

National Mourning Day

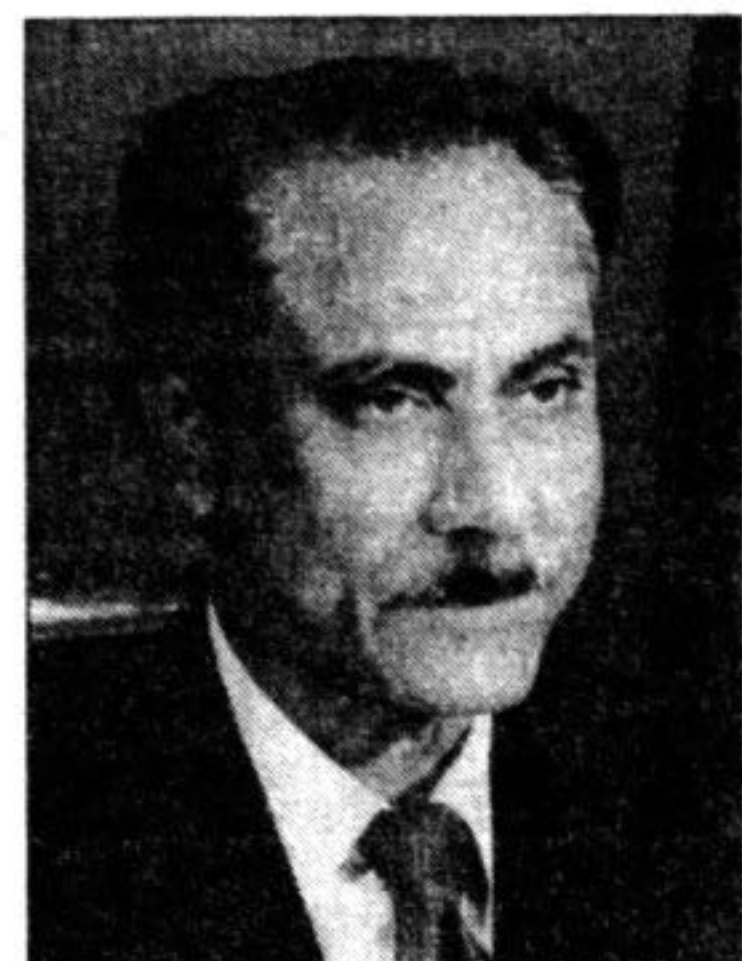
15th August

Homage to the Father of the Nation on his 23rd death anniversary

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রাষ্ট্রপতি
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ
ঢাকা
৩১ শ্রাবণ ১৪০৫
১৫ আগষ্ট ১৯৯৮

MESSAGE

On the occasion of the National Mourning Day and twenty-third Death Anniversary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, I pay my respect to his immortal memory.

The immense sacrifice of this untiring hero for the welfare of the people is unparalleled in history. His life-long dedication and continuous struggle for a separate homeland resulted in the birth of an independent and sovereign Bangladesh through a sanguinary War of Liberation. The people loved and honoured this illustrious leader spontaneously for his indomitable courage, strong character and brilliant leadership. He could not live long to materialise his dream of 'Golden Bengal'. His tragic death, along with members of his family, caused by some misguided army personnel, is a shameful chapter of our national history.

Time has come to build the nation to the desired expectation of the people. We are to invigorate ourselves today with the hope of a new life by forgetting the political as well as personal bitterness of the past in the greater interest of the nation. National advancement is to be ensured through unity and consensus. Democratic process must be allowed to proceed unhampered and general consensus should be built upon all important national issues. I appeal to all, irrespective of party affiliations, to accelerate these efforts for our survival in the world as a self-respected nation.

