

# National Mourning Day '94

19th Anniversary of the Assassination of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

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## History's Macabre Tragedy

by Sheikh Hasina

"Allah hu Akbar  
Hya alas Salah  
Hya alal Falah"  
(Allah is Great,  
Come for prayer  
Come for salvation.)

While the call of the muazzin floated across the city that pre-dawn fateful 15th of August, a group of murderers, ignoring that call, were proceeding with their tanks and armoured towards their evil intent. With their murderous weapons they went on a wild orgy of blood-letting. They killed the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had lighted the path of freedom for this country. They killed his mother, Begum Fazilatunnessa Mujib. They killed the student leaders and brave freedom fighter Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and their newly-wed brides Sultana Kamal and Rosy Jamal, the brides who still bore the henna marks on their palms.

There was a lot of killing that morning. The only brother of Bangabandhu, Sheikh Abu Naser, Brigadier Jamil who had rushed to save the life of the Father of the Nation, the police and bodyguards were slaughtered without mercy or reason. Little Russel, only ten years old, was crying with fright "Take me to my mother, take me to my mother." They dragged him to the body of his mother, pushing the corpses of his father and brothers, they pushed him down and shot him there. They described this as "mercy killing."

And this was not the only killing they did that night. The list goes on and on. Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni, a prominent youth leader and his pregnant wife were mercilessly killed. The killers went to the house of labour leader Abdur Rab Serniabat and murdered the entire household, including him, his thirteen-year-old daughter Baby, his ten old son, Russel's playmate Arif, his four-year-old grandson Shukanta, his nephews journalist Shahid Serniabat and Nantist. They did not spare the servants and others who had taken shelter in that house.

Once again, the 15th August 1975 witnessed the betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the people of this soil.

Recall 1975, in the war field of Plassey where that other heinous betrayal enslaved the Bengalee people for two centuries, when Bengal's last independent Nawab, Sirajuddowla was treacherously let down by his own commander-in-chief. Here, in the newly-independent, war-torn Bangladesh, Khandakar Mustaque's lust for power, to become the president of this country, led him to murder Bangabandhu with the collusion and collaboration of his trusted accomplices Col. Rashid, Col. Faruq, Majors Dalim, Huda, Shahrar, Mohiuddin, Khairuzzaman, Mohsin and others. And just as in that field of Plassey two hundred years ago, the soldiers of Sirajuddowla refused to defend him at the behest of that other traitor Mir Zafar, who had lusted for power, to replace Sirajuddowla.

Among those who had betrayed Bangabandhu were some of his most trusted people, some who had been

