

### Why Bangabandhu Matters

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dence were understandably a take off point for heresy. For Mujib, they were merely ideas that needed to be worked on.

In 1957, in Suhrawardy's presence, he wondered aloud if it was all right for Bengalis to remain part of Pakistan. For an individual who had placed unadulterated faith in the concept of a distinct state for India's Muslims in the forties, Suhrawardy could not be expected to warm to the idea. But Mujib went on toying with the thought. He was speaking of the need for Pakistan's eastern province to chart its own course in history. He was dead serious. More importantly, he recognised the truth that if the Bengali population of Pakistan were to strike out for freedom, it would need to do so through an employment of constitutional means. And yet the concept of eventual freedom had to be slowly and gradually injected into the popular consciousness. That was where Mujib was different from Bhashani: he was in all his political career loath to adopt the adventurist. That was also where he was miles removed from his contemporaries: his convictions stemmed from his refusal to compromise on principles.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman possessed uncanny instinct and endless shrewdness. That was one reason why he overlooked all the other political figures of his time and in the end forced them, as it were, into acknowledging the veracity of his political methods. Suhrawardy's death in 1963 freed, forever, Mujib from all constraints, and therefore he embarked on the task of bringing the Awami League back to life in 1964. For the next two years, Mujib assiduously wrought a change in the nature of Awami League politics through a transformation of his own political persona. Pakistan, he knew, would in the long run fail the survival test. But until that moment dropped forth from historical time, East Bengal would need vital regeneration in the political field. The engine for that came in the political package of the six point programme for provincial autonomy in 1966.

By 1971, Bangabandhu had successfully steered the movement for autonomy towards a struggle for independence. His victory at the Pakistan general elections of 1970 was essentially a vindication of his argument that his people had to find their own way out of the political bind they had been in for close to a quarter of a century. He had no need to destroy Pakistan. For that to be done, there was the Pakistan army and its ambitious politicians. And that precisely is what occurred in the nine months of the genocide in occupied Bangladesh. And at the end of the war, anti-politics had been stood on its head. Bangladesh, in freedom, was properly a revolt against the sophistry, and a rather poor one at that, of the two-nation theory expounded by the votaries of the Muslim League in the forties. Bangabandhu's success lay in the rebirth of the Bengali sense of cultural nationhood.

As the guiding figure in free Bangladesh, Bangabandhu exuded hope. In 1975, it was this hope which was extinguished, and in its place came shame in copious measure. But the hope? Go back in history. In Bangabandhu's time, the people mattered, in real, concrete terms. The state operated on the basis of constitutionality, and the rule of law was the measure of discipline. Villages mattered, and farmers knew they were part of the core of national politics. Abroad,



