 22 years old in 1971.

Young Shahkar protested, held rallies, wrote poems and distributed leaflets in support of Bangladesh Liberation War and as a result, he faced hatred from his family, society and the people of Pakistan.

He was general secretary of Punjab Students' Union and a section of people of West Pakistan protested the ruthless and brutal genocide of the Pakistani regime called 'Operation Search Light' on the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) on the dark night of March 25, 1971.

He was imprisoned as a 'traitor' then and during the nine months of Liberation War, he endured mental and physical tortures in Pakistan prison.

But young Shahkar did not go against Bangladesh. He was released from captivity after December 16, 1971 with the victory of Bangladesh.

Later, he worked as a producer in Pakistan Television for some time in Lahore but he could not stay in Pakistan for long with the mark of 'black sheep' in his own country.

In 1977, he went to Sweden for political asylum. He started his new struggle for survival. Later, he was appointed as a judge of the High Court Division of Sweden.

After 41 years of independence, Justice Shahkar came to Bangladesh to receive the Liberation War Friendship Award in 2012 at an invitation of the Bangladesh government.

Late President Md Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presented the award to him on December 15, 2012.