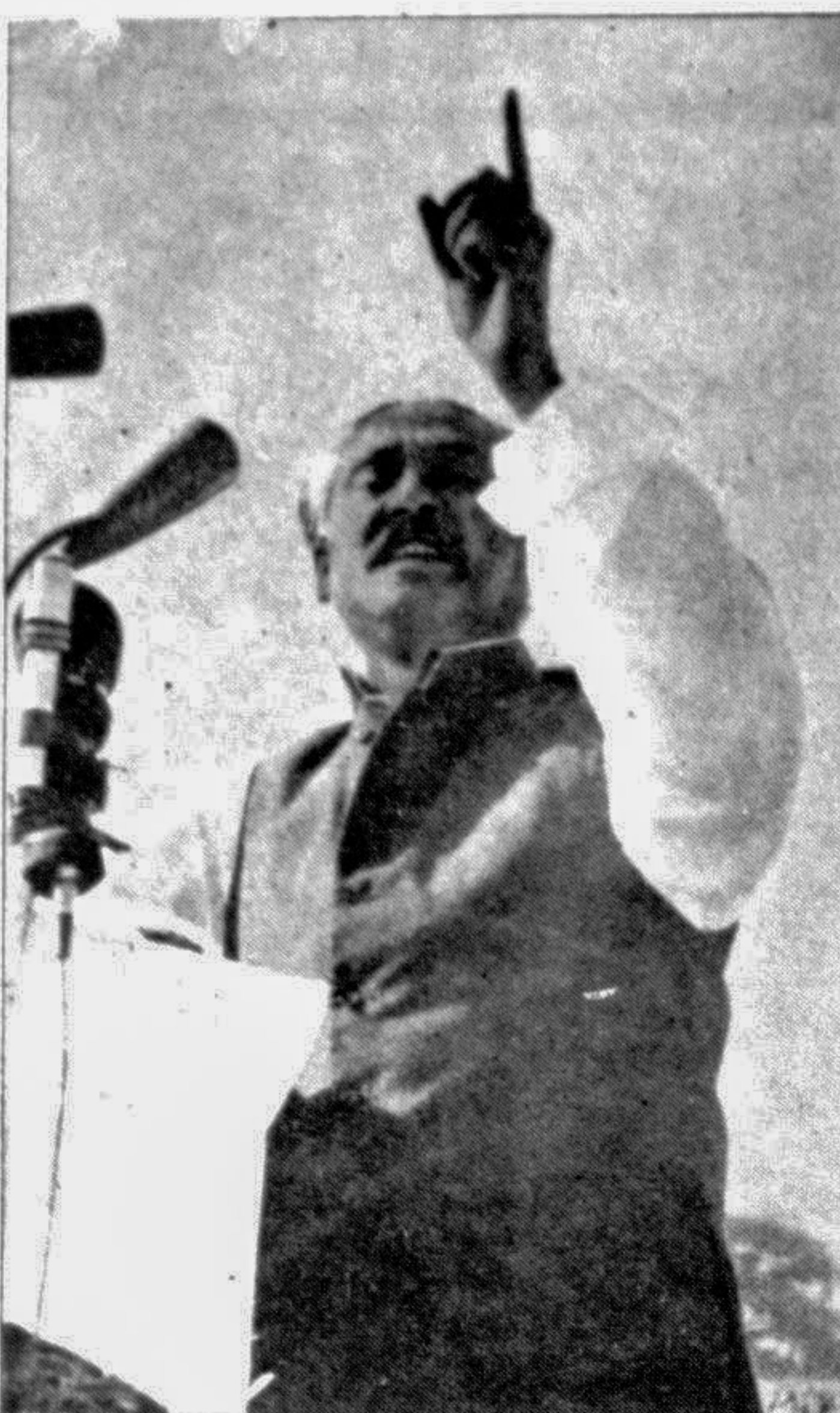


The Undiminished Flame

A Daily Star Supplement on Bangabandhu

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The Nation Paying a Price

by Nilratan Halder

NOT many nations are fortunate enough to have amidst them a leader of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's quality. Not many nations are also as accursed as the people of Bangladesh to lose one like him so prematurely and tragically. For men like him burst into the scene once in centuries. With the emergence of such Mohicans it is not the geographical lines alone that have to be redrawn but also the mental map of people are needed to be reshaped. Sheikh was a towering personality not in a sense that he rose head and shoulder above the common run but because he was the quintessence of the commonality that marks their lives. He was a son of the soil in every sense of the term, or to put it a bit differently, the great man was what his people wanted him to be.

It is because of this quality of identification with his people, Bangabandhu remained all through his life a people's leader. Even in the later days not known for the crowning glory, his presidential pedestal could not make him abandon even for once his unwavering commitment to his people and his enduring faith in their qualities of head and heart. His only fault lies in the fact that he chose to get deceived, betrayed and even killed by believing in the eternal goodness of his people rather than mistrusting them and dismissing their virtues for saving his life.

On August 15, 1975 therefore the misguided and violent group of army did not kill a

man with unbounded love for his people as such, but they killed the soul of the nation that for the first time emerged under the lovely brand name Bangalee to have a sovereign country of their own. This is how the nation paid him its debt. Since that act of ingratitude, the nation has been looking in vain for guidance. Conspiratorial forces — both internal and outside — have got into their heinous business of letting loose chaos. With the sense of direction missing, people are becoming confused and suffering from an identity crisis.

If charisma is one of the many qualities of great leaders, he surely had quite a lot of it. But charisma was not decisively a strong point of Sheikh. He shaped his life on one dream which is that the Bangalees in the East can live in dignity and on equal terms with the peoples elsewhere. In doing so he had to shun all kinds of pretence and even the assumed urbanity. Unlike Nehru he did not have to make extensive journey through the length and breadth of the land to get closer to his people. Mujib held the entire Bangladesh close to his heart. In fact the whole country had its image mirrored in his capacious mind.

