

# Bangabandhu will live forever

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

**B**ANGABANDHU will live forever in Bangladesh -- the country he founded. One can kill a man but one cannot kill a spirit. Bangabandhu instilled in the hearts of millions the spirit of Bangali nationalism that inspired them to fight against all odds for their freedom and emancipation. Bangladesh is a sovereign and independent country today and it is primarily due to his bold and courageous leadership. All efforts to undermine him during the past three decades have failed. One cannot draw a circle without a centre nor can one write the history of our independence struggle without acknowledging Bangabandhu's pivotal role. He is at the heart of Bangladesh and will always remain there.

The emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign and independent state is one of the remarkable developments of the twentieth century. It is an epic tale of how an unarmed but determined people defeated a well-armed repressive machinery. Three million people were killed, ten million took shelter in India, and countless others were subjected to the worst forms of persecution in the hands of the occupation army. This genocide had little parallel in history. Finally justice and truth triumphed over injustice and falsehood.

Our armed struggle lasted for nine months, but our movement for freedom and independence had been more than two decades long. It passed through various phases, movements for protecting our language and our ethnic identity, for grant of autonomy on the basis of six-points, mass upsurge of 1969, elections of 1970 and finally, our glorious war of independence. Bangabandhu played a central role in all these phases. Some elaboration is needed to put our movement for independence in its correct historical perspective.

The Muslims of Bengal had passionately supported the Pakistan movement as they had believed that the creation of a separate Muslim homeland would emancipate them from British colonial rule as well as Hindu economic domination. Unfortunately, the ruling Pakistani clique turned out to be the new exploiters which had no interest in the welfare of the Bangalis. Their only interest was to economically exploit the Bangalis, who constituted the majority in Pakistan, and to obliterate their linguistic and cultural identity.

Soon after the creation of Pakistan, Urdu, the language of the minority in the western wing, was declared as the sole state language over Bangla -- the language of the majority, who lived in the eastern wing. In the historic language movement, Bangabandhu played a central role to protect our mother tongue Bangla. Bangalis are the only nation in the recorded history who had laid down their lives to protect their language. The Pakistani authorities had to bow down to public demand and restore Bangla's due national status. The conspiracy, however, continued.

The Pakistani ruling clique dissolved four western provinces and created an amalgamated West Pakistan and renamed East Bengal as East Pakistan with a strong central government. Bangabandhu, as the elected

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representative of the people to the constituent assembly, protested against the Pakistani design to wipe out our ethnic identity. He demanded that Bengal's ethnic identity must be respected and that a referendum or a plebiscite should be held to seek public mandate to this change of name.

Bangabandhu fought against the military regime of Ayub Khan and continued to press for grant of full autonomy to East Bengal. His historic Six Points demand for autonomy provided the "charter of survival" for Bangalis. The Pakistani ruling clique opposed it and even tried to intimidate Bangabandhu by starting the Agartala conspiracy case against him. He was undeclared. In the face of mass upsurge of 1969, the Ayub regime caved in and released Bangabandhu unconditionally. They invited him to a political dialogue to extract a concession from him on the question of autonomy, but he flatly refused.

On December 5, 1969 at a public meeting, Bangabandhu underlined that "there was a time when all efforts were made to erase the word Bengal from this land and map. The existence of the word Bengal was found nowhere except in the term Bay of Bengal." He announced at that meeting that "East Pakistan" henceforth would be called "Bangladesh." From that moment, creation of Bangladesh became the Bangalis' cherished goal and they never looked back.

His charismatic and bold leadership inspired millions and they gave him, and his party Awami League, absolute majority at the National Assembly elections in November 1970. The new Pakistani military ruler Yahya Khan tried to entice him with all kinds of offers, including the "Prime Ministership" of Pakistan but he refused to betray the trust and confidence reposed in him by his people.

When Yahya postponed the National Assembly session at the behest of the West Pakistani leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Bangabandhu, in his historic Seventh March speech categorically told his people: "The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation; the struggle this time is the struggle for our independence. Since we have given blood we will give more blood. God willing, the people of this country would be liberated. Turn every house into fort; face the enemy with whatever you have... Victory shall be ours. Joy Bangla!" The people responded to this clarion call wholeheartedly.

Before the occupation army arrested him and started the genocide, Bangabandhu sent a message to the nation: "This may be my last message; from today Bangladesh is independent. I call upon you, the people of Bangladesh, wherever you might be and whatever you have, to resist the army of occupation to the last. Your fight must go on until the last soldier of the Pakistan occupation army is expelled from the soil of

Bangladesh. Final victory is ours." This call was carried by the Reuters and was published in the international press.

