

# Immortal Are Those ...

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## In Memory of Martyred Intellectuals

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### The Day We Cried

By S. M. Ali

NO matter where we lived and worked during that fateful year of 1971, many of us had occasions to cry, almost like children, forgetting that, as adults, we were supposed to have control over our emotions.

For me, then working as a journalist in Singapore, such poignant moments were brought about by all kinds of news which reached us from Dhaka and Calcutta, through wire agencies, foreign newspapers and broadcasts, letters from friends and relatives in India and Europe and just words of mouth. Some were pure hearsays; a few were too horrible to believe.

"No, it can't be true," said Nepal-da, a Bangladeshi born Singaporean whom I used to see in his modest house in Serangoon Gardens almost every other day, when I showed him a copy of the agency report on the killing of intellectuals on December 14.

I kept quiet, with a silent prayer in my heart that Nepal-da might well be right. But a moment later, he put his head on the table and broke down in sobs. When I put my hand on his shoulders, I could hardly offer him any consolation. Both of us were sobbing.

This was not the first time that we had received news of murder of persons I had personally known, university

teachers, writers, journalists. But such news had come often as rumours and sometimes as part of general situations on the war. Those reports usually prompted us to treat such news with some disbelief.

The report on the killing on December 14 was, if I remember correctly, gave names and occupations of victims and was written in a manner which looked authoritative. My journalistic instinct told me straightaway that this was one report that could not be put in the category of rumours and hearsays.

The two of us — Nepal-da and myself — and, indeed, other friends in Singapore, including my colleagues, reacted to all these reports with anguish and anger, at varied levels.

However, to someone like Nepal-da, the victims were persons I had talked about a great deal. So, he and a few others, knew about them as much as it was possible to know certain persons without actually meeting them. Yet, they

were like symbols, part real and part mythical, integrated with a multitude.

It was different with me. Many of these victims were people I knew well. They had names and faces, and they were part of my student days in the university and later of my early working life as a journalist. Their very names evoked memories, sad and happy ones, producing in me that feeling of gratitude for knowing them and profiting from their association.

Some, like Jyotirmoy Guha-Thakurta and Munir Chowdhury, were my teachers and friends.

If one, Guha-Thakurta, gave me a few subtle lessons in radical humanism, the other, Munir Bhai, as we all called him, introduced me to socialist realism in literature. In time, I proved a bad student in both.

Then, there was Shahidullah Kaiser who, through endless talks on socialism, created in me some unspoken misgivings of what life would be like in a Marxist society, which I kept to myself.

I remember the Sunday lunches at the London residence of Sayeedul Hassan in the fifties, the visit to my cousin Wali, a weekend painter and writer, in Chittagong and occasional encounters with Dr G. C. Dev, the head of the Department of Philosophy, who, it seemed to me, lived in a world of his own. And there were others.

Names, faces, memories. After two decades, they remain more than a part of my life that I recall with nostalgia. In effect, they represent strong influences in my professional life, as a modest writer-journalist, and what's more, in what one might describe, in the absence of a better term, as my political awakening. It was all part of a process that has shaped my life, for better or for worse.

When one sees such a process in a wider context then we realise how influences and contributions of individuals form part of a legacy of a people. In time, this legacy merge into our national consciousness and is integrated into history.

We may not always be aware of its place in our life. Sometimes we may even try to downgrade it and forget that it is there.

It is this legacy, intellectual, political and moral, which is left behind by our martyrs that we honour today.

### How the World Heard the News

DACCA, Bangla Desh, January 3, 1972: To his fellow reporters on the Bengali-language paper where he worked, Chowdhury Mueenuddin was a pleasant, well-mannered and intelligent young man. He had an open, handsome face, with a neatly trimmed beard, and there was nothing exceptional about him except perhaps that he often received telephone calls from the leader of a right-wing Moslem political party.

But, investigations in the last few days show, those calls were significant. For, Mr. Mueenuddin has been identified as the head of a secret, commando-like organisation of fanatic Moslems that murdered several hundred prominent Bengali professors, doctors, lawyers and journalists in a Dacca brickyard.

Dressed in black sweaters and khaki pants, members of the group, known as Al Badar, rounded up their victims on the last three nights of the war, which ended on December 17. Their goal, captured members have since said, was to wipe out all Bengali intellectuals who advocated independence from Pakistan and the creation of a secular, non-Moslem state.

If the war had not ended when it did, many Bengalis believe, Al Badar would have succeeded. The bodies of 150 persons, many with their fingers chopped off or fingernails pulled out, were found in the brickyard. Hundreds more are believed buried in 20 mass graves in nearby fields.

It has now been determined that Al Badar was composed of Bengalis not of the hated West Pakistanis or the Bihari immigrants from India, who have long oppressed the native Bengali majority.