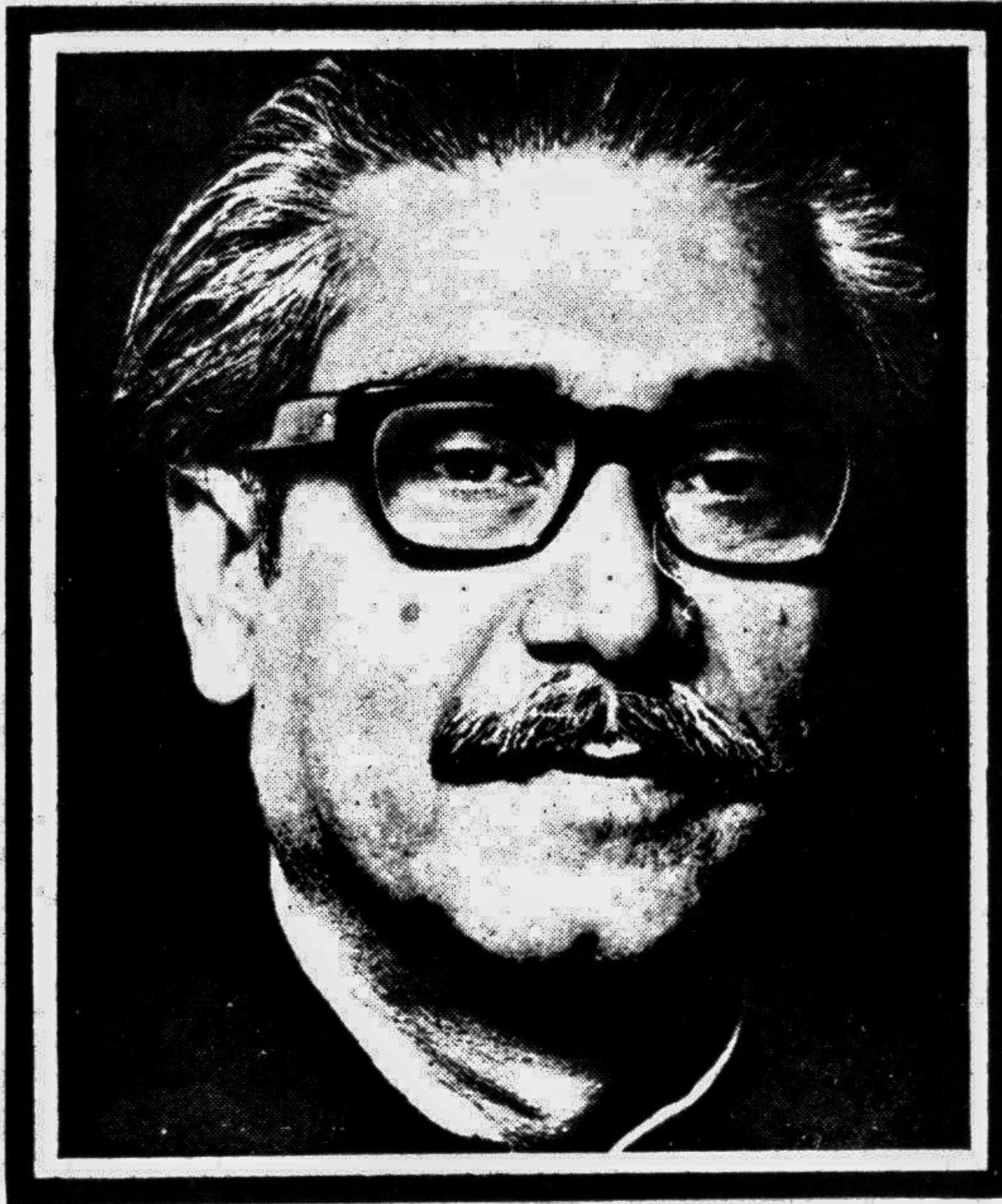
moulded by his own hands and had reached to the heights of power due to the reflected glory of Bangabandhu. It is strange that history is full of reputation but we never learn from history. For, just as Mir Zafar could not retain the bitter fruit of his treachery, he was nawab for less than three months, so Mushtaque was president of Bangladesh for not even three months! Traitors are not trusted wholly, even by their own evil masters. Such is history!

With the cruel assassination of Bangabandhu the hopes and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh were once again crushed under the boots of the corrupt, dishonest and unethical elements. When he had stimulated a hope, a euphoria that there was nothing that Bengalees could not do, a hopeless despair and tragic sorrow overtook our people. Once again they became the victims of exploitation, of slavery. The traitors had destroyed the momentum generated by Bangabandhu and the heady victory of the 16th of December.

The fate of the killers of Bangabandhu was another bizarre phenomenon. Not only did Gen Ziaur Rahman not punish them, but, by an amendment of the sacred constitution, they were exempted of their crimes and protected from any punishment. And, strange irony, they were rewarded for this act. They were inducted into the foreign ministry and sent out to represent Bangladesh as diplomats. And by this act all the ideals and fundamental values on which this country fought for independence, tolerance, justice, equality of opportunity, secularism were permanently destroyed. For rewarding wrongdoers and punishing the good and honest can create a psychological shock on a population. It is not surprising that we see so much lawlessness and vandalism today. The people of Bangladesh loved Bangabandhu and they abhorred the killers who till today move around heavily guarded. It is their fate. Why, and for what was Bangabandhu killed? Why this elaborate conspiracy to kill this man who sacrificed his entire life to emancipate the Bengalees from bondage, economic, social and cultural exploitation?

The key to this answer is just that key word — emancipation. Bengalees were downtrodden and crushed. They were the second class citizens of Pakistan, they were not the masters of their fate. Decisions came from the military junta of Pakistan and East Pakistan was ruled by a few puppet henchmen who carried out their masters' orders. Power was vested in the hands of a selected coterie. And Bangabandhu dared to challenge that vested interest group. The hope he infused in the minds of the Bengalee race, for years crushed under the bondage of exploitation, led them to a long and cruel battle and ultimate victory. That was his crime!