I pray for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed

ON BANGABANDHU

Sheikh Hasina

To the people of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the founding father of their independent, sovereign state. Lovingly, they used to call him *Bangabandhu*, the Friend of Bengal. To me, apart from what he was to his people, he is a father, my own father. Often, one has to pay a price for being the child of a great man. I had to pay it too, the highest price, on August 15, 1975, when he was brutally killed by some military men in his own home in Dhaka early in the morning, along with my mother, my brothers and their wives and even my youngest brother, who was only ten. My sister Rehana and I escaped, since we were abroad with my husband, a scientist, then studying in Germany.

I did not see my father much as a young girl. He was busy with his work as a political leader and was, quite frequently and for long spells of time, in jail. He was tall and handsome, with a deep, resounding voice, and very affectionate. Once, when, after a long period of absence, he returned home to our ancestral village, *Tungipara*, Kamal, my younger brother, then a small boy, asked me if he could go to my father and call him father too. If *Bangabandhu* had one quality, it was his enormous, unparalleled ability to love the people of his land. He could go to any length to help and serve them and he did. His courage never failed him. He was not a man to make any compromise when the interest of

the people was at stake. He was not self-seeking at all. When Awami League, his party, won the majority seats in the Pakistan Parliament in 1970, he could have easily given up his demand for the autonomy of the then East Pakistan and gone for the position of Prime Minister. He did not. Without him, Bangladesh would not have emerged in the map of the world as an independent country in 1971. The Liberation War of Bangladesh was fought in his name and no one other than he could have declared the independence of the country. The

hold he had over the people of Bangladesh is matchless in recent times. They loved him as much as he loved them and responded fearlessly to his call to liberate the country.

Bangabandhu's dream was to realise *Sonar Bangla*, the Golden Bengal, a happy and prosperous land, where people were free from hunger and disease and where social justice reigned supreme. All through his life, he suffered for his people. I have had my share of suffering too. I have been in exile for long. I have faced bullets and

political repression. I have fought against dictators and military rulers. I had to struggle relentlessly to restore to the people of my land their democratic rights. I have been put under house arrest many times. I had to take a great personal risk to restore peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of my country, torn by strife for more than two decades. After the brutal assassination of *Bangabandhu*, a regime of plots and assassinations began in the political domain of Bangladesh.

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The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu with the members of his family.

WHY BANGABANDHU MATTERS

— Syed Badrul Ahsan

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's death in August 1975 set the country back by a generation. Briefly, the tragedy was a lot more than the physical end of the man who had liberated the country through decades of political struggle. Indeed, on 15 August, it was effectively an end, for the time being, to the long story of the Bengali struggle for self-expression and the beginning of all those sinister aspects of life which were to traumatise politics in Bangladesh. I am one of those people who grew into adulthood in the solid belief that what *Bangabandhu* was offering his people (and I am here drawing attention to the gathering momentum for Bengali self-expression in the sixties) was fundamentally a return to cultural moorings. A consciousness, or call it a renewed awareness of tradition, came of course after the terrible experiment of being part of the Pakistani dispensation. At particular points in time, one might be tempted to argue that it was all a mistake partitioning India, and so it was, as the history of the years between 1947 and 1971 was eventually to show. In another way of speaking, one could with justification suggest that in the sixties, thanks to the politics of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it became possible for the Bengalis to rediscover themselves through the prism of emerging nationalism. It was one of those very poignant times in history when a nation longs to find utterance.

The single most significant attribute of *Bangabandhu's* politics and it is something that I have come to embrace as a political truism is the swiftness and the manner in which he rapidly turned into a spokesman for his people. Observe the transformation. In the forties, Mujib's politics was cen-

tered around that of his mentor Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, which is one way of saying that Mujib was, like tens of thousands of others, caught up in the frenzy for the creation of what was given out at the time as a state for the Muslims of India. He once travelled, and he did that on a bicycle, a long distance to see Mohammad Ali Jinnah at close range. And once Pakistan came into being, through blood and fire and fury, Mujib honestly believed that the welfare of the people of the new state would be ensured by the governing classes. Of course, nothing of the sort was about to happen, and soon Mujib's disillusionment with the Pakistani state made itself

obvious. He went to prison in 1948... and it was his first time there... pretty much convinced that the country was in danger of becoming a political illusion. The years after 1948 only reinforced Mujib's belief that Pakistan was not a sustainable proposition, that in any case the Bengali portion of it ought not to look forward to possibilities of its welfare within the structure of the state.