In this respect he is more like Gandhi. But with a sharp difference from the man who preached ahimsa, non-violence.

While the man in loth cloth (Gandhi gave up gentleman's clothes for the minimum cloth the average Indian wore and this is despite his background as a barrister), mixed spirituality with politics — if not religious proper — with the former taking precedence to the latter, Mujib made politics the only means for the deliverance of his people. But both appealed to their peoples and guided them to victory — one through a non-violent struggle and the other through an enforced bloody war.

What then has gone wrong since his death 19 years ago this day? A people that has defended them against the brutal Pakistani army and their cause against all temptations and impositions now cannot conduct their affairs in a way expected of them. The problem lies in the alienation of the leaders from their people.

That special touch of greatness no more imbues them with the sense of urgency to look beyond and inward. Looking at the far-off mental pasture is as much necessary as delving deep into the inner realm to develop a vision. It is this vision that continues to inspire a sense of purpose. As if by waving a magic wand Sheikh Mujib roused a whole nation to instill in them that sense of purpose.

Yes, he had that rare quality of throwing before him and his people newer challenges urg-

ing both to be equal to the task. Since it is he who most of the time took the lead, the people also rewarded him by responding the way he wanted them to. The respect and love were reciprocal. All this he could do because he felt their pulse. It is not for nothing that a man so busy and of such a position would remember the

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most insignificant man he had ever come across; he would even retain in memory that person's name and some other rudimentary information.

So the Bangalees were immensely fortunate to have Mujib to lead them through history's greatest test for them. But it was again them who either killed him or allowed him to get killed. Till now there is virtually no at-

tempt to redeem the sin we are collectively culpable of. The nation is not only being haunted by this original sin but it has in the meantime also become vulnerable to divisiveness and corrosion. A moral bankruptcy is what has set in, expediting an all-round disintegration. All those lofty ideals that went into the making of this nation in those best of days and worst of days have been buried under layers of personal ambition, group interests, unclear politics and a thriving consumerism not backed by matching creation of wealth.