Not very long ago Bengalees, including Bangabandhu, too, had fought for the creation of Pakistan. But after the victory, the fruit turned sour. We got nothing from that



Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

liaison, neither economic, nor political benefit. We were ruled with an iron hand from Pakistan. Our own wealth was used to build up Pakistan while our roads, universities, colleges, schools and other institutions started to decay. The crunch came when Bengalees were told that they could not speak their own mother-tongue — Bengali and instead Urdu would be the only language of this country. A lot of blood had to be shed before we could retain the right to speak our own mother-tongue! That was what we got for fighting to achieve the independence of Pakistan. Conspiracies continued to crush our culture and deprive Bengalees of their ancient heritage.

Twenty-two families were artificially created to control the economy of Bangladesh/East Pakistan. All businesses were controlled by them. Bengalees never got an opportunity to explore their own resources. They were not encouraged to have any kind of business. For the smallest business deal we had to go to Islamabad, stay there at our own expense, and try to meet the big personalities for the smallest favours. If there was a Pakistani contender, the Bengalee lost. Bangabandhu emancipated us from all this. His gift to the Bengalees was an opportunity to improve their lives in an atmosphere of freedom. Mark his famous speech of the 7th of March 1971, at the old race-course ground:

"This time our struggle is for our emancipation. This time our struggle is for our liberation. Joi Bangla."

Predictably, the reaction of the exploiters was shrouded by panic. Food as it were, was being snatched away from their mouths. How could Bengalees dare — and all the fault is of that Sheikh Mujib. He has roused the Bengalees! For Bangabandhu had indeed roused the Bengalee people and made them dream the dreams of what they had never dared to before. They wanted to attain that golden Bengal to claim their legitimate rights to shake off the chains and shackles and live a decent life with the rest of the world. The vision of independence, of claiming their birthright led them to the glorious victory of December 16th, 1971. After one of the bloodiest wars of modern times Bengalees achieved a historic victory: their own country, their own flag.

But on that sad morning of 15th of August, 1975, once again the defeated forces of 1971 raised their ugly heads. The ugly spectre which had been crushed by our valiant freedom fighters, rose up from the ashes to once again loot, plunder and enslave our people. A Bangladesh minus Bangabandhu was and easy prey in the hands of that old coterie.

What is Bangladesh today? Where does it stand? How much have we achieved since 1975? The dream that Bangabandhu had for his people: food, clothing, shelter, education, medical facilities, opportunity for all — has any of this been achieved after his death? A lifetime devoted to freeing his people and giving them a life of dignity and honour, Bangabandhu had to face untold harassment, jail

and torture was his lot. Single-minded and uncompromising in his purpose, Bangabandhu never broke down, not even when he faced a possible death sentence during the trumped-up Agartala Conspiracy case days. His devotion to the cause of our people, his uncompromising idealism should be a lesson for our younger generations. He achieved his victory.

And what happened after Bangabandhu was killed? That very military rule against which he had fought all his life, against which three million lives were sacrificed and which our valiant freedom fighters fought for nine months — once again military rule was clamped down on Bangladesh. People lost their fundamental rights. An unremitting campaign was launched to belittle the image of Bangabandhu. The freedom-fighters were insulted, harassed and even jailed and tortured. An even more vicious campaign started to distort the true history of our liberation war. Textbooks were changed overnight. The real war heroes' names were downplayed while those who had actively opposed the creation of Bangladesh were made into liberation fighters. Night became day and vice versa.

As a result there was a dormant resentment against the whole move. Powerless and beleaguered, Bengalees wore a mantle of depression and despair. The military rulers totally controlled voting rights and food supply of the people. That is how the entire country went under their clutches. The rich became richer while the poor went down further: while

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## Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Bangladesh Today

The history of Bangladesh is one of a thousand years' struggle for social, cultural, economic and political independence. Whatever was left after hundreds of years of domination was on the verge of extinction when the military junta of Pakistan tried to stifle the very Bengali identity and culture of our people. In a systematic plan to destroy the culture they first struck at our language, then the social pattern, the moral values and norms with a view to eradicating all vestiges of our proud Bengali nation. Throughout history Bengal had created patriots who fought and suffered, at the hands of these dominating forces. In our times we witnessed the greatest of these heroes of Bengal — Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Father of the Nation. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman successfully defeated these attempts, one by one, till he led us to final victory in December 1971. Step by step, Bangabandhu foiled the anti-people efforts beginning with the 1952 language movement, through the 1954 election victory, the 1962 anti-martial law movement, the announcement of 6 point autonomy programme in 1966 to the 1970 election, which he won a massive victory. In-between he had to fight the Agartala Conspiracy case manufactured to try and hang him for alleged anti-state activities. The entire Bengali nation rose in a body and forced the junta to free him unconditionally.

