

National Mourning Day Special

## Keep Him Above Politics, Please

by Shah Husain Imam

*He retained a middle class flair about him all his life instinctively bending over to the poor rather than to the rich. He had a sacrificing spirit that one rarely comes across these days among politicians.*

**T**ODAY we mourn the dastardly political murder of the principal leader in our nationalist struggle during the Pakistani days and liberator of the country, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The fact that he was done to death along with most members of his own household and the extended family, makes it into an episode of worst serial assassination as a means to seize political power ever recorded in the history of nations.

The annulment of the dark law that had indemnified the killers and the subsequent holding of their trial notwithstanding, there are lessons to be learnt from that grossly aberrant chapter of our history which saw military rule introduced in the country. That's where lies the importance of the mourning day as we see it.

The ruling Awami League party may draw satisfaction from what they are likely to view as the end of the de-mobilisation era marking a resurrection of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's image. But their detractors who have largely been the products of the post-Mujib phase in our political history hold on to an anti-national system of thought.

The saving grace, however, is that when they were in power, they occasionally, if a little half-heartedly, reflected a certain mood to give Sheikh Mujibur Rahman his 'rightful place' in history. The rightful place would be truly accorded to him when they will have brought their minds to denounce the act of assassination

in the first place, regardless of the dissent they might have had over Sheikh Saheb's policies. It is only the extremists who can dub 15th August as a 'day of deliverance,' not certainly a well-established political party which commands a sizable electoral support to be more responsible and far-sighted in its utterances.

It can hardly be over-emphasised that with Bangabandhu's assassination, a trend set in for changing of the guard by violent means of which Ziaur Rahman evidently fell a victim. To stamp out that menacing possibility for good, the political parties need to enter into a covenant of understanding to first of all make a public denunciation of all assassinations so far enacted, and then affirm their resolve to hold trials of those responsible for such gruesome political murders, including that of Ziaur Rahman. This is highly imperative for exorcising current politics of various conspiracy theories that rake up dark memories of the past bequeathing relations between political parties and taking up much of their time in no-win unending recriminatory bouts.

We would like to latch on the BNP's half-in and half-out inclination towards giving Bangabandhu his due place in our national life in the hope that the party will see the rationale of going forward with it to keep him above politics. If the BNP does so from out of power, it would send a more powerful signal of its positivism on this question to the

potential ally of the socialists. We need to know more about him, that is what we look forward to, beyond the mourning day.

**I**N Bangladesh to anyone having the slightest sense of history Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the nation's founding father, the architect of the country's independence and the last

## Trivialising the Hero

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

*If the Awami League is genuinely interested in protecting the heritage of Sheikh Mujib, let it toil for a Bangladesh that he dreamt of — a Bangladesh free from poverty, hunger, violence, insecurity and an yawning gap between the rich and the poor.*

sassin's bullet in 1975. Thereafter had begun his real assassination — the assassination of his character, his image and his heritage. It was done with a surgical precision. It is true that there were intriguers who never reconciled to the emergence of Bangladesh. But the orgy of his vilification was joined also by distinguished freedom fighters, a 'progressive' political left and even the ranks of Awami League itself. In the process, along with Mujib the whole edifice built around the spirit of liberation war was cruelly pulled down. In a sharp u-turn that Mujib did was systematically undone. Even his name was banished from the state media and it became a taboo in official circles. We saw with ignominy the name of the father of the nation lumped up with that of anbody else.

But then, like any great man of the history he did have his imperfection. He could not be expected to be above his human limitations. Even if he bungled things after independence, it does not, in any way, affect his greatness. Napoleon was a great man in spite of his defeat at Waterloo and notoriety in private life. Despite failings, Sheikh Mujib continue to be our revered father of the nation and beloved 'Bangabandhu' who had once been the heart throb of the millions in this country. Yet, when his 24th death anniversary is being observed to day, it is, as usual, an Awami League spectacle rendering his status to be that of a distinguished Awami leader although the state media gives it the appearance of a national event. Is it the way we would pay respect to our rational hero? Is it an insult to our national pride? After three decades of our independence we need to have an introspection what it was all due to.