People fought bravely against all odds and Bangalis paid the heaviest price for freedom and independence. Bangladesh was born and soon thereafter, Bangabandhu returned after nine months of captivity. Dhaka went delirious and millions were on the streets to receive him. Before landing, the British comet which brought him from London circled for 45 minutes over the countryside, in deference to Bangabandhu's desire to see his "Shonar Bangla."

Bangabandhu suffered more than anybody in the hands of Pakistanis and their cohorts and yet, in his first speech, he asked his people to "forgive" them and not to take "revenge." If Bangabandhu had not returned, many feared that there would have been a bloodbath in Bangladesh. Alas, these reactionary forces were behind his killings three years later.

At the international level, Bangabandhu had a unique position. It is largely due to his personal appeal that nearly one hundred countries, including all major powers excepting China, recognized Bangladesh within a few months. Again, due to his personal interceding with Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, India withdrew its troops within three months from Bangladesh. This is an unprecedented event in contemporary history. The United Nations, even before Bangladesh was admitted as a member, set up UNROD (subsequently UNROB after Bangladesh's admission) -- the largest interna-

tional relief and reconstruction efforts under its aegis.

On the basis of Bangabandhu's foreign policy based on peaceful coexistence and "friendship to all and malice towards none," Bangladesh was able to establish close and cooperative ties with all the countries of the world, and Bangladesh joined the Non-aligned movement (NAM), the Commonwealth, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), and finally the United Nations. At his speech at the UN he announced that "peace is an imperative for the survival of mankind. It represents the deepest aspirations of men and women throughout the world. Peace to endure, however, must be based on justice."

At home, the country was largely able to restore its totally devastated economic infrastructure; millions of refugees returned home from India and thousands of stranded Bangladeshis returned from Pakistan. The country adopted its first constitution providing the basic guideline of the newly independent state. The country's first five-year plan was adopted which inter alia, gave primary emphasis on education, health, agriculture, and rural development. The basic aim of the plan was to alleviate poverty and build "Shonar Bangla."

Thirty-one years ago on this day, Bangabandhu and members of his family were murdered. His two daughters Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana survived as they were abroad at that time. Bangabandhu may have been killed by the assassins, but his indomitable spirit still inspires his countrymen to build "Shonar Bangla" on the basis of his vision based on Bangali nationalism, democracy, social justice and equality of all citizens irrespective of their religion, gender and all other considerations.

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# He is our claim on history

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

**O**n a cold November night in Delhi a little over a decade ago, the respected Indian journalist Nikhil Chakravarty mused on the human qualities in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He and Mujib, Chakravarty told me, had known each other in Calcutta in the dying days of a united India. After August 1947, though, the two had parted ways out of sheer political compulsions, naturally. Mujib was to go on to build his political career in East Pakistan and obviously lost all contact with Chakravarty, who for his part went into journalism and kept trace of what the East Bengali was doing in his new country.

The two men were not to meet again till January 1972, when Mujib, by then the founder of the independent People's Republic of Bangladesh, called his first news conference after his return from captivity in Pakistan. As Chakravarty related the tale to me, it all sounded familiar, for I had gone through a similar experience with Bangabandhu. Chakravarty was seated at the end of the room, one among a crowd of media people come to interact with the Bengali leader for the first time after his homecoming. Bangabandhu soon entered the room, took in the view and at one point focused his gaze on Chakravarty. "Tumi Nikhil, na (aren't you Nikhil)?" he asked. Chakravarty was immensely surprised and asked Mujib if he could recognize him after all those years. Mujib laughed and gathered Chakravarty to him in the kind of embrace he always had for friends and admirers.

Here, then, is an insight into the human aspects of the Mujib persona. As a high school student in Quetta, I met Bangabandhu in July 1970, the obvious purpose being to have his signature affixed in my autograph book. In April 1972, when I visited Ganobhavan, the old

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President's House at Ramna (some days were open house for citizens to see the Father of the Nation) to tell him about my worries relating to the abolition of English medium education in the country (with English medium education gone, I could not hope to finish school), I was nearly literally stunned to discover that he remembered having met me in distant Baluchistan.

He asked about my parents, wanted to know if they and the rest of the family were alive. It was quintessential Bangabandhu. In subsequent times, through conversations with people of my father's generation and through the reminiscences of others, I was able to understand the nature of the immeasurably large soul that was in the Father of the Nation. He remembered faces long years after he had come across them in his travels through the hamlets and villages of Bangladesh. More poignantly, he could tick off the names of people he was meeting after years, even decades. Not many individuals you know, and least of all politicians, possess that capacity for remembering. Bangabandhu seemed to know almost everyone in the country. That was the nature of the man. And that was not all. There was a spontaneity of emotions in Mujib that he never sought to paper over with make-believe urbanity. He laughed uproariously and made little effort to foist any diplomatic or political restrictions on his natural way of looking at things.