Bangabandhu, with his charismatic leadership fought relentlessly to free his people from the stronghold of Pakistan which was engaged in an effort to choke out the very life of our people. He infused a dream and hope in the hearts of the people who had been pushed into dormancy, downtrodden with poverty and bereft of all honour and dignity. This light, this hope that Bangabandhu infused was like a magic potion — Bengalis woke up from that nightmare and resolved to break down the chains and shackles of bondage.

Bengalis became once again proud of their potential talent, they recognized that they had to struggle in order to achieve human rights and were ready to do that. Bangabandhu was a mystique, he possessed that divine talent which enabled the Bengalis to dream the dreams they had never dreamed before. He united his people, he brought out the noblest and best in them; and they could die for him and to throw away the yoke of enslavement. Those were his contributions to Bangladesh. And that is why he is acknowledged as the greatest Bengali yet born on this soil. His address of the 7th of March where he declared that from then on it would be a struggle for emancipation and independence hitherto his call was for non-violent non-cooperation. On the 7th of March, at the old Race Course maidan he called upon his people to erect defensive forts, and said that non-cooperation should be on all fronts. People obeyed his words in toto. When on the 26th of March the Pakistani army swooped with all their bloody might on the defence-

less people of Bangladesh, at that moment he declared independence of Bangladesh. Swiftly he was imprisoned by the Pakistani junta and whisked off to Pakistan. His people however continued to battle in his name, a long drawn bloody war where 3 million people gave their lives — and independence was achieved. The name of our country, 'Bangladesh' was given by him. The slogan 'Joi Bangla' and 'Joi Bangabandhu' were slogans which came from the hearts of our people.

Today, 23 years after the liberation of our country we have to ask ourselves once again, what happened to Bangabandhu's Bangladesh? What happened to those glorious ideals, the principal foundations, for which our boys gave up their lives to liberate this land? What happened to the dreams, hopes and aspirations of our people?

Bangabandhu said about secularism, "Bangladesh will be a secular country. By secularism I do not mean atheism. Here in Bangladesh the Muslims will practise Islam, Hindus will practise Hindu religion. Here Christians will practise their own religion and the Buddhists theirs. Our people have never been non-religious, our people on the other hand, have always been tolerant of all religions. By saying this I want to clearly say this to all of you — no religious intol-

eration will be allowed on our soil. In the name of religion nobody will be allowed to loot and trade. Nor will we allow

people to use religion as a political weapon, to create Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams to misuse and abuse our religion. Communal politics will remain banned. The four principles on which our country was based were Democracy, Nationalism, Secularism and Socialism meaning exploitation free society. Out side of these no other brand of politics will be allowed."

In brief three and a half years Bangabandhu worked without rest continuously to set in motion all the developmental or uplift programmes to complete them as quickly as possible so that he could swiftly go for other revolutionary reforms for the emancipation of the poor people. Anti-liberation forces killed him at this stage.

Awami League ruled this country for a brief three and a half years. They inherited a war-ravaged country where all the infrastructures lay destroyed. For the next 19 years the anti Awami League forces have been ruling. Except for a small coterie who became rich, or rather were aided and nurtured to become rich, where do the rest of the people of our country stand today? What progress have we made? In these 19 years BNP itself ruled for about nine and a half years.