Idea has been advanced in recent years that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman set out to entertain thoughts of Bengali freedom as early as the late fifties. For the rest of the political leadership from East Bengal, thoughts of indepen-

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A Return to the Roots

Farid Hossain

On their way to the *Bangabandhu* Museum the school children were giggling and teasing each other as they do while going to a picnic. Having stepped out of the school bus the children lined up before the lakefront museum that was the residence of Father of the Nation *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujibur Rahman until the night he was assassinated. They stopped laughing as their teachers went to buy tickets. When they were filing out of the two-storied house nearly an hour later the children were silent, some of them in tears. "I hate the killers I'll never forgive them," sobbed one of the young visitors. "I don't

understand why they killed *Bangabandhu*. Why Russel was killed?" cried another as if speaking for the group. For most of the children the visit offered the first opportunity to know about the Aug. 15 national tragedy from the scene where it happened. "Until Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina came to power in 1996 we were not allowed to tell the children about the killing of *Bangabandhu* and his family members. Nor were we able to tell them the true history of our glorious Liberation War", explained one of the teachers escorting the children from a Dhaka school last month. "The situation has now changed. The students can now read about the assassination of the Father of Nation in their text books," he said.

Since his gruesome murder on the night of Aug 15, 1975 the killers had tried to wipe out *Bangabandhu* from the history of Bangladesh, a nation he had created through years of struggle against autocracy and military rule in the then Pakistan. One of their first steps was to grant themselves an amnesty so no court can ever hold any trial for the heinous crime they had committed not only against a family but also against the nation and humanity. Not long after the Aug. 15 coup the killers had lost power to another group led by Gen. Ziaur Rahman who more than justified the killing by unleashing a campaign of lies and vilification about *Bangabandhu*, his family and his government. State-controlled radio and television as well as the newspapers were used to undermine the image of the Father of the Nation. Independent media were coerced to join the tirade against

Bangabandhu that was actually aimed at distorting the history of our glorious independence war. It was the blackest chapter of our national history when even an indirect mention of *Bangabandhu's* name was considered to be a crime. Only lies against the great man were welcome and encouraged by the then rulers. Gen. Zia went one step further. It was during his rule when many of the coup leaders were rewarded with jobs at Bangladesh diplomatic missions abroad.

These rulers tried their best to erase *Bangabandhu's* name from the nation's memory. Instead of telling the students about *Bangabandhu* and his leading the independence movement from a darkened solitary death cell in Pakistan the school text books at that time were full of lies against him. His daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana - who survived the massacre because they were at that time abroad - were forced to live in exile. Sheikh Hasina, now the country's Prime Minister, could return home in 1981 only after public pressure swelled at home.

Great men never die. Nor did *Bangabandhu*. His physical demise, specially the cruelty associated with his assassination, will ever haunt the nation. But in his death he has become more influential shaping the nation's destiny. His demise has reinforced the national values for which he fought throughout his life. This was reflected in the huge public reception that greeted a tearful Sheikh Hasina on her return home from years of exile in 1981. Her return as the President of Awami League, her

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প্রধানমন্ত্রী
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
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MESSAGE

