

# The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

## DAG DEATH MYSTERY MAY BE SOLVED AT LAST

United Nations personnel are once more in the firing line. The Yugoslav crisis has brought renewed calls for better measures to ensure that agents of the UN are protected. This has prompted two men who played leading roles in the long drawn-out crisis over the former Belgian Congo and the secessionist movement of Katanga, to raise again the need to solve the mystery of the death of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. They believe, after putting together evidence over many years, that Dag was the victim in 1961 of industrialists who wanted to keep control over the riches of Katanga and stop the tide of African nationalism. Sweden has reopened the Dag files and sent an envoy to talk to the two diplomats. Britain, as a major Congo player at the time, is being urged to reopen investigations. One of the two, GEORGE IVAN SMITH, reports for Gemini News Service what he now believes to be the solution to the 31-year-old mystery: Who killed Dag?

### "My Evidence to Show How Dag Died"

by George Ivan Smith

#### Sept 17 1961: The fateful flight

UN plane is thought to have skirted Katanga to avoid being fired on



Dag Hammarskjöld  
1905-1961

year before, I had gone as an assistant for his first meeting in Katanga with Tshombe. When Tshombe talked with us in the garden away from his Belgian masters and microphones it became clear he was a figurehead.

The mission was crucial. Congo had become an amphitheatre for the gladiators of the superpowers. Not just the future of the Congo — the "Heart of Darkness," as novelist Joseph Conrad called it — was at stake, but the authority of the UN itself.

From its chaotic independence in 1960 Congo was a prime Cold War target — a vast country in the centre of Africa laden with resources. The Russians saw it as a NATO base. In 1960 they tried to bring in scout transport planes and radio technicians to activate political transmitters.

Belgium, Britain and France often protected their own industrial interests at the expense of agreed UN positions.

The Afro-Asians, deeply suspicious of major power intentions, wanted Hammarskjöld to hold the ring. In Congolese politics there were many rings of many factions.

The climax came when the UN Security Council ordered the expulsion from Katanga of foreign mercenaries and Belgian military personnel. In August 200 were arrested. With external help they filtered back and in September action was repeated to expel them.

UN force was to be used only in self-defence, but orchestrated resistance by Europeans and fighting followed. Its nature and extent was exaggerated by Katanga publicity agents in London, Lisbon and Washington.

Conor Cruise O'Brien, the target and victim as UN

Representative in Katanga, wrote: "When Katanga is hurt, money screams, and money has powerful lungs."

Hammarskjöld arrived from New York in the Congo capital, Leopoldville, on September 13. He tried in vain to arrange a ceasefire meeting with Tshombe. The British Government put extraordinary pressure on Hammarskjöld by sending Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Lansdowne to the Congo. He warned: "Dismiss O'Brien, stop the fighting, otherwise Britain might withdraw support for the UN Congo operation."

Loss of British support would have been most damaging. To defuse the pressure, Hammarskjöld agreed to fly to Ndola to discuss a truce.

Tshombe was in Bancroft, on the Rhodesia border. He was in constant contact with Sir Roy Welensky, Prime Minister of the now long-defunct Central Federation and a key player keeping Tshombe in power. Rhodesian troops had moved up to the Katangese border. Some soldiers donned Katangese uniforms and crossed to help the mercenaries.

For Rhodesia and South Africa Katanga was the last northern bastion to maintain colonial rule where "white is right, and might." They per-

three Fouga jet fighters and upto 20 light transports adapted for military use which were serviced in South Africa or Rhodesia.

In the days before Hammarskjöld died they strafed UN personnel and buildings in Katanga and destroyed UN transports on the ground. The UN had no air cover and was an open target. That was why Hammarskjöld chose a secret route and a meeting in Rhodesia rather than in Katanga.

The Federation was still answerable to London on foreign policy. Lord Lansdowne flew to Ndola ahead of Hammarskjöld to help ensure the parley, but not to take part. A truce would have been the first step to-



Rivals in the Congo: Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba (soon to be executed) and Katanga leader Moïse Tshombe (right)

mitted mercenaries to be recruited and move freely within their borders. At Ndola they were free to act on the ground around the airport along and over the Katanga border.

The Katangese air force had

wards an overall solution — precisely what the European cabal wanted to avoid. Tshombe free of their control might sell the pass.

Dag Hammarskjöld was my boss and personal friend. As

his spokesman I had been with him on many missions, to the Middle East throughout the Suez Crisis. At UN headquarters, New York, I was in daily contact as his Director of External Relations. By chance, I was not with him on the last flight.

After the crash I was sent to Katanga to replace O'Brien and became the next target for those controlling Katanga. They stimulated similar opposition to the UN to provoke fresh fighting, putting up roadblocks, killing UN soldiers, and sent African paratroops to drag me from a function to prevent conciliation I was trying to use.

They were trying again to win overseas support at UN expense, but they failed because the death of Hammarskjöld had shocked the world. I stayed in Southern Africa for four more years as personal representative of U Thant, who succeeded Hammarskjöld.

During that time I learned many details that now enable a clearer picture of the 1961 events to be put together.

