

From Grief to Nation-building

Fifteenth August. Give us this day the power to strengthen our resolve against all future black acts of treachery and cowardice, unconscionable cruelty against man and nation — bloody murder not only of people but of people's achievements. Give us this day the resolve to struggle and shape our nation as fulfils our aspirations and is in consonance with the dreams of the best lovers of this land and its culture and this people.

This was the day when the politics to end all politics struck and blood was let never to cease flowing from the wasted body of this nation, thrown as it was to abysmal muck of mistrust and endless perversity of pursuing personal ends at the cost of closest of men and dearest of their values.

Did the nation acquiesce by being non-committal even at that hour of its violation from whose ignominy we haven't yet risen clear? No. While some rejoiced, and clamped pat a name on that black morning — the Day of Deliverance or Najat — the nation was dulled with the thud of the stroke into a moron's existence and is not yet fully recovered. Military dictatorship replaced democracy, communal sectarianism substituted secularism and the root of all our struggle to establish our identity was to yield place to a most outlandish concoction. What remained of the decades long democratic struggle crowned by the victorious liberation war? Very little.

We need this day to resolve against the perpetrators of the August 15 killing and its sinister spin-off, the Jail Killing — and the forces that till today glorify these, the heirs to the arsonists, rapists and murderers of the nine-month genocide. One may differ with the policies and performances of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman a thousand times. But condoning the ultimate crime of slaughtering the founder of the state — and almost his whole family as a means of transfer of political power is simply something that doesn't go with democracy. If the rules of the game called a modern state is trivialised so easily, the state is headed to be trivialised in a very dangerous manner. We cannot take this as long as we believe in Bangladesh.

How can the wound of August 15 be healed? By having faith in Bangladesh and by making it worth having faith in. How to do that? By honesty and efficiency and application. By holding steadfastly to the goal of achieving a polity that will give meaning and satisfaction to the life of each of its citizens. By knowledge and diligence. Through all this let us first prove to ourselves and then to the wide world that by carving this new state a bright future for Bangladeshes was born.

Some Revelation!

State minister for energy and mineral resources Rafiqul Islam could not have done more to add to one's annoyance this weekend when he told the leaders of chambers and other trade bodies that the government wants the private sector to produce and distribute 50 per cent of electricity. Is it a revelation? Did not we know it? More precisely, is it any response to a problem that the country has been grovelling under for such a long time? Is government's policy in the power sector that too about distant future what the power starved load-shedding stricken people want to hear? Lest the government is under any wrong impression which apparently seems to be the case, it should be stated clearly that people's sufferings have reached a position where vague generalities and banal utterance by the authorities can only convince people about what we have been suspecting for long: government is not on top of things in the power sector.

It has been more than two years since the Awami League came to power but until now it has not been able to communicate an impression of having measured up the problems that are plaguing the power sector and their remedies. The government has not only spoken spontaneously on the power situation but one can't help getting the impression that it has also tried to keep the public attention away from the subject. Instead of pursuing the challenge professionally, the government seems to have adopted the 'let the dog sleep' policy. The welcome promptness that we saw in decision making about solving the power crisis is totally missing when it comes to implementation. One gets the feeling the government has settled for inane phraseology in order to hide its inefficiency. This cannot be the attitude of a democratically elected government which has any commitment to the accountability.

Enough of your rhetoric. People have become sick and tired with your plans for future and the promises. People would like to have an idea about when their present ordeal would come to an end. If it can't improve the power situation for some impediments within its system it should inform the public. No point in telling old wives' tales or beating about the bush.

Black Fumes

That the two-stroke engine three-wheelers which sputter the sooty leaded fumes as nobody's business are dangerous health hazard is an old piece of knowledge. Only slightly less obsolete is the information that they were put on the files to be gradually phased out. No action has followed.

On the contrary there has been a reopening of the wound with the news that some banks had even rolled money to auto-rickshaw cooperative groups to put an additional fleet on the road.

The indecisiveness is entirely unnecessary. The answer to both pollution and joblessness lies in a conversion technology. It is good to know that the current thinking is along that line, only we hope, it is sustained to a point of actual materialisation. There is talk of operating the three-wheeler on electricity.

These can be run on battery, too, as Nepal has done, to say nothing of Thailand. The petroleum option remains, only that we have to ensure it is unleaded. Very little extra-money would be needed for that. So, let's go in for. All the three options without ado.

If we have such an environment-friendly mini-transport technology in operation not only would the citizens be spared a serious health hazard, many more auto-rickshaw drivers will get jobs, too.