Today the yawning disparities between the privileged class and the deprived majority are none of the political leaders' concern. In the name of opening opportunities for businessmen, industrialists and other elite groups favour is being distributed. The under class has to fend for themselves in the most adverse condition conceivable. For they too have to purchase their barest essentials from the market where as producers they are always at a disadvantage but have to face a more adverse condition as a buyer due to their poor purchasing capacity.

The birth of Bangladesh was supposed to change all those. It might not be a promise for an El Dorado but certainly a place where all might be ready to reasonably share both wealth and its scarcity. That

was not to be. In fact from 1946 onward the nation was moving ahead to set the gross injustice to rest and wrongs right. Bangladesh was thought to be the culmination of one phase of people's struggle and the second phase was to be devoted to shaping their destiny as a continuation of that heroic sacrifice and commitment.

As ill luck it might be, the evil triumphed over the good and instead of becoming the epitome of the collective will, the country started on a round-about sojourn. The father who promised the fulfilment of a beautiful dream had his life cut short before he could know that the men surrounding him hardly shared his ideas, let alone ideals and vision. His was a concern not to be misunderstood and misinterpreted. But the crafty and the crooked knew how to sabotage all his good moves. One dares reiterate that he trusted those men only too much. Against all odds he tried to remain calm and composed. But the conspirators and his unfaithful lieutenants alike struck blow after blow to render him incapacitated. However, he was the last man to submit to designs so meekly. In a desperate bid to salvage the situation he went for the controversial one-party (BAKSAL) politics. Before he could prove anything by way of that move, the assassin's bullet silenced him into history.

Even so Bangladesh and Sheikh Mujib are inseparable and perhaps synonymous. Parting him from the country's history can be possible at great cost for all who live and will be living here.

Apotheosis

by Waliur Rahman

The Modhumoti chugs on deep. Sleep dear Father sleep — The serpentine Baiga promises to keep Sleep my Father sleep...

A grave of earth and water, Mother earth, soft and mellow, caring and perfect. Tal, Tomal, Hijal overarching your safety... With Doel and Dove as sentries loyal — Dew-washed grass under the morning sun, Impenetrable shield of faith and trust: In a hamlet of simple amplitude and fulfillment, Tungipara is the name, Evoking feelings, genial and mellifluous, Calm and beauty and sacrifice Full and fecund and the rain... Opens up the magic casement — A Howard Carter standing at the gate Of Tutenkhamen.

And imbibed the spirit of love and soul And love of humanity... A tomb without tombstone, A sepulchre, holy in heart and look.

The Modhumoti chugs on deep, Sleep dear Father sleep The serpentine Baiga promises to keep... Sleep my Father sleep.

You dreamt of Bengal, golden Bengal, Happy and sprightly, masters of their own — A free people, a free nation, After a thousand years or two?

In 1971 you gave us a land — A flag and a song... Three million martyrs put to the torch, Blood spilling over the lush green land Soaking it crimson and red.

The forces of evil and darkness — Of defeat and hatred ran for shelter, Hurry, hurry — Ahriam went to the nether world. Lese Majeste? Conspiracy? Complotto? Joined by dupes, connen and swindlers — Compradors, Factotum.

And Ahura-Mazda, Ormuzd? The evil overpowered the good — But for how long? a while I guess You're a poet, a poet of politics I mean. Trusted one and all and sundry... But that is good —

That's how you're a great man Friend of Bengal — Bangabandhu. A man of mystic height.

The Modhumoti chugs deep — Sleep dear Father sleep... The serpentine Baiga promises to keep, Sleep my Father sleep.