"There is nothing in the world that has not been done to us," remarked Entesham Chowdhury, the editor of the paper where Mr. Mueenuddin worked. Mr. Chowdhury's brother was kidnapped and presumed killed by Al Badar, and he himself escaped capture only because he stayed late in his office on the night Al Badar came to his house.

"When I think about what has happened, my legs buckle," Mr. Chowdhury said. "It would have been better if these people had just plowed us under."

There is growing evidence that Al Badar was equipped and directed by a special group of Pakistani army

Fox Butterfield in The New York Times.

officers. Among papers found in the desk of Maj-Gen. Rao Farman Ali, the military adviser to the Governor of East Pakistan, were a series of cryptic references to Al Badar.

"Captain Tahir, vehicle for Al Badar," and "use of Al Badar," one scrawled note said. Captain Tahir is believed to have been the almost legendary Pakistani Commander of the Razakars, the Bihari militia used by the Pakistani army to terrorise Bengalis.

On another page, the author wrote: "Nizamuddin, motivated news," Nizamuddin Ahmed was a Bengali journalist known for his anti-Pakistani views. He was kidnapped from his home two days before the war ended. Beside his name, the author had pencilled in an ominous check mark.

The executioners left few clues. They rounded up their victims at night during the curfew. They never identified themselves. And they carried out their killings in a remote and heavily guarded area.

Farmers who lived near the brickyard, on the north-west edge of Dacca, saw men dressed in black sweaters and khaki pants escorting an endless procession of bound and blind-folded prisoners on the last night of the war. But they couldn't get close enough to see who the men were.

A handful of people escaped to tell parts of the story.

Prof. Mohammed Rauf, a statistics teacher, was roused from his bed by loud knocks on the door just before dawn on December 13. His wife answered. She told 12 armed men at the door that her husband was not at home, but they barged in.

"They said nothing to me, just searched until they found him," Mrs. Rauf recalled. "They tied his arms behind his back and took him away." By chance, a clerk from a pastry shop where the Raufs often shopped had been thrown into the same room as the professor. The clerk, Sri Chandpal, was later released through the intercession of a friend who was a fanatic.

"There were 42 of us in the room," Mr. Chandpal remembered. "We were all tied with our hands behind our backs and had blindfolds. But I managed to work my blindfold loose. Most of the people in the room were

professors and doctors. The guards wouldn't give us anything to eat, and when we asked for water they laughed and said, "Go and ask Indira Gandhi."

Mr. Chandpal said he had no idea who his captors were until he overheard them discussing Al Badar. They kept talking about the need to kill Bengalis," he recalled. "We could hear screams from other rooms."

The following night, Mr. Chandpal said, the guards took away 10 prisoners, including Professor Rauf. They never came back.

When he was released on December 15, Mr. Chandpal discovered that he had been kept in a dormitory of the Dacca College of Physical Education, a group of modern concrete buildings built with American aid.

Makbul Hossain, a janitor at the college, also remembers those nights. "They brought in hundreds of people, all nicely dressed and tied up. We could hear screaming all the time from the rooms," the janitor said.

The name Al Badar is derived from the place near Medina where the Prophet Mohammed fought a great battle in 624. His valiant, outnumbered troops were given the name Al Badar.

According to one captured member now being held in the Dacca jail, the reporter, Mr. Mueenuddin, had been the master-mind of the organisation. A diary belonging to Mr. Mueenuddin's room-mate has been found. It listed the names of Al Badar members and how much money they contributed to the group.

The two men live next door to the Dacca headquarters of Jamaat-e-Islami, a right-wing Moslem political party that ran in the elections for the National Assembly last year but won less than 1 per cent of the vote.

Al Badar is believed to have been the action section of Jamaat-e-Islami, carefully organised after the Pakistani crackdown last March.

Mr. Mueenuddin was last seen on December 13 after having had an argument with a fellow reporter at their paper, Purbodeah. That reporter was kidnapped from his house by Al Badar a few hours later.

Atiqur Rahman, another reporter in their office, has started a search for Mr. Mueenuddin. "We will find him," Mr. Rahman said. "We will find him, or there can be no rest for any of us."

### Two Score and Zero Years Ago

## Trying to Destroy the Nation's Intelligentsia

WHAT will you do if you want to destroy a computer? Suppose, you were allotted nine months to demolish a large, full-fledged computer machine.

From the onset, you tried in unimpeachable ways of yours to do the job. But as days pass by, the computer grows to be even a harder nut to break.

In the long run, you realize that the wicked goal of yours is unattainable. So, understanding that the computer machine has virtually become indestructible, you try, in your desperate bid to annihilate the machine, to obliterate the software, the think-tank of the computer-machine.

That's, exactly, what the Al-Badars and Razakars did precisely two decades ago, today, assuming the role of the terminator of a large chunk of the think tank of this country. Had they been given a couple of more days they could have literally blotted out the whole intelligentsia of our nation.