Today is the 15th of August, National Mourning Day. The Architect of Independence of Bangladesh, the Great Leader of the Century, the winner of the Julio Curie Peace Award, and the greatest leader of the Bangalee, Father of the Nation *Bangabandhu* Sheikh Mujibur Rahman embraced martyrdom on this fateful night in 1975. The father of the Nation along with his beloved wife Begum Fazilatunnessa Mujib was brutally assassinated on this fateful night by a gang of heinous murderers, the most despicable enemy of human civilisation. The great lady Fazilatunnessa Mujib played a very unique, firm and luminous role from the background in bringing success to all the democratic movements of the nation during the pre-liberation days. Many more including three sons of the Father of the Nation - child Sheikh Russel and freedom fighters Sheikh Kamal and Sheikh Jamal, Sheikh Nasser, the younger brother of *Bangabandhu*; newly wedded daughter-in-laws Sultana Kamal and Rosie Jamal also embraced martyrdom. *Abdur Rab Serniabat*, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, and *Arzoo Moni* along with many dedicated political leaders and workers, civil and military personnel on duty, helpless women, innocent children, domestic servants and guests also became the victims of this gruesome massacre on this fateful night. I pray to the almighty Allah for the eternal peace and divine blessings of the souls of all the martyrs including the Father of the Nation, who were the victims of the August 15 gruesome massacre.

The greatest leader of the Bangalee nation was assassinated at such a transitional period, when after the sanguinary War of Liberation, the Bangalee nation, under the leadership of the Father of the Nation, was devoted in economic reconstruction of the war torn country with the hope of building up a prosperous homeland combating the natural calamities, floods and draughts, and the artificial crises created by the reactionary circles. For long 21 years after the martyrdom of the Father of the Nation, all the achievements made for national advancement and progress suffered humiliation in a planned manner. Through the barbarous and scandalous massacre, evil attempts were made to enchain the progressive advancement of the Bangalee nation in the shackles of murder, coup, conspiracy and backwardness by distorting the history of our independence and the liberation war. The reactionary vicious circles ran amok in the disastrous game of eluding the Bangalee nation of its self identity through strangulating the conscience and voice of the nation, annihilating the democratic process and creating a reign of anarchy. But death could not terminate the guidance and the glories of sacrifice of the Father of the Nation. The deathless *Bangabandhu* emerged time and again as a source of unending valour, indomitable spirit and inspiration in the prolonged struggle for democracy the Bangalee nation had to undertake against autocracy, communalism, and reactionaries after the martyrdom of the Great Leader.

In the face of traditional struggles, sacrifices and resistance of the nation, the enemies of mankind, the culprits, the killers and the anti-liberation circles have been defeated. The people of Bangladesh have rejected the politics of killings and conspiracies through the free and neutral election held on 12 June 1996 under a neutral caretaker government. The most cherished democracy and commitment to independence and the liberation war have been illuminated and flourished at the peak of the spirit of the people. The people were burdened with the blemish of the black Indemnity Ordinance that was promulgated to let the hated killers go untried. With the Jatiya Sangsad repealing the Indemnity Ordinance which was inimical to humanity, the people have been relieved of a legacy. Trials of the heinous killers have begun under the existing law of the land. The entire nation has been looking towards the fair justice of the gruesome massacre of the 15th August.

During the last two years since assuming responsibilities of running the government, we have been marching forward towards continued success with a view to realising the dreams and aspirations of the nation nurtured with the spirit of independence and liberation war. The people's voting rights have been established, and we have now been relentlessly working for realisation of the economic emancipation as well as establishment of the rights to food for the people. We have been working with a commitment to reach the fruits of socio-economic progress achieved by us to the doorstep of every citizen. In our struggle for realisation of the rights, equality and economic emancipation of the oppressed and deprived people, we want to carry forward our programmes with continued success being imbued with the ideologies of the *Bangabandhu*.

On the National Mourning Day, I call upon all the countrymen to take a vow to work unitedly for building up the "Golden Bangladesh" as dreamt of by our Great Leader by turing the grief for the eternal departure of the Great Leader into strength. Our collective homage dedicated to the Great Leader can be worthy only through establishment of rights to food and ensuring a better life of the people and thus materialising the "Golden Bangladesh". May *Bangabandhu* and all other martyrs of the 15th August be immortal.

Joi Bangla, Joi *Bangabandhu*
May Bangladesh Live Forever

Sheikh Hasina