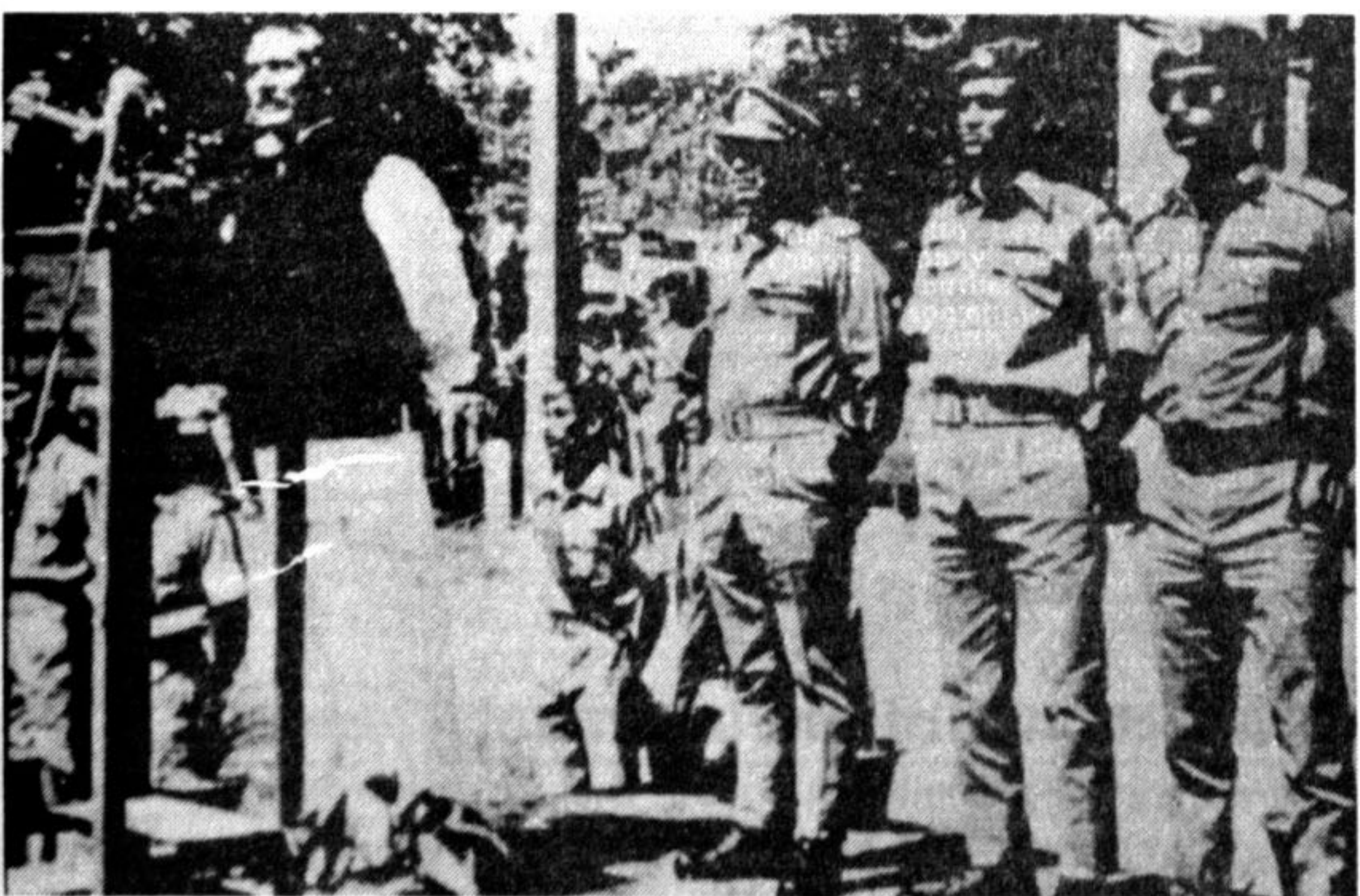
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addresses United Nations General Assembly in Bangla for the first time.

despite the grinding poverty at home and the swiftly arriving clouds of gloom, there was dignity for the country. Yes, Bangladesh did go through convulsions. Don't forget that the country had come through a grim struggle for sheer survival. Three million people were dead, roads were gone and bridges had disappeared. There was drought to compound the issues. And there were countries determined to punish the new country in geopolitical terms. Within the country, armed bands swearing by political negativism constantly sought to undermine the state. It was an accumulation of all these that Bangabandhu's government dealt with head on. And by early 1975 it was all paying off. Life would be different had Bangabandhu survived 1975. As it was, two years after the fall of Salvador Allende in Chile, it was his turn to go. His assassins, and the powers behind them, ensured that Bangabandhu did not live.

The country has paid a huge price in terms of politics and human dignity since the mayhem that claimed the life of the Father of the Nation. The people were pushed to the fringes, and crass materialism replaced political ideals. The worst was the humiliation heaped on the country through an imposition of the spurious notion of 'Bangladeshi nationalism'. Obviously, the overriding objective of the usurping classes was a reinterpretation of history. In the event, the little men could not quite scale the peaks. History has a way of punishing transgressors. It has been doing that in Bangladesh, to good effect. And that is why Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has remained the focus of national aspirations.

Bangabandhu was a thorough, fully committed political being. He knew no fear, and there was an abundance of the hearty in him. It came through all the time. He loved humour, and swapped jokes even as darkness descended on politics all around. He remembered names, and recalled faces, years after he had run into them. He liked to laugh, in that illuminating kind of way, and often broke into a guffaw to unwind himself and make all of us feel easy. He loved watching the boats sail down the river. And on silent evenings, as rain pelted the earth, he borrowed music from Tagore and sang. And sang on.

On a day in August, years ago, the voice was stilled. Into our poetry came a deafening silence. Lightning had struck the tops of the trees, deep inside the land.



