

# In Quest of Progress

by Shah Husain Imam

Bangabandhu's place in history as a national symbol is immutable, and as far as that goes, there cannot be any room for controversy.

It was Henry Kissinger who said of Bangabandhu on a visit to Bangladesh in 1974. "Here is a man who has fathered a nation out of his own convictions."

It sounded almost like a retraction from the US pro-Pakistan stance on our Liberation War which as the Secretary of State in Nixon administration Kissinger had articulated almost till the very end veering away only when a field situation reading in Pentagon after the first week of December suggested the US had better accept the reality of an emerging entity in South Asia. So, his tribute to the Bangladesh leader bore more of a stamp of authenticity than of a customary diplomatic pleasantry.

Another anecdote recaptures the mood of the time: a newly-arrived Bangladeshi in a foreign country was to be greeted with such boisterous words as, "Oh, you are from the land of Mujib!" It is a far cry now. Bangladesh passport has since lost its appeal at the immigration desks overseas.

The root cause of national decadence lay in the massive interference with the natural course of events on August 15,

1975. Things were never to become normal then on.

More than BAKSAL it was a certain vendetta. It seems, which spawned those intrigues that culminated in the assassination of the architect of Bangladesh along with several members of his family. We have had to live with the consequences of that day in the inexorable pattern of violent changeover, coup d'etat and power usurpation that followed.

Now that the indemnification of the assassins has been ended by striking out the provision for it from the statute book and their trial is on, a debt to rule of law and history must be deemed to have been repaid.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has quite pervasively returned to national consciousness and the distortions in the history of the Liberation War have been exposed and placed before the new generations for their enlightenment. A balanced sense of history and heritage is an essential guide to a constructive future.

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for controversy.

We now need to turn our mourning into a national resolve to address the problems at hand with vigour and imagination.

Of foremost importance at this juncture is a clear-cut delineation between issues that require a consensual approach to be solved and the rest that the Awami League can effectively resolve on its own strength by virtue of its electoral mandate. Bipartisan understanding is needed especially in a country which, whether we like it or not, is politically divided almost in the middle.

A bipartisan working relationship will have to be developed principally in areas like abjuring the use of martial law as a political weapon and allowing an elected government to run its full term subject to the option of moving only a no-confidence motion on a ruling party in the parliament under extraordinary circumstances.

There can be hurdle against an occupation force, an alien government or an autocracy. But why should there be a breakdown of civic life in a democracy where: (a) it

amounts to an imposition of a partisan will on others in a pluralistic polity; (b) it is a recipe for economic disaster that no body in a right frame of mind can savour; and (c) there are other outlets to grill the government through?

If a consensual understanding is reached on the two vital points: abandonment of martial law as a medium of political agitation, and a normal guarantee for a full-term to an elected government, then both sides would benefit equally from it while the nation is saved from frequent political tantrums.

Will all this steal the thunder off the opposition camp or dilute their effectiveness as the representative of a large segment of the electorate? Not at all. Because if they direct their energies to debating issues skillfully and powerfully exposing in the process government's pitfalls and suggesting remedial measures on the floor of the House or through public meetings they have a much better chance of keeping the party warm and together through public reputations than by other stressful means that eventually depress the spirits of party cadres.

# Time We All Condemned the Monstrosity

by Chandra Shekhar Das

August 15 is a day of utter shame and sadness. It comes every year with the overwhelming urge for soul searching and moral cleansing by all of us.

**T**HE return of Awami League to power after 21 long years may not have been a revelation in the hope for waking up from the nightmares of our history but it certainly has made breathing in nation's moral life lot easier. It has removed the deadening weight of a monstrous crime that had come to weigh on nation's conscience for an inordinately long time — the gruesome murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family members. Twenty-three years ago on this fateful day the fusing force of Bengalee nationhood and Bangladesh was killed at his 32 Dhanmondi residence by some jumpy, paranoid moral Lilliputs. Since then the whole nation was put on a moral sleep. Direct beneficiaries as they were of the upheaval, the subsequent regimes not only hailed the heinous act as some sort of an exorcism but delved deep in the moral depravity to legally block the scope for trying the killers through indemnity ordinance. After being coerced into an amnesiac stint of more than 20 years the nation finally woke up the other day as the party in power finally threw the dead albatross off the nation's neck

— indemnity ordinance was gone. And the way was paved for the trial of Bangabandhu's killers.