A hero without a fault — A hero in an unheroic land, So was the king of Mycenae... A lightning rod in a shipwrecked ocean — Caesar's courage and love for people Gilgamesh's vision and the joy of life — Came to naught... Brutus and treachery Synonyms in thought Where is hubris? — Nowhere we got... August 15, 1975 Annus Mirabilis — Year of wonders — evil and dark. A sleek sort of a man Walks out with dark cap on his top — Schadenfreude is the name of the cop... The blood sticks like a leech — Motheaten, bankrupt, rotten, Soulless corruption — Putrid bone, dank in marrow. Shorn of ideas, Wallowing in excreta, its own; Consumptive carcass — Vultures do not touch ... Bengal, golden Bengal — The circle is done, round and full, Hundred million souls, Sentinels of truth, just and good — Marching to the tomb ... Without tombstone, To the sepulchre, holy in heart and look.

The Modhumoti chugs on deep — Sleep dear Father sleep, The serpentine Baiga promises to keep — Sleep my Father sleep...

What Happened at Bangabandhu's Burial Site

By Naimul Haq

FROM quite a distance, the unagreeable vibrating sound of the rotor blades of a helicopter whirling around ominously alerted the inhabitants of Tungipara, 22 km from Gop-alganj district town.

August 16, 1975 was a hot, humid day. It was well after midday when the giant Russian copter started circling above the dak-bungalow of the village before delivering an unusual cargo. It was the coffin of the bullet-ridden body of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. A most unexpected way for a hero to come home.

"I was having my meal when I heard such an unusual sound of the copter", Abdul Makid Fakir, 52 recalls the day with visible emotion. "I ran out and found our neighbours looking up in the air with surprise. Then we saw the copter above the dak-bungalow," said Fakir pointing towards the building.

In London. "We got the news of the assassination at around 9:15 am the same day. A wireless message first broke the news at Tungipara. It quickly spread across the village. It was terrible, few could absorb the shock of the death of the great leader," said Nawab Ali, 68, who often used to accompany Mujib to his public meetings.

Nawab Ali remembers how Mujib's grave was made. "A wireless message from the capital first ordered five graves to be readied. This confused us. As we wondered who were the five to be buried, a second message from Dhaka said two graves were needed. This was also confusing but we guessed that the second grave would be for Mujib's wife. We were half way through the first grave when we were interrupted and told that only one grave was to

was given in writing that Mujib was a 'Shaheed'. The officer was in trouble and did not wish to waste any more time, he allowed the body to be cleaned before burial. The men were given only 15 minutes to complete the process. Halim asked for 30 minutes explaining that 15 minutes were not enough to complete the process. The officer agreed.

Meanwhile, the villagers forced to stand away from the scene, wished to have a last look at the great leader. Kazi Enayet Hossain, 66, was among thousands of villagers who encircled the area to see what was going on. "We were anxiously waiting to see the body. Some of us became angry at the decision that we would not be allowed to see our leader. However, our emotion subsided as we saw the troops suddenly pointing submachine

remained at the bottom of the coffin. A white folded piece of cloth lay on the chest of the body. I removed the cloth, suddenly my eyes were filled with tears. The more I stared at the body the more I cried. I saw Mujib wearing a lungi, white kurta and a vest. The clothes showed more than 20 bullet wounds. There was blood all over, says Islam murmuring Sheikh's name a number of times. We bathed Mujib's body with a soap secretly brought from the nearby hospital and then wrapped it with two white saris. It was an irony that the troops provided only a small piece of white cloth for Mujib's burial. We, however, avoided that and quickly wrapped the body with the saris before they noticed anything."

"We were now ready for Janaza. The troops also joined. It took only few minutes. As soon as the Janaza was over the commanding officer directed the volunteers to complete the burial in 10 more minutes. The troops stood by. About 14 people helped lower the body in the grave. The emotion in us grew stronger and stronger as we put the body down, said Islam nodding his head and saying, I still cannot accept that our great leader is buried in that grave."