Bangabandhu speaks at Comilla cantonment.

## On Bangabandhu

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Change in political power was brought about by conspiracies and plots, through unconstitutional means and in gross violation of the Constitution of the Republic. This became a normal trend. I have established people's rights through prolonged struggle. Many leaders of my party and out followers have laid down their lives in these struggles for the restoration of the rights of the people. Many have become handicapped and maimed as a result of physical torture and repression. Democracy I have established after a lot of sacrifice. Now my aim is to establish people's rights to food, i.e., their economic emancipation. I want to build a Bangladesh free from

poverty and hunger. For this we have to build a new society, on the ruins of an anachronistic, moth eaten one. Such a society would ensure the people of this country the fulfilment of their basic needs - need for food, clothing, shelter, education, health and employment. This I believe would redeem my father's dream of a Golden Bengal, not for the privileged few, but for every citizen of this country. My father is my ideal, as he is of millions, and I would continue to work until the last day of my life to fulfil his dream and complete his unfinished task. That now is my only ambition in life.

Joi Bangla  
Joi Bangabandhu

Nkruma also faced the same fate as that of Ben Bella. A military coup d'etat instigated by the Anglo American colonial forces of that time ousted him from power. He had to take shelter in neighbouring Guinea where President Seko Ture declared Nkruma the lifelong President of Guinea to show his and the rest of Africa's respect for the liberator of Ghana. The Africa that we see today is, in fact, the creation of Nkruma, Ben Bella and Lumumba. Such a statement, however, does not undermine the towering leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Abu Bakr Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe,

All three leaders of African revolutionary nationalism Patrice Lumumba of Congo, Kwame Nkruma of Ghana and Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria were deposed from power shortly after leading their countries to independence. Lumumba was assassinated in a brutal fashion by Belgian Mercenaries under the treacherous leadership of Joseph Casavabu. Dr. Ahmed Ben Bella, who led the Algerian resistance against French colonial occupation and finally led his country to independence was toppled and kept in solitary confinement till his death.



Bangabandhu in tears in remembrance of the three million martyrs whose sacrifices paved the road to freedom at Suhrawardy Uddyan, 10 January 1972.

### A Return to the Roots

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father's party that led the independence war in 1971, rekindled the hopes and dreams that were left unfulfilled because Bangabandhu's life was cut short by the assassination.

A grieving nation finally triumphed after Sheikh Hasina swept the general elections held under a neutral caretaker administration. In her victory the Bengali nation vindicated the truth about its history that was distorted by those who ruled for 21 years since Bangabandhu's assassination. The simple truth is that it was Bangabandhu - no one else - who led the Liberation War. The anti-Liberation forces have not stopped even though they are now out of power.

The truth needs to be told and re-told. Or else a generation

that grew under the shadow of a hate-Bangabandhu campaign unleashed by the anti-liberation forces for 21 years will know only a distorted version of our history. Bangabandhu's career is synonymous with the history of Bangladesh. It is difficult to tell the history of Bangladesh without telling about Bangabandhu.

The Bangabandhu Museum that houses the exhibits of the assassination is thus a storehouse of national history. This is the house at 32, Dhanmandi where the great man lived and died. This is the house where thousands of dreams were dreamt.