Turning Our Grief into a Nation-Building Force

by Mahfuz Anam

We must translate this tremendous grief into a positive force. If we really want to show respect for and gratitude to him, then let us build the country that we helped us to free. There cannot be any glory or satisfaction for him, or for us who profess to love and respect him, if our Sonar Bangla remains a poverty stricken country with a significant part of its population suffering

WE as a people must mourn the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and make a firm resolve to punish his killers. This we should do not only to pay our tribute to the founder of our state but also to strengthen the moral foundations of our nation. If we just consider the inhuman nature of the crime itself, Bangabandhu was killed along with practically all the members of his immediate family. His wife, three sons including wives of the elder two, was all murdered. Only the two daughters — Sheikh Hasina, the present Prime Minister, and Sheikh Rehana — escaped the massacre because they were abroad. Also killed the same night were his brother Sheikh Naser, nephew Sheikh Moni along with his pregnant wife and relative Abdur Rab Sarniabat, a cabinet minister, also with his wife and children. Several servants were also killed who came in the way of indiscriminate bullets that were sprayed in their respective homes.

What was Bangabandhu's "crime" for which he had to pay so dearly? Was it because he introduced BKSAL and destroyed the parliamentary system that he himself had created? According to the killers' statements, made while they were abroad, and in interviews given to authors of articles and books, the planning for the murder had started much before the one party presidential system was even thought of. Though we do not accept that any mistake, however serious, made by any political leader entitles any other person to assassinate him; still we would like to make the point that the killers had started planning to

kill Sheikh Mujib from end '73/early '74.

Then again, if we take the President's killing as a political murder, why were his family members, his children and one aged only 10, killed? Why were the two newly wed wives of Kamal and Jamal killed? Why was Sarniabat and his family killed?

Let us consider another fact. Along with murdering Sheikh Mujib and his family, the killers imprisoned Tajuddin Ahmed and Nazrul Islam, Prime Minister and Acting President respectively of the war-time government in exile, and Mansur Ali and Syed Qam-

ruzzaman also cabinet ministers of that government. All of them were Bangabandhu's lifelong associates and leaders of our liberation war. They, with Nazrul Islam as the Acting President and Tajuddin Ahmed as the Prime Minister led the war efforts and successfully steered our independence struggle to a glorious conclusion. These four leaders were brutally murdered inside the Dhaka Central Jail when the assassins were about to lose power in the November 3 army push.

To us it is clear that those who killed Bangabandhu and his family wanted to wipe out all the leaders of our liberation war. Will it then be wrong to

conclude that the 15 August assassination was really the beginning of an elaborate attempt to wipe out the leadership that led us in our independence war? If yes, then, it obviously follows, the real plan behind the assassination was to undo whatever has been gained through our two decades-long democratic struggle in the fifties and the sixties and the magnificent achievements of our liberation war.

Herein lies the real significance of the assassination of Bangabandhu. We must see it in its wider context. Immediately after the killing, and in the years that followed, it was the constant attempt of the ruler of

the day to show that the August killing's aim was only to change the political leadership of the day. In fact in some circles for a long time the August killing was mainly referred to as the "August Changeover", as if nothing of significance had happened on that day except that some new people came to power instead of the old. Killers were able to hide their intentions well as they were able to put in place a new cabinet that contained many faces from the just ousted AL government.

This was done through Khairul Karim, a long time Awami League member of war-time government. Mustaque had his own agenda part of which became revealed during our independence war. However his reasons for joining hands with the killers still remain to be fully unearthed. Awami League itself needs to come clean on how it was possible that so many members of Bangabandhu's cabinet could join Mustaque's cabinet over the dead body of their leader. This fact alone played havoc in the public mind and helped the killers to create the initial confusion.

It is our considered view that the assassination of Bangabandhu was the first major step of an elaborate plan to undo the gains of our liberation war. Perhaps the redrawing of our map was their ultimate aim. However a reversal of our political, economic, social and cultural goals was definitely the short and medium term agenda of the killers. It was because of these aims that they were able to find some immediate collaborators of their heinous act.

While we await the unearthing of the real reasons for killing the founder of our independent state, and vigorously pursue the trial of his killers, we suggest that we transform the grief of his death into a massive force for nation building. We feel it is not enough just

to mourn his murder. He was far greater a man, and his contribution towards our freedom and independence far too much to just mourn for him or demand the death of his killers. We must translate this tremendous grief into a positive force. If we really want to show respect for and gratitude to him, then let us build the country that we helped us to free. There cannot be any glory or satisfaction for him, or for us who profess to love and respect him, if our Sonar Bangla remains a poverty stricken country with a significant part of its population suffering for malnutrition and ill health. What respect can we earn from the world if majority of our people suffer the indignity and debilitating effect of illiteracy?