Let us examine the World Bank report and compare the figures of then and now:

	1971-75	1976-80	1981-86	1990-91	At Present
National Growth Rate	7	4.7	3.6	1.9	
Below Poverty Line	50%				88%
Landless	34%				60%
Unemployment	15%				42%
Grams of food per Person	807 gms				690 gms
Rate of Food Production	8.5		2.7		1.7

Price Index of a few essential commodities, The old rates are of August 1975

Item per seer	1975 Rates	Present Rates
Rice	Tk 3.75	Tk 12.15
Mosudal	Tk 4.70	Tk 28.38
Mustard oil	Tk 6.50	Tk 58.00
Dried chilly	Tk 11.65	Tk 44.64
Beef	Tk 6.00	Tk 65.00
Mutton	Tk 10.00	Tk 120.00
Large rui fish	Tk 11.75	Tk 240.02
Large hilsa fish	Tk 6.00	Tk 160.00
Onions	Tk 2.57	Tk 12.79
Sugar	Tk 6.00	Tk 32.00
Potato	Tk 1.25	Tk 11.00

The price of these everyday essential items have risen disproportionately to the rise of people's income. Poverty and unemployment have risen to an alarming proportion. What is more dangerous is the alarming increase in violence and crime: campus and street terrorism, murder, smuggling,

decadacy, kidnapping, black mailing and extortion. People are living in terror. Let us examine some more statistics. Only foreign debt at Bangabandhu's time was 86 crore US Dollars — which means roughly 50% of national GDP. That is exactly Tk 4817 per person. The percentage of export earning spent in repayment of foreign debt is as following:

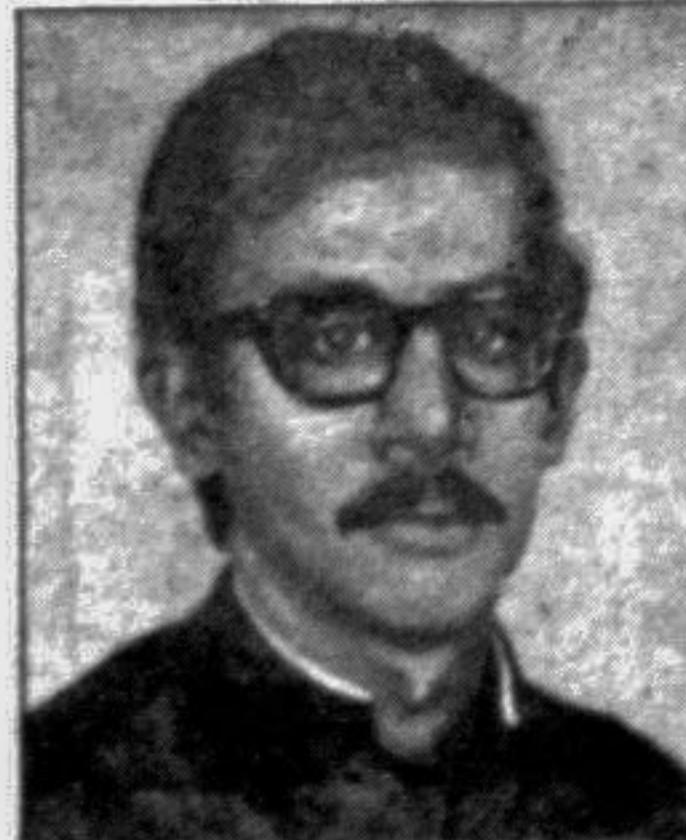
	Bangabandhu's time	Zia's time	Now
Debt payment from export earning	4%	38%	43%
Balance of Trade	Tk 435 crore	Tk 2979 crore	Tk 6600 crore