Watch any of the old photographs of the great leader, observe the twinkle in his eyes and the laughter that has been arrested by the lens of the photographer for posterity. When Abdus Samad Achakzai, meeting him after a long span of years, remarked that the Awami League chief had grown old, Mujib shot back: "Ayub Khan ne tum ko bhi buddha bana diya, hum ko bhi buddha bana diya (Ayub Khan has made you old and he has made me old as well)." Then he broke into a guffaw, laughter that convinced everyone around that here was a national politician to whom protocol was of little consequence. If protocol were important, he would not have lived and died at his Dhanmondi home.

One of the greatest qualities in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the abundance of confidence on which he based his life and politics. In the early days of his trial in the Agartala conspiracy case, he cheerfully told a western journalist in court: "You know, they can't keep me here for more than six months." He was proved almost right, arithmetically speaking. He was freed seven months after he had made that statement. It was a time when the full force of the Pakistani establish-

ment had come down on him, but that did little to deter him from speaking his mind.

When a Bengali journalist he knew well studiously tried to avoid being seen talking to him on the first day of the Agartala trial, Mujib exclaimed, loud enough for everyone present in court to hear: "Anyone who wants to live in Bangladesh will have to talk to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman." Note the courage. Note too the use of the term "Bangladesh." His dream of national freedom was already taking shape in the recesses of his political being. By November 1969, he was telling people that East Pakistan would henceforth be known as Bangladesh. He was not willing, not under any circumstances, to compromise on the issue.

And that was one of the finest traits in his character. Once he had decided on a course of action, he was not ready to consider any deviation or change or readjustment. Back in 1957, he asked a plainly sleepy Husseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy if it would not be a reasonably good proposition to take Bangalis out of the state of Pakistan. One can imagine the shock that must have gone through Suhrawardy, the man who had only a year earlier assured Bangalis that the 1956 constitution had guaranteed ninety eight per cent autonomy to East Pakistan. Of course it was no such thing. The point, though, was that Suhrawardy could not conceive of the end of Pakistan in the land of the Bangalis. On the other hand, Mujib was already thinking of a post-Pakistan condition for his people. In the decisive period of early March 1971, it was a nationalistic yet circumspect Mujib who told the media: "Independence? No, not yet." He was already moving toward his goal, but he was at the same time making sure that his adversaries, in this instance the Yahya Khan junta and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, were given enough rope to hang themselves. In the early moments of 26 March, he had no more illusions about the course Bangalis needed to take. His message of freedom was passed on to M.A. Hannan in Chittagong, minutes before he was taken into custody by the Pakistan army.

Mujib's resilience was sorely tested in Lyalpur, where he was brought before a military tribunal for trial on charges of waging war against Pakistan. He did not recognize the court and refused to accept the lawyer, A.K. Brohi, appointed for him by the junta. Held incommunicado, with no access to newspapers or radio or visitors, he made sure that his steely individuality did not collapse. He was too strong in his physical and psychological make-up to break down. Throughout his long political career, he wore down his

tormentors, every single one of them. His determined politics ended the presidency of Ayub Khan. And it was his undisputed, focused leadership of the Bengali nation which, despite his incarceration a thousand miles away from home, ripped Pakistan apart and left Yahya Khan, Bhutto and everyone else among his enemies biting the dust.

In February 1974, on arrival at Lahore for the Islamic summit, Bangabandhu knew his triumph over the state of Pakistan was complete. When Prime Minister Bhutto introduced him to Tikka Khan, by then chief of staff of the Pakistan army, Mujib had a curious, almost sarcastic smile playing on his lips. As Tikka saluted him, Bangladesh's founding father remarked, simply: "Hello, Tikka," and moved on. History had come full circle. In March 1971, when his soldiers had informed Tikka that they had Mujib in the cage and asked him if the Bengali leader should be brought before him, the Butcher of Bengal (and, earlier, Baluchistan) had replied contemptuously: "I don't want to see his face." In Lahore barely three years later, the man with that face was before him, and he was paying homage to him in full view of the world.