The only durable and meaningful monument we can erect in the name of the founder of our state is a reasonably prosperous Bangladesh with a sufficiently rising growth curve that will eliminate poverty within the foreseeable future. We have to build a country where we will be able to send all boys and girls to school at least up to the secondary level, provide enough food so as to abolish malnutrition, and provide primary health for all. We will have to create opportunities for our entrepreneurs to invest and thereby create jobs. We will have to make the government sector more efficient and turn the bureaucracy into genuine "public servants". These are the real and durable monuments we can, and must, build to glorify Bangabandhu.

The slogans, the meetings, the rallies and the endless seminars will last only as long as those who organise and attend them find it convenient. They will change with the changing winds. Only nation building will last, and last forever. Therefore if we are sincere about avenging Bangabandhu's assassination then we must turn our grief into a massive and electrifying nation building force and show the world that we really deserved the independence and the new state that Bangabandhu inspired us, and we fought an armed struggle, to get.



To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

'Respect' in the prickly game

Sir, Jai Jai Din is an informative news magazine. Specially its dith to Salman F Rahman of Beximco is enjoyable. I read in that weekly that Begum Zia while appearing in a court in connection with a case against her requested for a chair for pain in her leg which the trying magistrate allowed. It is alleged that one of the ruling leaders did not appreciate this gesture of the magistrate. Politics is a prickly game. We have seen in the recent past two Korean presidents were serving their terms. Japanese ministers were facing charges for corruption. Narasimha Rao (ex-Prime Minister of India) appearing in court to answer charges. Benazir Bhutto was languishing in jail for 2/3 years not very long ago. Even in our country military dictator Ershad also had to spend a couple of years in jail. So nobody knows who goes where and when? Thus tolerance and mutual respect for each other is very necessary. As courtesy begets courtesy and respect begets respect.

Unfortunately this very thing is lacking in our country. Only the other day Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury's remark about Tofael Ahmed's father was not only undesirable but was devoid of decency as well. What happened?

It provoked an equally derogatory remark which was also undesirable. Two wrongs cannot make one right. It is somewhat like a snowball — the more you roll, the bigger it becomes.

In view of the above and as an aged person I appeal to all our political leaders to show restraint, not to wash dirty linen in public and show respect/courtesy to each other. It will definitely yield good results and bring a sunny day in our political horizon.

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Who is a scientist?

Sir, Applications from scientists, researchers and technologists of Bangladesh were invited for participation in the International IT Training Programme and a huge number of applications were received from the highly qualified and experienced candidates. But none of them could claim and introduce themselves as scientists for the authority concerned did not recognise anybody knows the reason despite the fact that they retire as the principal scientific officers, chief scientific officers or with some other designations that are not categorised as "scientist".

In connection to that I contacted a large number of senior scientists, chief editors of the scientific journals, my colleagues abroad and many scientific associations of the developed and developing countries. I requested them to define what

is meant by the term "scientist". On the basis of the survey results obtained from the globally recognised scientists, the number of scientists in the country is highly satisfactory. The pertinent question is if we hesitate to recognise them as scientists while the global market accepts them as scientists, then where do we stand and what is our actual position?

My last visit to the United States for participation in the following meetings: (a) NGO consultation meeting held 1st week of March, '98 at the UN Headquarters, New York. (b) International Conference on Technology and Education (ICTE) held 8-11 March at Santa Fe, New Mexico. (c) International Conference on Gender and Globalisation held 12-15 March at the University of California at Berkeley and (d) the 24th Annual Third World Conference held 18-21 March at Chicago has prompted me to write this letter. Series of such workshops, seminars, symposia and short training programmes are going on in the developed and some of the developing countries round the year and there are many international organisations, donor agencies and individuals to provide scholarships, fellowships, travel grants to the young scientists of the developing countries.

Unfortunately, I found none of our young scientists to participate in any of the above mentioned conferences.

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Difficult to answer, right?

Sir, The news about the death of Rubel shocked me. I don't understand how can they be so cruel and inhuman. I think the police are not actually meant for a society. They can only be compared with the uncivilized people of ages back. I think they have taken it for granted that they can do whatever they like.

But they must understand that everyone has his limit and can't go beyond that. My question to the whole police authority, "How, you people would have felt if any one of you had lost your children in an unpleasant way like Rubel?" It's really very difficult to answer, isn't it?

Faisal UK

Thanks, Mr Prince

Sir, We are very happy to learn that the Saudi Prince Abdul Aziz has extended generous financial help in establishing the first Islamic Centre/Mosque in North America. Our heartiest congratulations to him for his active initiative to spread Islam to every nook and corner of the world.