But has this official stamp of severance with an immoral legacy helped our perverted political culture in any way? Have our politicians learnt to see history in its proper perspective? Apparently not. Otherwise many of them would not have indulged in the futile exercise of negating the tragedy August 15 epitomises. August 15 is the day on which the gale of our independence was brutally snuffed; it is the day on which a light-house was uprooted; it is the day on which we abjectly surrendered to the reign of utter smallness and accepted the decimation of mercy and largeness by cruelty and hypocrisy; it is the day we withdrew our commitment to spirit of all embracing fraternity; it is the day on which the gains of 1971 were stowed back into history's morgue.

Politics is a ruthless game. Everyone knows that. Here the palace of one's fortune is built on the tomb of another. But there are certain things that are beyond the blood dimmed horizon of ambition. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the pole star

in the grey welkin of our pre-liberation days; the uncontestable leader in our ascent as a nation. Too large and inextricable a figure for people to fail in condemning his killing without any reservation. We lived in apparent peace with his killers; his willers at the great expense of abasing ourselves. Now that the chance for a moral regeneration is there what stops our political leaders to remember August 15 as a dark night of Bangladesh's soul? Why August 15 has to be a mourning day for Awami League? Why not all the parties that believe in the creative impulses that went into the emergence of Bangladesh?

The great pain that some political parties and leaders suffer to rob the day of its lugubriousness is enormous. Every time BNP chairperson and leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia has an occasion to refer to this day she would almost invariably say *Sheikh Mujibur hatyar bichar hoty holey Shikdar hatyar bichar hoty holey* (if the trial of Mujibur's murder has to be held, then trial of Siraj Shikdar's murder has to be conducted too). As if Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's killers cannot be brought to book before an inquest is made

into the death of the icon of underground movement in Bangladesh. The whole idea is to make light of the enormity of the crime. But what for? Will unequivocal condemnation of the monstrous spirit that whaled through the conscience and system of the nation on August 15 night make the BNP lose its popularity? It can be argued that without August 15, BNP would have never come into being. It is true that BNP owes its existence to that dark night. But then BNP has come a long way. Far too long and far too big in popularity to be tied to a congenial immorality. BNP will be a far too acceptable party for this betrayal with the inspiration and events of its origin. This is one opportunity for that BNP and parties believing in its philosophy should not let go by.

August 15 is a day of utter shame and sadness. It comes every year with the overwhelming urge for soul searching and moral cleansing by all of us. In the festive atmosphere of the region as our neighbours celebrate the end of the colonial rule we look back at a point of time in history that well and truly marks the beginning of the legacy of conspiracy, regression and blood in our politics.

# Bangabandhu's Encounter with Castro at Algiers Summit

by Helal Uddin Ahmed

It was the latter part of 1973. As the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman went to the north-west African city of Algiers to take part in the summit of Non-aligned Movement. During the summit, he had bilateral discussions with many third world leaders. Among them was the Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. The following is a description of Bangabandhu's encounter with Castro as narrated by the then DG of Betar M R Akhtar Mukul.

The meeting between Prime Minister Mujib and President Castro was arranged near the end of NAM summit. On the day of the summit, news reached Algiers at noon that food-riot and looting had started in Chile following disruptions in food supply due to countrywide truck strike. The leftist leaders in Chile were dumbfounded. In this volatile situation, a large column of tanks surrounded the Santiago residence of President Salvador Allende. Air Force planes were hovering in the sky. Allende's fall was imminent. Castro was terribly upset about the whole episode.

Fidel Castro arrived at the designated place of meeting surrounded by a large contingent of security personnel. He was to meet another legendary figure of the time Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The rays of the sun were fast receding in the Mediterranean and the sound of the seagull could be heard from a distance. A semi-military bottle-green uniform and a guerilla cap. His face was covered with beard. Alighting from the car, he smiled when he saw Bangabandhu waiting to receive him. They warmly embraced and kissed each other. It was a rare moment of camaraderie between two great leaders of the two hemispheres. Castro did not have much command over English. His broken English carried French and Spanish flavour. Bangabandhu's accent, on the other hand, had subcontinental influence. The two started their conversation without the help of interpreters. They were sitting in the same sofa with the entourage members sitting opposite them.

The conversation between the two had tremendous historical significance. Significant portions from the dialogue are presented below in a polished form.

Castro: Excellency, you are probably aware about the latest developments in Chile. Allende's government may fall any time due to external conspiracy. That means, this great man will be wiped off from the face of this earth. Excellency, in such a backdrop, I would like to say a few words as I consider you a friend.