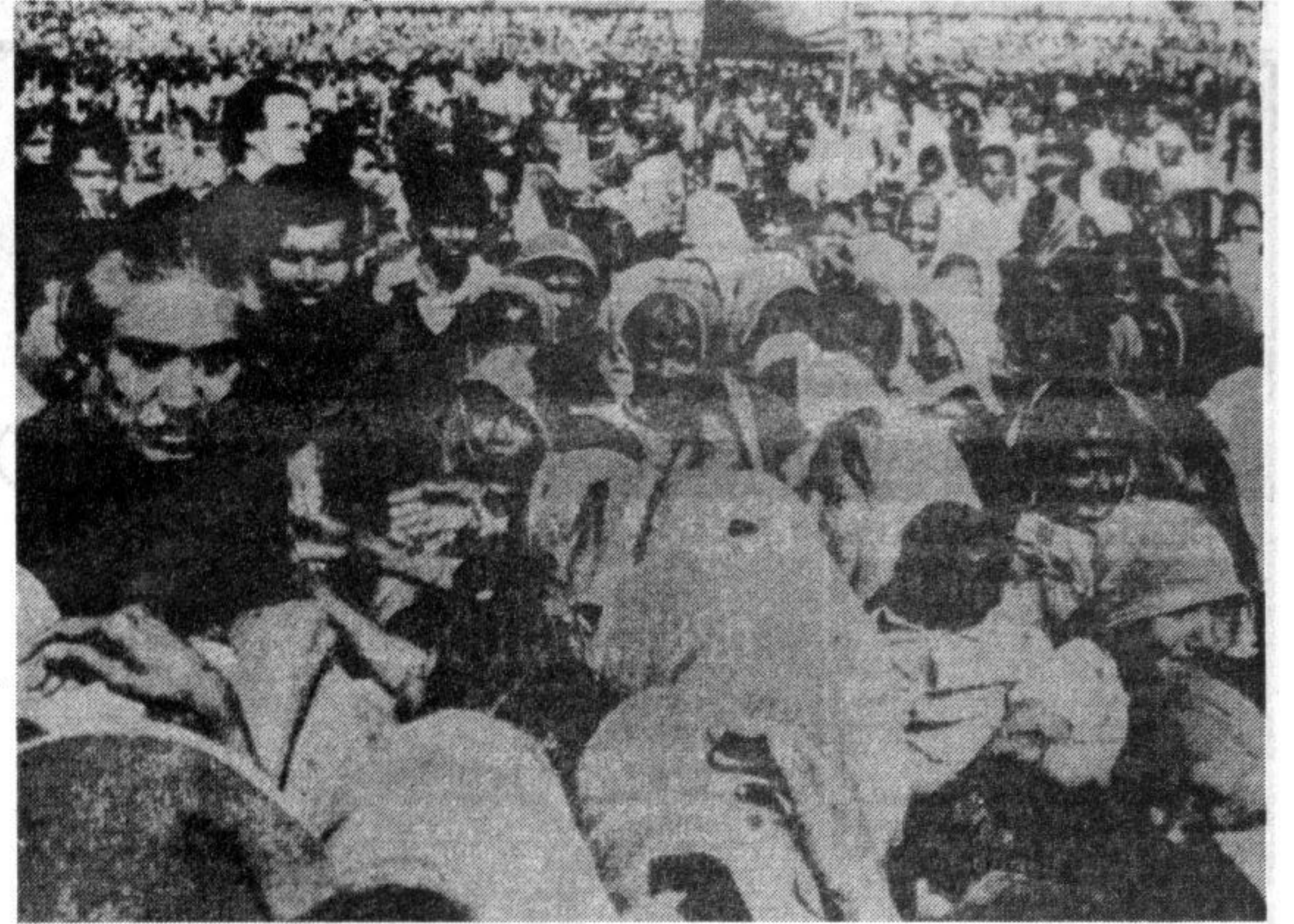
From where Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman waved to the cheering crowds that streamed into it after his party's historic triumph in the 1970 general elections were overturned by the then Pakistani military rulers. The house, now stained with his own blood, was so dear to him that he did not leave it after becoming the country's first President and then Prime Minister. This is the house where his beloved wife Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib, their sons Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel and two newly-wed daughters-in-law were gunned down.

Even when she was an opposition leader Sheikh Hasina set up a trust to turn the house into a museum dedicated to Bangabandhu's memory. Each open day the museum is visited by hundreds of people, including children. Like the school children many of the visitors leave the museum not only in tears but better informed with a true history of Bangladesh and its national heroes. Sheikh Hasina's dedication of her father's house to the museum is more than just a daughter's homage to a father. It's also a return to our roots.

him. His closest ally in Latin America's fight for liberation from the shackles of US multinational companies, Dr. Salvador Allende has been obliterated from the political scenario of Chile by a military coup. While the bullet ridden body of the democratically elected President Allende was still awaiting burial, the leader of the coup Agostinho Pinochet declared on state radio the Junta's decision to handover ownership of all copper mines, nationalised by Allende's government, to their former owners all of whom were the multinational business conglomerates of the West.

To day, on 15 August 1998, as we look back to the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the early morning of 15 August 1975, exactly twenty three years from now, the fateful happenings of that time do not look any different from what had happened in Africa in the sixties.