The cabal of industrial and

would be given details when Albertina broke radio silence over Ujiji, Lake Tanganyika — where Stanley found Livingstone.

They would have time to send planes to greet Albertina over Ndola nine miles from the airfield, the point where all planes turn to land. They had radio equipment with which to invite Hammarskjöld to Kamina for talks with the cabal. There was no intent to harm him. A warning shot might be used as a persuader.

Indeed, it was, I have seen notes compiled by a diplomat friend who met mercenaries wanting to absolve themselves of cold-blooded murder. They explained their job had been to divert Hammarskjöld to Kamina. One recalled the words: "God, I have hit it."

Whatever caused the plane to crash, I am convinced from all the evidence I gathered in the following four years that external interference took place at a critical point in landing operations.

Two thorough inquiries were held, one by the Rhodesians, the other by the UN. The first settled for "accident", the second for "open verdict." Neither had any hard evidence. None was to be found in the wreckage.

I visited the control tower some months after the crash, explained to the man who had been on duty that I came as a personal friend of Hammarskjöld and not officially. He was helpful, but could not explain why a taped recording of conversations with aircraft had not been kept.

The inquiries were given only the remembered words of witnesses. As I left he said: "You are right to enquire... we may never know what happened to that plane."



Veteran diplomat George Ivan Smith being greeted in Kuala Lumpur during the 1989 Commonwealth summit

commercial figures controlling Katanga were in Kamina and Kolwezi, centres of Belgian influence before independence. Kamina had an exceptionally large airport, ancillary facilities, workshop, and hospital. It had been the nerve centre of Belgium's colonial regime.

After independence it was used when Brussels sent paratroopers back to protect Belgians and started the international drama. Kolwezi became command centre for mercenaries, who included former high-ranking French officers opposing President de Gaulle's freedom plan for French colonies. Belgian army officers were there and a ragged international brigade from Southern Africa.

With Rhodesians and South Africans they sought to stop the Winds of Change in Africa. Their agents staffed Tshombe's office.

When Hammarskjöld arrived in Leopoldville on September 13 they intensified pressure on the UN. One can trace the pattern.

In the five days before Hammarskjöld left for Ndola air attacks increased. Tshombe was prevented from keeping appointments with O'Brien to arrange a truce. The UN was asked to send Irish soldiers to protect Europeans at Jadotville. They were surrounded and forced to surrender — a trick to gain leverage.

A ceasefire broadcast by one of Tshombe's aides was ignored. Lansdowne flew from London on September 15 and next day pressed demands. That day Tshombe called from Bancroft, which was within constant reach of Welensky, suggesting Hammarskjöld should come for talks.

I am now convinced that those messages were sent not by Tshombe but by the European cabal. They were elated when they heard he would come the next day, September 17.

At last they had a chance to divert him, explain why the UN must not "sell out to the blacks." They knew precisely when his plane would arrive over Ndola. The control tower

I met Welensky many times afterwards. He admitted or denied nothing, but said: "When at 8:30 the next morning I heard there was no news I ordered a check on all African airports. No news again, so I ordered a search from Ndola."

The records show that the night before the search after 0830, I checked the hotel records later. The manager had not been there. I was told he had probably been at a nearby pub which was owned by a mercenary.

Months after the crash a British ex-naval officer who had been driving in the area at the time told me a projectile smashed through the mudguard of his car. He thought it could have been a heavy bullet. Next day he reported to the police. They told him to get it repaired. The fact was not put before either enquiry.

In 1963, as roving UN Ambassador, I planned with officials to make a permanent memorial garden at the crash-site among the smashed trees, which made a poignant cathedral-like shape when I saw them in 1961. I found the site cleared as well as a square mile of bush around it.

Angry, I challenged the European at the Ministry of Agriculture. Why? I asked.

"We rotate sectors for charcoal burning."

But there are thousands of square miles around it. You must have known our plans. "I did but when the first news went out it said Dola Hill, not Ndola."

But Dola is miles away. "I know, but that's where the world first heard it happened." — GEMINI NEWS

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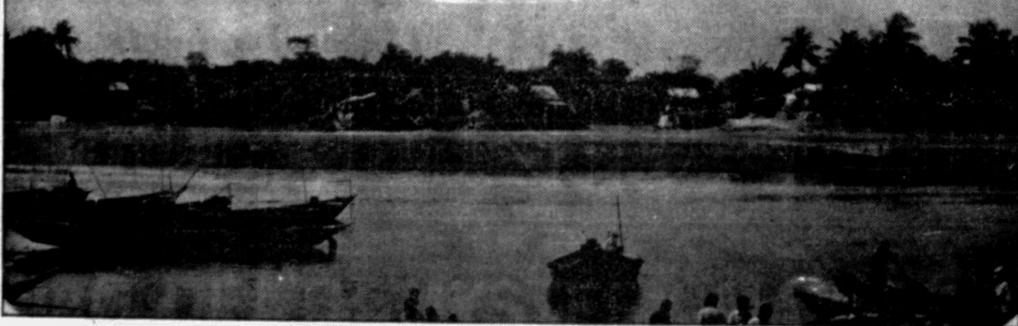
A watery expanse just beyond Gabtali bus terminal, breaking on both sides of the road in barely noticeable waves that reflect in silvery lusters with gentle morning sunshine, makes an ideal setting for a memorable journey. As the bus rumbles along the road, an endless vista of concentrated green occasionally punctuated by an azure horizon unfolds only to recede backward in a procession. The journey takes one slowly but surely into the heart of real Bangladesh.