Bangabandhu: Excellency, you can say anything you like without hesitation. I know very

well that you are our well-wisher and friend.

Castro: From what we hear about Bangladesh and India, situation there does not seem to be very good. The agents of imperialism are active in both these countries.

Bangabandhu: Excellency, you can address me without ceremonies.

Castro: Then listen. Like President Allende of Chile, we also consider Bangladesh Prime Minister Mujib to be a gone case. Excellency, you are finished.

Bangabandhu: Comrade, why do you say so? Can't you say more clearly?

Castro: The reason is, you have rehabilitated the defeated administration in Bangladesh. So you are going to be wiped out, excellency.

Bangabandhu: Excellency, you know very well, our country is a small one. It suffered enormous losses during the war of liberation. So, to reconstruct Bangladesh, we need seasoned and experienced bureaucrats. That is why I have reinstated experienced officers of the Pakistan era in our administration, with the exception of a few collaborators.

Castro: Please do not take any offence, excellency, you are speaking about their administrative experience! Ha! With their experience and guidance, mighty Pakistan lost in the war and fell apart. But your Mukti boys? No experience. Fighting, fighting and fighting, getting victory.

Bangabandhu: Then how can we reconstruct war-ravaged Bangladesh?

Castro: Bring lawyers, bring journalists, bring business executives, bring doctors, bring engineers, bring professors and put them on top of the administration. They will make mistakes, mistake and learn...but not conspiracy. For God's sake, please give more responsibility to your Mukti boys. And fully trust them.

Bangabandhu: Comrade, to tell you the truth, I have dismissed only a handful of collaborator officers and reinstated the rest in responsible positions. Till now, my view has been that their experience would be useful. But I am worried by what you say.

Castro: Excellency, nowhere in the world today top-ranking officers of the defeated regime

are given responsibility of a new administration. In Bangladesh their lives have been saved because of your magnanimity; isn't that enough? In a post-war country, no question can arise about rehabilitating these officers. Even look at the USA; if the incumbent loses the battle for Presidency, top-ranking officials and diplomats of that administration are removed.

Bangabandhu: Excellency, my only concern now is how to rebuild war ravaged Bangladesh.

Castro: Excellency, let me then cite the example of Cuba. After our great revolution, Comrade Che Guevara reorganized the whole administration after eliminating the defeated

ones. In Cuba today, you will find not a single bureaucrat of the Batista regime. Because of that, although mighty USA is sitting on our neck, no conspiracy against me succeeds. Look at the map of the western hemisphere, your excellency. The distance between Cuba and Miami beach in the USA is only about 90 miles. Despite that, Cuba has maintained her proud existence. Comrade, look at my bodyguards. Nobody can make them turn against me — at no price can they be bought.

Bangabandhu: Excellency, please continue. I want to hear more from you. My eyes within are opening up to the conspiracy without.

Castro: (Pointing fingers at the bodyguards) Please try to buy them. Offer them hundred thousand dollar — two hundred thousand — half a million. All right, offer them one million dollars. No, you can't buy them. They were engaged in a prolonged war against dictator Batista, we fought together

from the same bunker. We shared food, bed and everything. You can't imagine how dearly they love me. I smoke cigar; my boys taste them first. Two of them even died, because of CIA poisoning. Excellency, in Bangladesh who do you trust? Like Allende, you are also going to be finished Comrade Mujib.

All eyes were full of tears by then. The time to say good-bye had arrived. Putting the half-burnt cigar in the ashtray, Fidel Castro rose and stood in front of Bangabandhu. Then they embraced and kissed each other. Castro put his head on Mujib's shoulder and raised his voice, "Comrade Mujib, I love you. I love Bangladesh." As he climbed into the limousine waiting outside, Fidel Castro turned his head and shouted, "Joy Bangla." In no time his motorcade vanished from sight.

Extracted from the Biography on Bangabandhu *Mohapurni* (in Bangla) by M R Akhtar Mukul.



# "I'll Pay off My Debt in Blood"

A REMEMBRANCE OF BANGABANDHU

by Md Abdus Salam

As we know from our bitter and painful experiences, the hardened criminals do not listen to the sermons of religion. So the killer forces must be hit, and hit hard by united strength of pro-liberation and progressive forces.

**O**N June 23, 1975 I called on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at his Ganobhaban office. My appointment was arranged by Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni, Editor of the Banglar Bani and The Bangladesh Times. The then special secretary, now an honourable Minister Mr Tofael Ahmed also helped me to a great extent.