In retrospect, something significant happened on the night of 25 March 1971 when Mujib was arrested by the Pakistani authority. Whatever could have been its motivation behind the arrest it effected a physical separation between Mujib and his people during a crucial period of his struggle. When he returned home after nine and half months from Pakistan's prison a war of liberation had already produced new dynamics in the politics of post-independence Bangladesh where Mujib was instantly surrounded by sycophants cloaked as admirers and well-wishers. They wanted both to gain his favour and influence his course of action in the statecraft. Mujib inadvertently succumbed to this self-seeking bunch who succeeded in separating him from his people to whom he, throughout his political career, endeared himself as one of the folks the next door. He was overnight turned into an icon, a messiah and an infallible superman who never existed in flesh and blood. He gradually became a stranger to his people who watched in anguish their hero giving way to megalomaniac till he was led blindfolded to the brink by the sycophants.

Sheikh Mujib fell to the as-

sassination in 1975. Thereafter had begun his real assassination — the assassination of his character, his image and his heritage. It was done with a surgical precision. It is true that there were intriguers who never reconciled to the emergence of Bangladesh. But the orgy of his vilification was joined also by distinguished freedom fighters, a 'progressive' political left and even the ranks of Awami League itself. In the process, along with Mujib the whole edifice built around the spirit of liberation war was cruelly pulled down. In a sharp u-turn that Mujib did was systematically undone. Even his name was banished from the state media and it became a taboo in official circles. We saw with ignominy the name of the father of the nation lumped up with that of anbody else.

The divergence in opinion and approaches is nothing new in national politics. But never a nation disputes its independence and one who delivers it. Never an attempt is made to snatch the mantle deserved only by its supreme leader. It is something that comes through the process of history which is its dispenser, Mao-Tse-Tung was condemned for many of his blunders but his place in the history was never questioned. Indian hawks are severely critical of Mahatma Gandhi's pacifism but none attempts to dislodge him from the exalted height he occupies as the nation's founding father. Mujib's detractors however ventured all these. It is still a mystery why the post-1975 rulers of Bangladesh went out to destroy Mujib's legacy with so much of vengeance. There has been animated discussions on the subject but no convincing answer has really been found.

The heritage does not last on rhetorics and empty words. When imposed and sustained through regimentation it backfires and its reaction is that of repulsion. Look at the legacy of Lenin which crumbled like the house of cards. His broken statue was kicked about in Moscow after the fall of his creed. His mausoleum is abandoned in the Red Square where no more a honour guard is mounted. Anything that was known by his name is now stripped of it. There is hardly anything in a name game. It only trivialises a great man. If the Awami League is genuinely interested in protecting the heritage of Sheikh Mujib, let it toil for a Bangladesh that he dreamt of — a Bangladesh free from poverty, hunger, violence, insecurity and an yawning gap between the rich and the poor.



## Remembering Sheikh Mujib Who Defended My Honour in the Parliament (Memoirs of a Civil Servant)

by M Matiul Islam

**A** few months after the promulgation of Martial Law by Yahya Khan in 1969, I was transferred to Islamabad as Joint Secretary, Economic Affairs Division from the position of Secretary, Commerce and Industry, East Pakistan Government. In December 1969, when I went to Islamabad for my last Import Policy meeting I would be attending as Secretary, Commerce and Industries, I was served with a notice by the Establishment division suspending me from the Civil Service under Section 58 of the Martial Law Regulation on charges of corruption. Dazed, shocked, and broken hearted, I left for Dhaka to join my grief stricken family and waited for the framing of the charges.