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General (ret'd) Shafiullah Remembers Colonel Jamil Ahmed

by Shamsuddin Ahmed

General (ret'd) K M Shafiullah was the first chief of the army staff of Bangladesh and was serving in that position on the fateful 15 August 1975, the day the President of the Republic and the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was murdered along with his wife, three sons, his brother and a dozen more of his family members and staff. General Shafiullah still mourns the brutal killing of the great leader. In that incident he also lost one of his most close comrades-in-arms Colonel Jamil Ahmed, the slain President's outgoing Military Secretary, who was posted as Director General, DGF and to be promoted as Brigadier on assumption of his duty. He was shot at point-blank range by an officer-in-uniform a few hundred yards from Bangabandhu's Dhamondi residence. That officer, later bragged about how he had killed Colonel Jamil while he was insisting that he must go to the President's residence.

General Shafiullah has retired from army long since. He is now an Awami League MP, elected from Ruppaganj constituency of Narayanganj district. While walking down the memory lane he laid open his heart with Dhaka Courier on 12 August evening at his Dhaka Cantonment residence and reminisced his long and very cordial relationship with Col. Jamil and his family while serving in Pakistan as well as in the then East Pakistan and finally in Bangladesh.



Col Jamil Ahmed

My acquaintance with him was academic in the sense that we first came to know each other at the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul in 1952. He was one course senior to me in the Academy. We were there together for one and a half years. During those 18 months we became very close to each other. He was a very soft, kind-hearted and amiable person. Since he was senior to me in the Academy, I used to call him Jamil Bhai. He was really like an elder brother and treated me as his younger one all through our long march in the army. He got his commission six months before me and left the Academy to join the army signals corps.

The next time we met each other after leaving PMA was in Rawalpindi in 1960. He married quite early, immediately after commission. Probably in 1956-57. When we again met in Rawalpindi he already had two sweet looking lovely daughters — Tanu and Kankan. "I was also newly married at that time. We used to visit each other's house regularly. Mrs. Jamil used to entertain us as if she was our real Bhai. To my wife she was her real elder sister.

"Jamil Bhai, myself and the few Bangali officers who were in Pakistan in those days had a regular liaison among ourselves. That was the time when Bangali nationalism was at its budding stage. As members of the majority of the population of Pakistan we saw it the hard way how small our representations had been in the armed forces. Whenever we met, we used to talk about this. Jamil Bhai's sense of nationalism was the strongest among us and at times he would burst out in anger and desperation.

"My son was born in Rawalpindi in 1962. At that time Mrs. Jamil was very helpful. She used to love my son as if he was hers. As time passed our two families became like close relatives.

"Sometime in early 1960s he went for a 3-month course to the USA. Such courses are very short and one cannot save money to buy gifts even for fam-

ily members. But to my astonishment when he returned I saw he had bought a beautiful tie for me in the States. That tie is still with me and I value it as one of my most precious possessions.

"For a few years after 1963 both of us were posted to East Pakistan. It was during this time that the 6-point movement was snowballing and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib was emerging as the sole leader of the majority of the population of Bangladesh. Both Jamil Bhai and many of us began to draw inspirations from the political movements of those days. I remember Col. (ret'd) Shaikat (AL MP), Colonel Huda (who died along with Brig. Khaled Mosharrar in the night of 6 Nov., 1975), Colonel Malek (former Dhaka City Mayor) and a number of young officers getting restive on the political developments in East Pakistan. Bangali officers, wherever they belonged, got involved, either overtly or covertly, with the movement of the Bangalis led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"Col. Jamil and I again attended the Staff College at Quetta in 1968. The Agartala Conspiracy Case was on at that

time and we were openly expressing our support to the accused of the case. We felt that we were being shadowed by the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of the armed forces. His third daughter 'Shweta' was born at that time.

"In 1970 I was posted at Joydepur from where I deserted the Pak army to join the war of liberation.

"After independence I was the chief of the armed forces when Col. Jamil was repatriated to Bangladesh. I knew what a great patriot he was. I did not hesitate to request Bangabandhu to take him as his personal staff which the Bangabandhu did. Colonel Jamil proved his loyalty with the last drop of his blood.

"The last time I talked with him was in the morning of 15 August, 1975. He had phoned me to let me know that he was rushing to the President's house. I told him I had been trying to reach the President over telephone but could not. By that time I had asked the Dhaka Brigade commander to mobilize forces towards the President's residence. I told Col. Jamil to convey the message to the President. I also requested him to try to take the President out of his house if he could. But everything was perhaps too late.

"I have a lot of respect for shaheed Colonel Jamil. He gave his life in performance of his duty. He did not hesitate to move when called by the Father of the Nation, knowing fully well that he was stepping into the den of murderers. Man is mortal. Only his deeds outlive him. Colonel Jamil is one whose gallantry and courage will outlive himself as an example of bravery, loyalty, dutifulness and dedication. We are proud of him. The nation should be proud of him.



Banani graveyard: Here lie the victims (other than Bangabandhu) of 15th August 1975 brutal massacre, including Begum Mujib, Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal, Sheikh Russel, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, Abdur Rab Serniabat and others.