As scheduled, Mr Tofael Ahmed got me entered in the chamber of Bangabandhu at 1 o'clock. I was taken back to see him so much excited. He was looking around and pacing about restlessly. His face spoke a turmoil in his heart. Some 6/7 secretaries were also there in the room with uneasy riding their faces. I guessed some very tense situation prevailed there immediately before. However, seeing me Bangabandhu stepped forward to the door with anguished but smiling face. He asked me, "Where do you come from?" "From Jessore," I replied. "Where at Jessore?" Along Jessore-Magura Road via Khajura," I told. He sat on a two seated sofa and asked me to take seat by his left. I complied accordingly. He put his left hand upon my back, patted dearly and asked me to speak out. I held out an application to him for special grant from President's discretionary fund. I narrated the poor conditions of my college (Jessore City College) and about the arrears of 4/5 months pay of the staff. I also briefed him the steps I took to make the college financially solvent through construction of commercial shops in front of the college bordering Khulna bus stand. I referred to the valuable advice and guidance of late Mr Raushan Ali and the then DC Mr M Akhtar Ali, now Secretary, Ministry of Industries. I also iterated the setting up of SSH College at Khajura, nine miles north from Jessore town, in memory of journalist Shahid Sirajuddin Hossain where I also held the post of honorary principal. Bangabandhu gave me a patient

hearing and suddenly... became grave. He put his left hand on my shoulder and told me in subdued tone, "I know that teachers of schools and colleges, taking humble stale rice, go to their institutions regularly. They are half-paid and half-clad, yet they are not angry with me. But if I pay the government servants on 7th instead of 1st of every month, they will rebel against me. He paused for a while. Again in agonised tone he continued, "You are all doing your respective duties nicely. But I can't do mine. Because nobody pays heed to my words.

Nobody tells me the truth about things. I think, most probably, I won't get time to serve you any longer. They won't spare me. You have done all for me. You have fasted and prayed for my release from jail. I don't know whether any other leader under the sun has got so much from his people. But alas! I am undone now. Now I think of leaving... or I will pay my debt in blood. You please do serve the country and build it as Sonar Bangla after my dream. So saying breathlessly, he stood up. I handed over the application to him. He said goodbye and asked me to pray for him.

I stood motionless and still. I was trembling and sweating. Stray thoughts seized my mind and sank my heart. I wondered why the leader at whose behest from Chief Justice down to a peon stopped work; the leader whose movement once rocked the precipice; the dauntless personality who commanded unquestioned obedience and allegiance from all, now feels so much helpless and hopeless! I frenzied to unearth reasons for such abandonment and isolation. I was heaving. I got back my senses at the call of Mr Tofael Ahmed. I sat at his chamber for some time and told him of the conversations. He also became concerned and opined 'Yes, conspiracies are there everywhere'. I came out of his

room. But I left my heart with Bangabandhu who was writhing in pain. In due course, the grant reached my college.

Hardly two months elapsed. Bangabandhu's apprehensions came true. On fateful night of 14-15th August he was brutally assassinated. Grosslest brutalities and tragedies took place shocking and stunting Bangladesh. The vast canvas of greenery turned mournful red. Gpd himself was startled at the ungratefulness of the ser-pents in the grass around him. He castigated all for correction. He was never so unkind to anybody. He used to forgive and forget. The killers took the advantages of his magnanimity and murdered him with gruesome barbarism.

I have been nourishing the memory of this rarest interview with Bangabandhu with anguish of bereavement and pleasures of being a lucky one to be so much juxtaposed with so great a leader. Even today after more than two and a quarter decades, the same ominous sights and sounds are seen and heard during his daughter's regime. They are up and doing to undo Sheikh Hasina's governance and even threat her life.

As we know from our bitter and painful experiences, the hardened criminals do not listen to the sermons of religion. So the killer forces must be hit, and hit hard by united strength of pro-liberation and progressive forces.

We must punish otherwise we may have to be perished. We must take oath on this mourning day.

Notwithstanding the austerity of her chair, the Prime Minister, we hope and believe, will incline to a great extent to be over-vigilant about people around her judicious over decisions and pledges, courageous to overcome odds and oddities. She must also rise over provocations and cajolery on the basis of seasoned reasoning and analysis in her to realise the dream of Sonar Bangla.

# Rhapsodies of a Shady Birthday and Other Things

by Mahjabeen Ahmad Mimi

We have witnessed the birthday celebrations of the opposition leader on varied dates, for instance 5 September, 15 October, 19 August etc. etc. But it has so happened, this particularly mysterious birthday is being celebrated, and in an extravagantly grand style too, on 15 August for the past two years or so in a row.