In 1971, our glorious year of the War of Independence, when the Pakistani occupation army found out that their end

was inevitable, they tried to efface the intellectual community of Bangladesh at the rag end.

As a matter of fact, it was a more flagitious act than the concentration camps of Hitler's Germany. There, the Nazis killed regardlessly, not particularly sorting out the brains of the nation. There were some intellectuals in the crowd, but they were not deliberately selected out.

But here, in Bangladesh, 20 years back, the butchers had a more heinous and calculative mind than Adolf Hitler's 'Schutz Staffel' (SS) or Geheime Staats-Polizei (Gestapo).

The intellectuals are the main driving force of a nation. Those, whom we lost in our War of Liberation included Scientists, Philosophers, Doctors, Artists, Writers, Singers, Composers, University Professors, Researchers, Journalists, Politicians, Lawyers, Teachers, Engineers, Architects, Sculptors, Govern-

ment and non-government officials. Social workers, Historians, Cultural workers, Psychologists, Physicists among them.

On the first night, that's 25th March, 1971, the killers victimised the professor of Philosophy at the University of Dhaka, Dr Govinda Chandra Dev. He was dragged out of his house and shot with the students at Jagannath Hall ground.

On the same night we also lost Dr Muniruzzaman, Professor of the Department of Statistics; Dr Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, professor of the department of English at the Dhaka University; from the department of soil science of the University of Dhaka, Dr Fazlur Rahman Khan, Professor Santosh Bhattacharya of the department of History; Muhammad Abdul Muktafir from the Geology department, M A M Faizul Mahi of the Institute of Education and Research, Physics Departments Anudaiyapan Bhattacharya, and many others. The following nine months saw the death throughout the country of about two thousand intellectual.

The atrocities included the burial of Mir Abdul Quayum, a teacher of the department of Psychology of the University of Rajshahi, while he was still alive and the slaughtering of a Headmaster of a school of Khulna, Mr Prafullakumar Biswas.

In a desperate bid to terminate our intellectual force, the assassins killed many more on 14 December, twenty years ago, in 1971. They included Dr Ghulam Murtoza, the resident physician of Dhaka University, Rashidul Hassan of the department of English, Ghiasuddin Ahmed of the department of History, Dr Abul Khair, also of the department of History, Dr Abdul Alim Chowdhury and many others.

Other martyred intellectuals in our freedom fight includes, Mofazzal Haider Chowdhury, Sirajuddin Hossain, Dr Md Fazole Rabbi, Ms Meherunnesa, Naimuddin Ahmed, Supatirnan Barua, Dr A F Ziaur Rahman, A N M Ghulam Mostafa, Anwarul Azim, Altaf Mahmud, Anwar Pasha, Selina Parveen, Shahidullah Kaiser, Nutan Chanda Sinha, Nityananda Paul, Sirazul Haq Khan, Dr Abul Kalam Azad, Syed Nazmul Haq, Shahid Saber, Ladu Bhai, Dr Muktafir, Khondoker Abu Taleb, Dr Sadeq, Dr Aminuddin and many others.

According to information published in "Ekattorer Ghatok

O Dalalra Ke Kothae" (killers and collaborators of 71 — their current position), the plot to assassinate the intellectuals was the brain child of general Rao Farman Ali of the Pakistan Army. He was assisted by Brigadier Bashir, Captain Katiyom and others.

From the documents found after our independence it could be ascertained plan gained momentum in the month of November in 1971.

At this time the occupation army started finally briefing the central commanders of Al-

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Badr, Al-Shams and Razakars. One of the documents, which was issued on 16th November, 1971, to the Al-Badr camp of Dhaka, clarifies the fact that the occupation army, at the time, supplied the camp with vehicles, arms and killing instruments.

Some brain-washing lecture sessions were held at the camps, where the lectures were delivered by Sub-Zonal Martial Law Administration Brigadier Bashir Ahmed, Captain Katiyom and other army officials.

From the 2nd of December, 1971, the Sub-units of the Pakistan army were re-arranged and different units were allocated functions, such as capturing, torturing and killing.

From 4th December, 1971, started the curfew and black-out to kidnap the intellectuals. The Al-Badr's declared their appreciation for the radio speech by Yahya Khan delivered on the previous day.

The kidnappings, in order to carry out that mass genocide started on 10th of December, 1971. In the midst of curfew and black-out the Al-Badars captured the intellectuals throughout the days and night. They went to the houses of them on a jeep, boarded the

We deeply mourn the loss of the gems in the pendant 20 years ago on this day. Today the members of the Drama Circle remember with pride and honour a brilliant mind, a wonderful personality and Past President of the organisation



Munier Choudhury

May his soul rest in peace

On behalf of Drama Circle  
Taufiq Aziz Khan  
A Founder Member



An effort to cripple a nation's conscience : Bengal's finest massacred at Rayer Bazar by Al-Badr fanatics, December 1971.