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Begum Fazilatunnessa Mujib



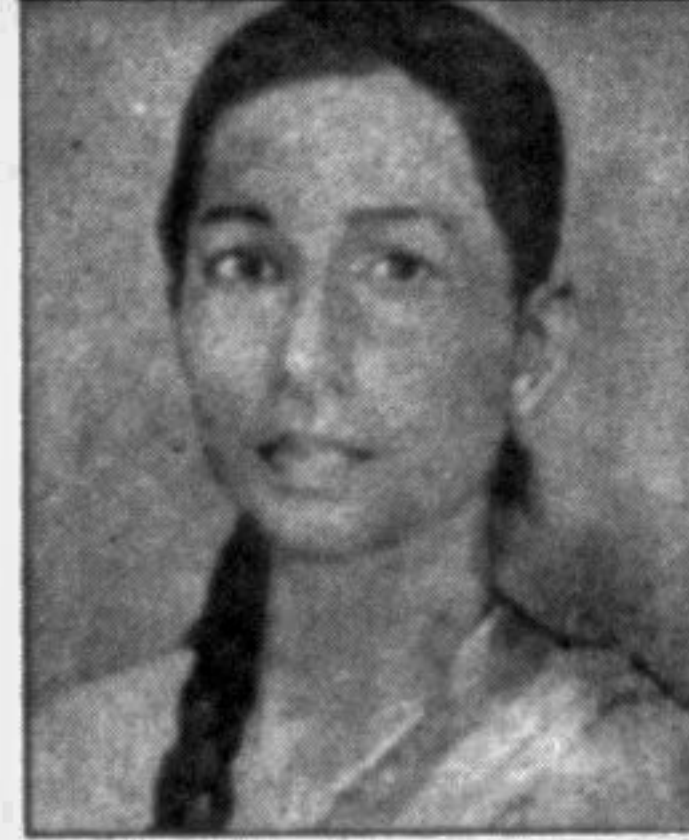
Sheikh Kamal



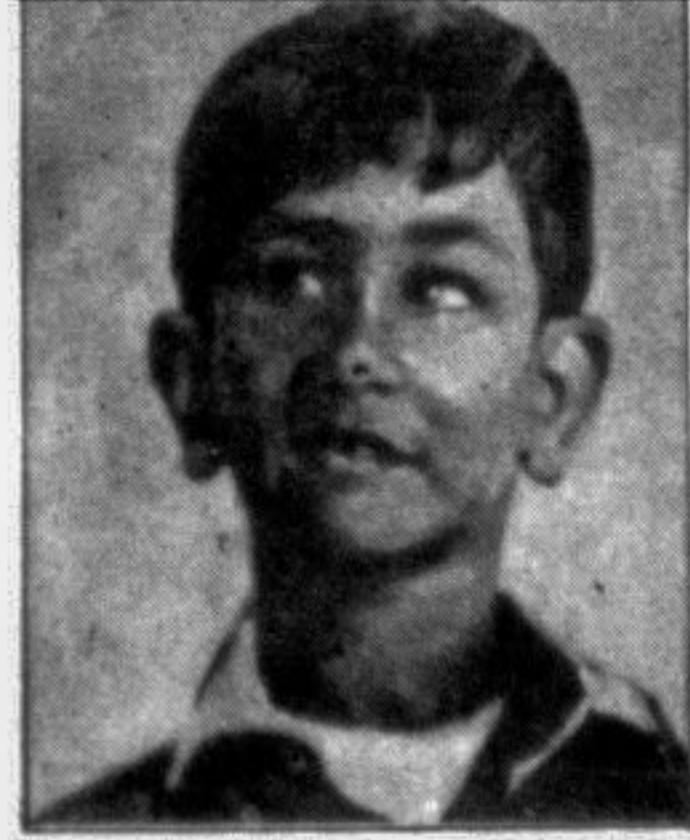
Sultana Kamal Khuki



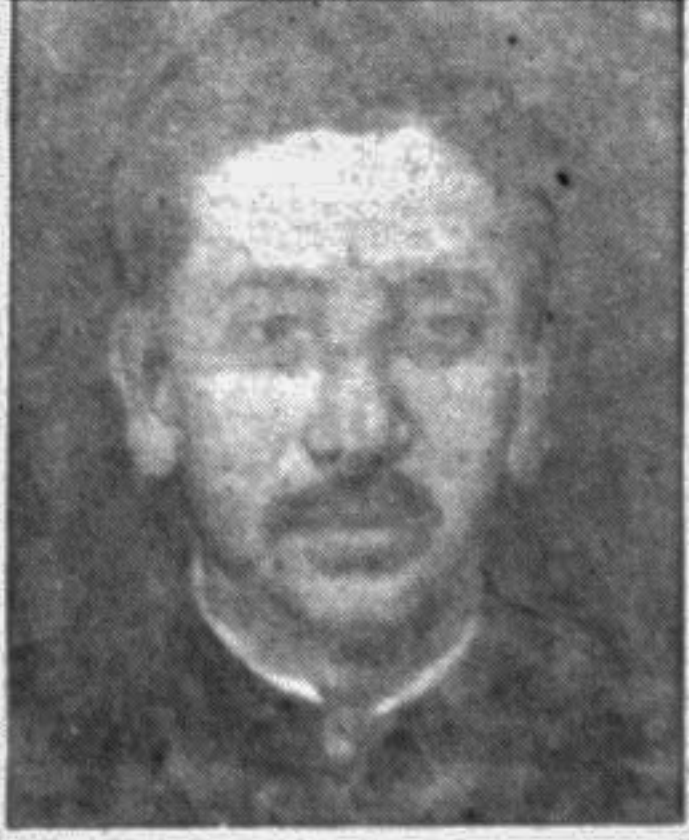
Sheikh Jamal