Paradoxically, though, the bus that pierce through the calm of the surrounding green belt and looks like the odd thing out is the most convenient and cheapest mode of transport for a journey to the countryside. Both Arichaghat and Daulatdia may give a less daring but sensitive mind a moral shock not so much because of the mismanagement there and risks involved in getting on board the ferrying launches but because of the rat race for everything ranging from the coolies' competition for luggage and the constant fear of being cheated by the next man around to the unstrained behaviour of the apparently most polished men and women in their finest wears.

Such diversions aside, the ever-weakening Padma between the two points of Aricha and Daulatdia still has, on a bright autumn day, to offer a sumptuous feast to the perceiving eyes. The intruding landmass on its bosom celebrating the first vegetation may have scientific implications bad enough for the whole country, but presently the natural montage in motion is simply an artist's dream. With gulls winging their ways up and down and swerving sideways with their characteristic skill, the landscape no longer belongs to the prosaic. Such is the irresistible charm of water meeting land and sky that one is almost involuntarily reminded of the inseparable link between them and life itself. The transient life, instead of losing its way into the vastness, becomes one with them

## A Journey into the Heart of Bangladesh

by Nilratan Halder



and murmurs the eternal melody in unison.

Nevertheless, there are barely enough time for such reflective mood. Because, it is time to get out of the launch with its toilet leaving a trail of nauseating smell all around and catch the bus that is waiting at a considerable distance, negotiating not only a disorderly crowd but slippery sands. By the time the passengers have all boarded the bus, streams of sweat run down their bodies — actually the second time since the first boarding at Gabtali — spreading a nasty odour. Add to this the pungent stench of occasional smoking, and the trial and tribulation become complete.

Once again, the green lines of trees and crops provide for the relief from all the unpleasantness in the bus. Cows and goats lazily tearing at mouthful of grass at a distance, a kingfisher making a sudden swoop, a skylark on a quiet flight, a white crane standing in an endless wait, two doves lovingly preening each other's

bodies all the time flapping their wings after a good day's both and two kites settling in an odd score, boys jumping into a pond, a girl carrying a pitcher along her waist and men throwing nets into canal water — all are a treat to the starved eyes.

As if to match the change in

the feeling within, the sky is then engaged in a similar tricky game. With the sun hiding under clouds — some black and others translucent — that threaten rain any moment, it is not very pleasant to alight from the bus and again wait for the engine boat to start for the next part of the journey. The

engine boat, unkempt and with little provision for the passengers' comfort, glides on through a canal. It is a mystery how the canal was dug in such an extremely low and swampy plain.

Even the trees on the canal sides have a distinctive characteristic in that none of them are famous for economic value. Most of the trees do not grow tall enough, nor are their timbers highly valued. Rain trees, so common in the country, are rare too; and rarer still are the fruit trees. However, of the trees, Kadams, the flower of which has been immortalized by Rabindranath in his famous song: "Badal diner prathamam kadam phul" and the tree itself has a special place in the Radha-Krishna lore, are in abundance. It is quite remarkable that the land is rich in shrubs. Then there are kash phuls, white and breathtakingly beautiful, that have really run riot.

Compared to their lush growth, the paddy fields however cut a sorry figure. The traditional varieties of paddy

are on their way to depart because of less water and the high yielding varieties are yet to appear on the scene because the plain is not high enough. Caught in such a "no-hope" situation and even fish being in short supply, the people in the area are yet to decide how best to adjust to the changing nature. But dire necessity has its own way of inventing remedies to overcoming the odds, no matter if they are bizarre at times. A market for shells — millions of them being brought in by boats for sale — has emerged almost overnight at a local business centre. The canal water is littered with empty shells and the putrid stench is simply unbearable. No doubt the shells collected from submerged lands provide for a modest earning and are used as food for shrimps in hatcheries at as distant a place as Khulna, but this marshy land of Gopalganj is exposed to a new kind of environmental hazard.

With the engine boat coming to the end point, there are still a couple of kilometers to go by a country boat. Simple illiterate and poor, the boatman attempts to light his bidi while paddling the *batha* (oar). But a little lecturing on the bad effects of smoking and also on the alternative way of supplementing his diet by the money he spends now on tobacco works as a magic. He keeps his bidi in his pocket and swears not to smoke as long as he can. Quite an achievement indeed!

Suddenly the sound of *dhak* (drum) played at a *Durga mandap* (makeshift arrangement for worship of the goddess, greets the small party from Dhaka. A little more attention, and similar sounds ring at a few other places. One is then reminded that the locality has an absolute Hindu population. The sights and sounds all around have an intimate character. When the sounds of *dhak* come to an end, the quietness of village life is something to savour. Even the dove that breaks the stillness of the surrounding with its low cooing seems to have become cautious to do any outrage to the serenity.

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