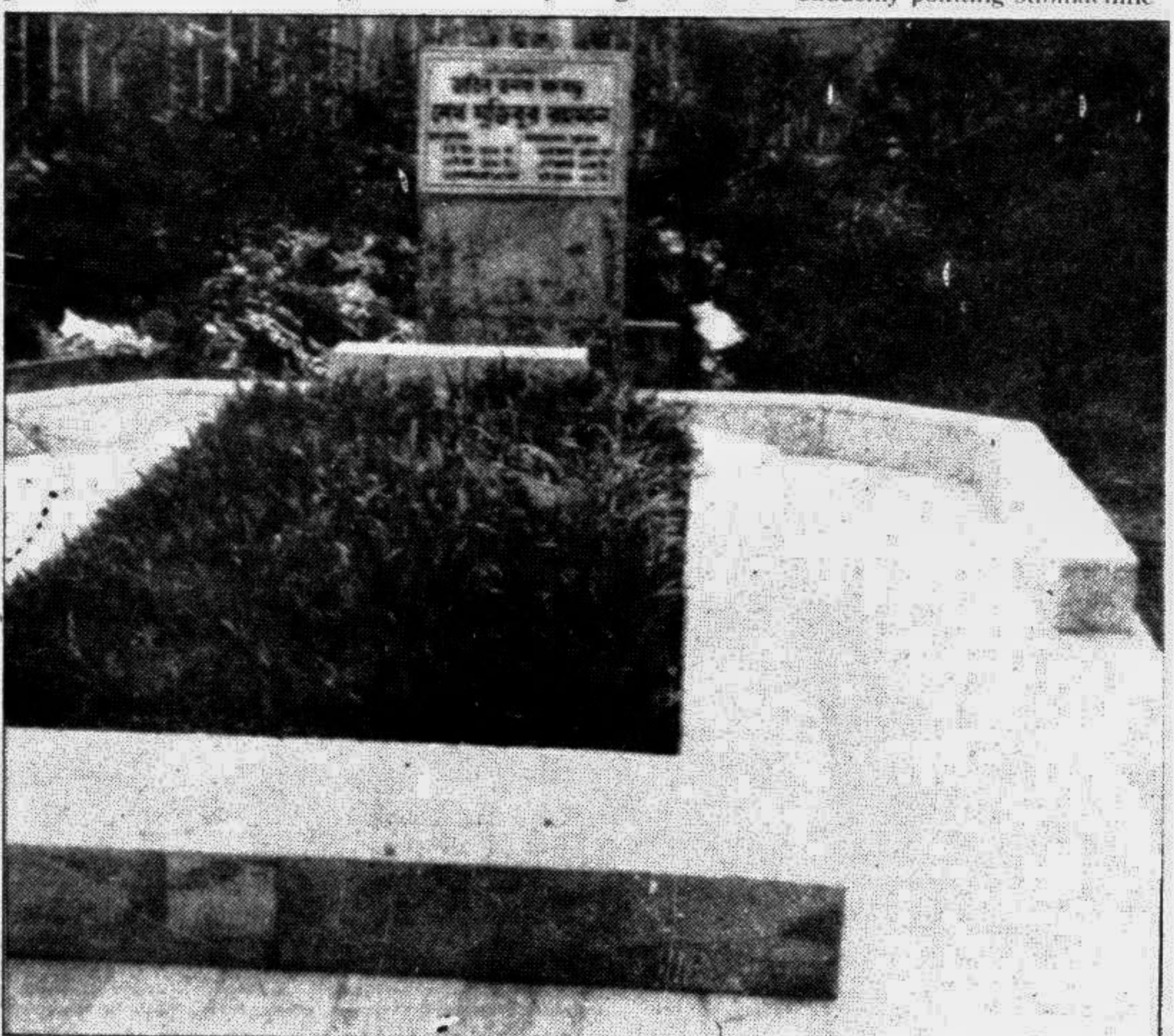
As soon as we completed the burial the local police was ordered to clear the place. They were strictly forbidden to allow any visitor inside the area.

The helicopter lifted off carrying the troops. Thousands of mourners watched as the copter vanished into the sky.