**A**S EVER 15 August is here bringing with it memories of unfathomable pain. And with it is also an episode of sheer embarrassment. This embarrassing episode, of course, by no means a doleful business for it revolves around the jublations of someone's birthday. And the embarrassing affair that stems from its celebration may very well be attributed to the one whose birth day supposedly is on 15 August. We shall come back to that and more later but first allow me to say a bit about some very different people from different lands.

It is known to many that the deceased former Indian prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri was not equipped with academic qualifications, neither was former British premier John Major who in fact was well-known for his scanty academic records. But it is refreshing to know that they had chosen not to play hide and seek about the matter. Perhaps they were not that vociferous about their shortcomings and perhaps they were not proud about it either but nonetheless they

never made an elaborate business of engaging in an absurd effort to cover up the whole thing. The reason was the fact that they would do a lot of studying, reading on a wide variety of subjects and therefore were able to possess minds that were lucid, accommodating, incisive and refined. There is an old adage, "The mind like the sword needs to be honed and kept sharp." So education brings about the desired edge and sharpness to the mind. And education itself can be had in any number of forms and means. It may be the conventional, disciplined formal education, it may be spontaneous education attained through keeping in company with the wise and erudite, it may be derived from self-learning, it may even be in the form of ancient lore handed down from generation to generation and in many other manner. The real teaching or true education is that which aims at penetrating and enlightening the deep, dark corners of the mind and consciousness.

Now for some inexplicable reason the ostensible birth anniversary of our venerable opposition leader is observed on a concocted date. One might wonder if it's just another social faux-pas or part of a well-concocted scheme to trivialize the national mourning day. Similarly it's rather difficult to fathom why she has deluded the nation with varied untrue information on different occasions as to her educational qualifications. What does it take to prevail on our leaders that by acting the way they do (crass and puerile) if anything, it's their self-esteem that's on the line here? So what if the ornate sword of academic education missed her golden grasp, that doesn't make her stock of experience any less enriched. The vast amounts of knowledge

and practical experience she has reaped through the years itself is no less valuable, so why the complex? Why the abundance of falsehood?

If one is reminded of the enormous gravity of formal education, if argued that it is imperative for a political leader to brandish the academic sword never mind the fake certificates, then I must concede such logic eludes my comprehension completely. For if we should take a simplified look into it, nothing on earth is so relative and ambivalent a matter as education. While the immense importance and necessity of formal education is undeniable, there is no need to conclude he who is educated is essentially the better person or vice versa. In reality, it is a world inhabited by both leaving absolutely

no scope for such segregation. There is no shortage of example though, they are right here about us and in plentiful. The post of barristers, undaunting student leaders, intellectual editors with receding hair lines who have hit the internet, all are visibly weighed down by wisdom.

Whereas even the average person would realize that mendacious propaganda and con-

tinued spewing of vile words in an attempt to demean rivals cannot be the prime and only objective of a responsible opposition. Not by any stretch of imagination. The people in general are pretty disappointed with its shoddy leadership as well its abject performance in and outside parliament. Can we fault one for presuming that the opposition is not a haven for rash and immature leadership, that currently it is swarmed with petty, renegade leaders whose chief objective is to somehow launch an all out offensive against the government by cashing in on the prevailing tenuous situation thereby forcing the issue of a mid-term election on them? Had the case been otherwise, there would be such myriad of other constructive and people-oriented work an opposition would have to shoulder as part of its responsibilities. That there would simply be no time for patry matters.

Now then, if we may get back to that shady little "birthday" thing of ours. In the past years we have witnessed the birthday

celebrations of the opposition leader on varied dates, for instance 5 September, 15 October, 19 August etc. etc. But it has so happened, this particularly mysterious birthday is being celebrated, and in an extravagantly grand style too, on 15 August for the past two years or so in a row. One wonders against, how many birthdays are possibly can there be in a single person's life? What kind of desperate mindset would it take to indulge in an irony such as this! Whoever is or are fanning the flames of this prank and to gain what grounds one knows not.

The eternal cycle of life and death rotates by the will of God. It may be today the birthday of a father whose son it might have to be today tomorrow or the same day. It is not in our power to reverse it, much as we would have liked to.

What haunts one is the big question as to what point are they really trying to drive home here and who stands to gain from all this? Our political leaders never cease to amaze us and it's not in us either not to marvel at what they have to proffer every now and then.