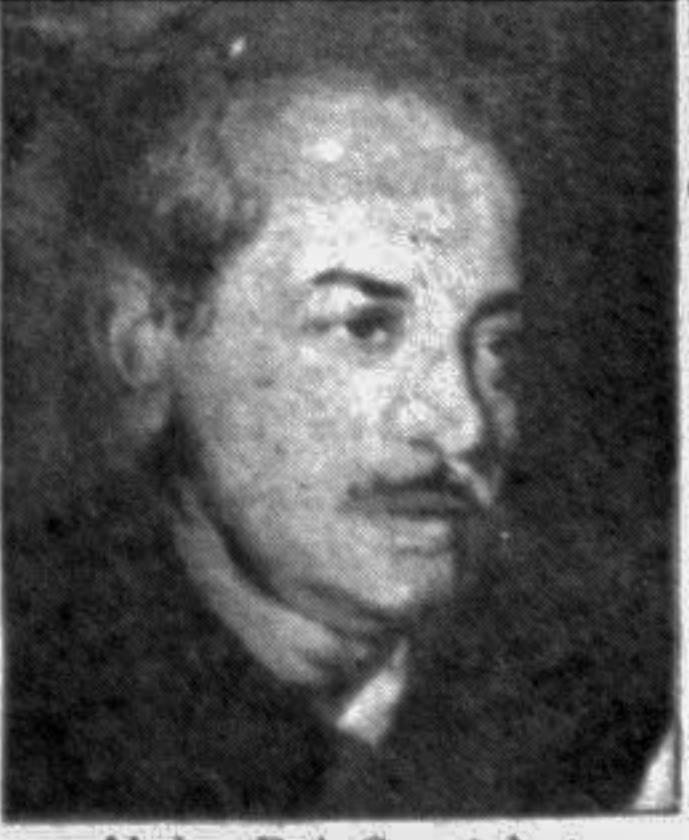
Parvin Jamal Rozi



Sheikh Russel



Sheikh Nasser



Abdur Rab Serniabat



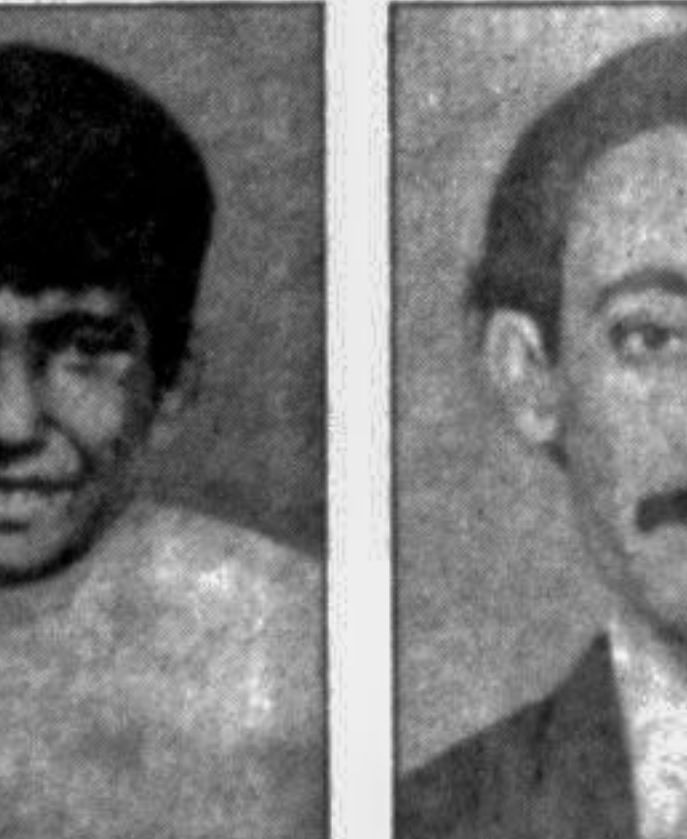
Baby



Arif



Babu



Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni



Begum Arzoo Moni



Shahid Serniabat



Colonel Jamil