The graveyard was sealed off. Police patrol guarded the boundary of Bangabandhu's home, automatic guns were fitted on top of the roof for further security. Those who looked after the house were also asked to leave and live somewhere else, recalls Nirmal Biswas, 41, who served as a servant in the house since he was 12. "I was kicked out by the police. They threatened to lock me up if I ever tried to come near the area. In fact, I was once arrested for attempting to go near the grave."

Many however risked defying the warnings just to see the grave. A dozen or so people were arrested. "How could they expect that we would avoid seeing Mujib's grave", said Ekram, 47. "This is Mujib's home, he grew up here, stayed in that house and climbed the stairs to earn the highest respect as a leader. How could we forget him. I will regret for the rest of my life for not paying the last respect to Mujib, said an old man in his eighties.

Bangabandhu will be in the hearts of thousands of inhabitants of Tungipara and its neighbourhood. The remains of Mujib's bullet-ridden body rest, perhaps, in peace in the white marble grave only 20 feet away from his house where he grew up as a child and was destined to be the founder of an independent country. One wonders if Mujib really rests in the soil of Tungipara or in the hearts of unknown millions of his people.



now a police station. It was a horrifying scene witnessed by hundreds of villagers.

The copter stood still in the air until a platoon of troops armed with automatic weapons jumped off onto the ground and took up position in a circle to scare off any one daring to attack them. The copter slowly landed. We feared an attack on us by the troops. Words quickly spread that the copter was carrying Bangabandhu's coffin.

It was quite a surprise to see the coffin although, the whole village had already undergone a mortifying shock at the previous day's news of brutal killing of Bangabandhu, said Fakir.

Bangabandhu was killed in a bloody coup at his Dhanmondi residence in the capital in the early hours of August 15. Sixteen others, mostly Sheikh's family members, were also killed in the coup the same day marking the death of his entire family, except two of his daughters who were away

from Dhaka. We dug the grave only eight feet away from the graves of Mujib's parents. Abdul Mannaf, 71, recalls how rough the officer in charge of the army team was with them. Mannaf was among the 30 villagers selected to help in the burial. On arrival, the officer asked Moulana Abdul Halim of the village to conduct the funeral prayer for Mujib.

Halim enquired if the body had received a purifying bath. The reply was "no." Halim asked for permission to give the bath. The request was turned down. Halim refused to conduct Janaza unless the body was washed. The officer and Halim exchanged hot words for a few minutes. Halim stood firm on his decision to conduct Janaza only if Mujib's body was bathed. From the very beginning the officer had been ordering the helpers to bury the coffin but Halim objected. At one stage Halim said the body would need no bath if it

guns at us," said Hossain who rushed to the spot minutes before the coffin arrived. "The situation was tense. We feared gun shots to be fired at us while the army team feared that they might be attacked by the villagers.

The troops thought the people there might take revenge on them for having killed Bangabandhu. So they wanted to hurry through the burial. They assumed tension would die down as soon as they flew off.

In the meantime, the wooden coffin had to be broken as there was no easy way to open it. "I along with four others helped open it. At first, I saw pieces of ice covering the body, said Nazrul Islam, 50. The ice did not appear as crystal as they should. They appeared brownish. The body gradually emerged as we removed the ice with our hands. The bullet-ridden body was at last before us. Every one tried to have a look.

Coagulated lumps of blood

15th August

by G A Momin

This is the day When the world came to a halt for us And all the rivers and the streams started Blowing in the reverse direction. The southerly breeze took to blowing From the north.

This is the day When the truth was carried to the gallows by the lies And valour got vanquished by cowardice.

This is the day When Gulliver was overpowered by the Lilliputs And darkness got better of the sun. This is the day.

But this is also the day Which should ignite a war of roses Against odious pests A war of singing birds Against shrilly vultures.

This is also the day Which should transform the blood stream of '75 Into a spate submerging and washing away The abodes of snakes and predators.

This is also the day Which should turn a zephyr into a fierce gale up-rooting the trees that have not taken the roots deep inside the soil of the laud. This is the day.