You can go on speaking of Bangabandhu for an eternity. Yes, he had his foibles. There were the many peccadilloes he could have done without. But there was the big man subsisting in his soul. He bestowed the world as our very own, a colossus. Fidel Castro marvelled at the fact that Bangalis had liberated themselves in his name despite his imprisonment in enemy land. Anwar Sadat referred to him as Brother Mujib. Some years ago, when I chanced upon Edward Hehr in London and told him where I was from, he paused, smiled and said softly: "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's country." That was a measure of the historical niche Mujib had carved for himself. It was history he created when he spoke before the United Nations General Assembly in his native Bengal. It made the tears run down the cheeks of an Indian diplomat, a Bengali, who ran up to Bangabandhu and hugged him from sheer gratitude.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman remains our authentic claim on history. We went to war in his name, prayed for him in the darkest days of our national life. When he died, the light went out of our lives and the wolves took over. Our failure to save the man who had always been our saviour, our pusillanimity in the face of thuggishness and murder, on August 15, 1975 remains a shame that hangs like an albatross around our necks. We bear the cross, and will do so until we can redeem ourselves through travelling back to the principles Bangabandhu held dear -- and which we upheld under his inspirational leadership. Joi Bangla will then be sounded all over the land once more; and the dream of Shonar Bangla will be retrieved from the debris of time, to shape rainbows once again for the huddled masses the Father of the Nation spoke for.

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# The leader and political power

NURUL ISLAM ANU

**P**OLITICS is an astonishing profession -- its most amazing component being the political power that propels it. Its mystic element has carried different meanings to many of its practitioners throughout history in all societies. There have been practitioners who used it without being aware of its inner content -- the superficial application of it satisfying them.

In all these cases, this was application without knowledge and in the complicated area of socio-political management this proved disastrous to many societies. And yet there have been practitioners whose application of political power was the result of deep understanding of its philosophical and moral content. These practitioners were in a relentless pursuit in their understanding of its dynamics, and the social engineering needed to make its application meaningful.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, as a political personality symbolised almost everything that politics meant in the contemporary history of the sub-continent. He was a thorough practitioner, constantly in pursuit of political power -- its mystic content providing the inspiring base of his leadership.

It was a career, colourful in its form, defiant and heroic in its practice, and yet somewhat tragic in its fulfillment. The sustaining basis of that career spread over three decades was devoted to what political power and its application should mean to transform societies. To him political power's legitimate base was the inescapable content of popular approval of its moral basis -- its application inevitably leading to the ultimate goal of public

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good. To him these two components were inseparable: practising political power without a moral basis of its source was immoral and illegitimate.

Throughout his entire political career he continuously sought popular approval of his definition of political programs which he again converted in his own creative way into a source of political power. He galvanised an oppressed minorities' position into the slogan of power; he articulated the Six Point Program as a vehicle of political power; he stood defiant against a ruthless military oppressor -- made the call for an independent Bangladesh in a rare piece of political eloquence, his thunderous voice inspired by the mystic popular approval -- the ultimate source of political power.

He firmly believed that application of political power in a democracy cannot be sustained without this element of popular approval. To him a conceptual misunderstanding of this theoretical definition of power could lead to enormous distortions into the process of social management. Comparisons are odd and this proved prophetic in Bangladesh's context. Bangladesh had its unfortunate share of confused practitioners whose lack of understanding of this issue has led to disastrous consequences. The nation was forced to accept usurpation through illegitimate adventurism as source of political power; the settled definition of nationhood as a secular democratic order is threatened to be

redefined: its secular content is being challenged by a manipulative state-sponsored religious fundamentalism; the economic objectives of the revolution are being sacrificed at the altar of unbridled capitalism; role of practitioners of political power as trustees of national resources is being compromised. One can add. But these are some of the legacies left behind by the "confused practitioners."

Debates have been endless on Bangabandhu's political experiment with Baksal and I am not sure if history has given a definitive judgment on an experiment essentially political in nature encompassing all sections of people. This was neither an act of usurpation nor grabbing of power through military adventurism. Its alleged authoritarian character remains debatable in the context of its broad-based composition. Debates apart one of the compelling component remains the experiment's committed endeavour to bring political power close to the people.

The introduction of the District Governmentship, for example, stands in stark contrast to the inability of the subsequent political establishments to decentralise power to the people mandated by the constitution. Ostensibly the failure is due to the establishment's failure to determine the position of the MP in expedient power structure. It only points to the conceptual problem related to the source of the political power and the owner remains denied.

Bangabandhu's historic achievement in this regard has been the framing of the Constitution of 1972 which gave a clear definition of political power and the location of its ownership. There has been several attempts to tinker with that definition. Subsequent political developments have only proved that nobody could bypass the powerful message authored by Bangabandhu in that historic document.