In South Asia the 1970 dawned with a burst of revolutionary democracies that promised the final victory of the peoples of the sub-continent. The seventy five million Bengalees under the heroic leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won a sweeping electoral victory against the colonial military rule of Pakistan in December 1970. The Pakistani junta strangled the verdict of the people and unleashed the worst genocide in history against the freedom loving people of Bangladesh. The blood thirsty Pakistanis were defeated in the nine month long war of independence in which three million people were killed by Pakistani soldiers. India, the beacon of democracy in Asia, gave active support to the liberation war and played a determining role in helping the



After the devastating tidal bore of 12 November 1970, Bangabandhu stood by the people to share their misery.

## The Blood That Spilled

Shamsuddin Ahmed

freedom fighters defeat the so called 'invincible' Pakistanis. The Soviet Union of that time defended the cause of Bangladesh both militarily and diplomatically.

The defeat of Pakistan in the hands of Bengalee freedom fighters earned humiliation and shame for the Pakistani warlords and their very powerful western allies who had armed Pakistan to the teeth and had created a myth of insuperability of the Pakistan army. That myth was shattered in the afternoon of 16 December 1971 at the race course ground of Dhaka when the Chief of the Eastern Command of the Pakistan army General Niazi signed the document of surrender of 94,000 Pakistani troops to the joint Bangladesh-Indian command. The mad West realised it for the first time that military forces, whatever strong may they be, cannot suppress a nation's aspiration for freedom whatever weak or non-martial that nation be. Sheikh Mujib and Indira Gandhi became a pain in the neck for the West as well as the hurt cobra that was the humiliated Pakistan army. They lied low for a short while looking for their time to come for a reprisal.

The Bangladesh army of that time comprised a huge number of officers and soldiers of the erstwhile Pakistan army who shared the vainglory of the invincibility of that army and many of them could not swallow the bitter pill of its inglorious defeat in the hands of half trained, half equipped, illfed and lungiclad Bengalees of humble origin. India's proven military superiority over Pakistan, her newly acquired prestige in the world community and strengthening of Bangladesh's fraternal relationship with India continued to bleed them from inside.

Conspiracies brewed. The defeated forces of 1971 found a number of accomplices in the ranks of the armed forces intent on destroying the budding democracy in Bangladesh. Long years of service in Pakistan army had ingrained in them a hatred for people's rule. They despised democracy and loved martial

law. Martial law establishes supreme authority of the military over the rest of the population and gives them absolute power to amass wealth by plundering the economy. This observation is all the more vindicated now as we follow the proceedings of the

Twenty three years have passed since the bloodshed at Dhanmondi thirty two, and the blood stains of the greatest Bengalee of all times, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, are still there on the staircase. The bullet riddled wall and balusters are filled with such a deafening silence that a visitor sometimes gets numb by its ferocity.

Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind.



Bangabandhu affixes his signature to the draft of the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu murder case. It is becoming more and more clear at the court house that the handful of officers and soldiers

who carried out the 15 August putsch were motivated by their hatred for Bangladesh and its democracy. Events that followed the assassination amply corroborate it.

Twenty three years is a long time. It is about a quarter of a century. For those who observed the development or degeneration of politics in this country over this period have seen how our society and its values have been brutalised by military rule. The dreams that were born in the liberation war have been all but obliterated by subsequent military juntas of General Ziaur Rahman and General Ershad - both of whom exiled politics and politicians from the mainstream of governance and in the process gave birth to crony politics in which sycophants and boot lickers were brought to the forefront to act as civilian facade for the military rulers. Twenty one years of persistent mass movement for the establishment of a democratic system to replace military and pseudo-military rule finally achieved victory in June 1996. The shattered dreams of the people have begun to piece together under the leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina.

We do not know what fate awaits the murderers of Bangabandhu, his family members and other leaders of the freedom movement. But we know what has happened to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Hundreds of thousands 'Sheikh Mujib's have been born from each drop of his sacrosanct blood that gushed out of his pierced heart in the early morning of 15 August 1975. It is this new generation of patriots who would put Bangabandhu's dreams into perspective and lead the country to the pinnacle of progress.



World Peace Council Secretary General Ramesh Chandra honours Bangabandhu with Julio Curie Award for peace, 23 May 1972.