I refused the advice of my well-wishers to seek political support, especially of Sheikh Saheb, against victimization of some innocent East Pakistani officers. Nevertheless, one of my brothers-in-law who was close to Dr. Malek, the then sitting Central minister, dragged me to meet the minister who literally rebuffed me when he said that Yahya Khan wanted the corrupt officers like us removed outright, but was prevailed upon by senior Cabinet colleagues to give them an opportunity to defend themselves. What an irony it was that two years later to the day, I, as Finance Secretary, acceded on the spot approval when approached by Dr. Malek's brother for release of Tk 20,000 to meet the expenses of defending Dr. Malek, who was in jail, facing the charge of a collaborator.

For giving replies to the formal charges under MLR 58, we were allowed to consult the relevant files in the presence of the anti-corruption officer concerned. In my case, the anti-corruption officer was joined by a Colonel of the army who kept sitting throughout the period of

consultation. I was allowed access to papers only with approval of the Colonel. I realized much later when I again met Sheikh Mujib as to why this special treatment was accorded to me.

Mr. Tofazzal Ali, the renowned advocate, and Dr. Kamal Hossain corrected and edited my reply to the Martial Law charges and I also appeared before the Martial Law Tribunal. However, in mid 1970s, when the country was in the midst of election fever and the political parties were frantically busy preparing to face the next election called by Yahya Khan, I was retired from service at the age of 39. With plane ticket provided by Sadri Ispahani, I went to Karachi with him and was introduced to the President of Eastern Federal Union Insurance Company. During my negotiation for a job, Mr. Bhimji, the President of Eastern Federal, suddenly went to Dhaka and on return offered me a suitable position in the insurance company. Before I could make up my mind about the offer of Eastern Federal I was swept into joining Pakistan National Oil as a member of their Board of Directors. It was then that Mr. Bhimji told me that during his visit to Dhaka he sought and promptly obtained Sheikh Mujib's clearance before he offered me the job.

It was in January 1971 when I went to meet Sheikh Mujib, then acclaimed as the future Prime Minister of Pakistan, in the company of my other colleagues in the Pakistan National Oil, including Mr. Habibur Rahman of Bogra, he was standing in front of his Dhanmondi residence, seeing off somebody. Sheikh Mujib literally dragged me into the house, ignoring everybody else, and introduced me to all the senior leaders of Awami League.

and one of the question that came to my notice was the policy of reinstatement of 309 officers retired and dismissed by the Yahya regime. The day the question was admitted for answer in the Parliament by the Law Minister, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I happened to be there along with Tajuddin to discuss some important files with the Prime Minister who was in his Parliament office, listening to the floor debate on the speaker.

I witnessed Sheikh Mujib's triumphant return to Bangladesh on January 10, 1972 on TV, as I was preparing to leave Bangladesh in search of a living abroad. By that time, almost all the industrial and commercial entities of the Group of which I was a director were vested in the Government as the Law Minister Mr. Manoranjan Dhar was trying to answer a supplementary question as to the basis of my reinstatement. The Prime Minister, livid with fury and anger, pushed me aside and rushed to the floor of the Parliament and moments later we heard his booming voice in the speaker saying that the Law Minister was not aware of all the facts of the case to answer the supplementary question, and that he would like to answer it himself. He said "Mr. Matiul Islam was thrown out of service for nothing else but that he was my man." There was stunned silence in the Parliament and that ended the debate on the subject.

As I recall the episode today, I also wonder whether I truly deserved the love and affection of this greatman. He had given me so much when he was alive, and what did I give in return? An ungrateful creature. I have not even performed the simple and solemn task of offering Feteha by his graveside.

The writer is a former Finance Secretary

of the vanishing breed of the national liberation leaders. Bangladesh produced many illustrious sons in the past but it awaited the advent of Sheikh Mujib to translate what its people dreamt for thousand years, into reality. He had been the first public leader to totally identify himself with our impassioned urge for freedom. With his courage, conviction and phenomenal organisational skill he delivered it to his people. Those who dispute his greatness and unique contribution for his people, in fact,

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