It is unfortunate that Bangabandhu's attempt to define political power in an institutional form and make it a practising tool dedicated to the common good was cut short by his tragic assassination. It is tragedy with enormous political consequences evident from the series of political crises suffered by the nation for the last thirty years. The ultimate authority of political power stands threatened to be disfranchised and rescue packages regrettably have to be designed to ensure the obvious -- to prove the ownership of the title holder.

Three years was a short period of time. Counter-revolutionaries, political urchins, enemies of the revolution and regrettably, class-conscious revolutionaries -- all got restless to find a new definition of politics in Bangladesh. Did they get it?

Bangabandhu stands out majestically in the colourful canvass of history as champion of the common man's power -- the ultimate source of political power -- which he so admirably symbolised. With so many others as one who had the distinction of serving him personally, I salute him on this day.

A dead Sheikh Mujib remains as great as he was when alive.

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# Reflections on a tragic hero

DR. RASHID ASKARI

**T**HE history of our independence closely resembles literature. It is replete with the grandeur of epics, the story telling of novels, the incredulity of fairy tales, the suspense of short stories, the conflict of drama and the spontaneity of poetry.

Really, there is no accounting for the fact that he, who appeared as the saviour of a people, has been ruthlessly killed only in a double couple of years by some of the same people. His whole family perished in a monstrous carnage. The killers went on a rampage and shot dead almost every member of the family; the Mujibs, their three sons, two newly married daughters-in-law, Mujib's brother Nasser and many others. Even the innocent child Russel could not escape the wrath of the marauding killers. Mujib was killed by bullets in the chest at the turn of the stairs, while asking the killers what they wanted. Unguarded, the founding father of the nation was gunned down!

The tragedy of Mujib's death multiplies when we get to know the harrowing facts of his burial at his native village of Tungipara on August 16, 1975. Although all dead bodies were transported to Banani cemetery for burial in unmarked graves, Mujib's body was buried far from the capital city for, the killers did not want his graveyard to be a place of pilgrimage. One Major Haider Ali was ordered by the DGFI to perform the responsibility of Mujib's burial to be completed in a couple of hours since it would be dangerous to fly the helicopter after nightfall. The burial rites of the greatest son of the soil were performed most expeditiously and

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perfunctorily at gun point. A bucket from a nearby cow-shed was used to fetch water from a tubewell for the purifying bath. The soap used for this purpose was a cheap laundry soap. There was no clean white cloth to be used as a shroud.

So, when no winding sheet was being found, the local police officer suggested that some saris donated by Mujib himself to a nearby Red Cross hospital could be used for this purpose. How the Major in charge of the supervision of Mujib's burial reacted against this suggestion has been poignantly mentioned in S.A. Karim's book *Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy*: "We have no objection. You can bring anything you like. But you are to complete the bloody burial business quickly." The Major answered in military English in which every sentence is liberally sprinkled with the all-purpose word "bloody." Anyway, "three saris," continues Mr. Karim, "were procured from the hospital. Their red borders were trimmed with a razor blade to make a makeshift white shroud. There was no time to stitch the pieces together. There followed a hurried janaza, in which some 25 people took part. Mujib's body was then

lowered to the grave beside that of his father. The Major and his military escort were able to fly out well before dusk so as to arrive safely in Dhaka before nightfall. Thus ended the life of Sheikh Mujib -- the man who was the Father of the Nation."

This terrible killing of Mujib is one of the biggest tragedies in our history. We consider this August 15 pre-dawn killing as August tragedy. The grief is so profound that the remembrance of these excruciating events tends to fade our lofty ideas about Independence and Victory into insignificance. We are repeatedly made to feel: what is the value of the independence of the country, which has seen her founding father, being killed?

As a matter of fact, during the thirty years after Bangabandhu's killing, the spirit of our great liberation war has been vitiated, democracy trampled under military feet, constitution dissected and concept of secularism and human rights throttled. Alongside are fostered autocracy, communalism and anti-liberation elements. So, August tragedy is on one hand, a tragedy of losing the Father of the Nation and that

of losing our national ideals on the other. After the killing of Bangabandhu and then four national leaders in jail, the pro-liberation stance of the country started stumbling around in the dark alley of reaction.

In consequence of this impasse, the anti-liberation forces have bagged power in alliance with the beneficiaries of Bangabandhu murder. Not only that, they have paved the way for the capture of the country by the Islamist militants. This is the biggest concern of the day. Price hike or power shortage is not a very serious problem we are faced with. But the rise of militancy is really something to worry about. This can be solved by the resurrection of the true ideals of our liberation war and those of Bangabandhu.

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