

## National mourning day

*A black day in our history*

15 AUGUST is a black day in our history; a shameful episode that will never be blotted out from our memory. That is why The Daily Star has been calling for -- and we do so once again -- declaring 15 August as the day of national mourning.

No doubt, a personality like Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will have his share of detractors as well as admirers. He will be judged as well as misjudged. Some will treat him fairly while some unfairly. Some will be inclined to seeing him with a jaundiced eye while others may be subjectively disposed towards assessing his character and his contributions, his foibles and fortes. This is but only inevitable and is naturally associated with a political leader of the stature of Mujib.

But, whatever may have been his imperfections, nothing can justify the senseless and brutal killing, that perhaps ranks among one of the most heinous acts of recent times, of Mujib and his entire family save two. What is even more unacceptable is the fact that the killers have so far not been called to account for their crime, they have so far gone unpunished, and from what one observes of the legal process thus far, they may not have to face punishment at all.

The farce that the trial of the killers has been reduced to by frequent 'embarrassment' of the judges and the inordinate delay in appointment of judges to hear the case are but regrettable, and we can hardly keep ourselves from expressing our deep sense of disgust at this.

Let there be no doubt that Bangabandhu is a colossus whose place in history can hardly be questioned. But we entreat all concerned to keep him out of, and above, all controversies. It is unfortunate that it is the deification of Mujib by the Awami League that has stood in the way of making an objective analysis of the great man. On the other hand, the deliberate and planned vilification and denigration of Mujib by the BNP and the alliance is a singularly shameful episode in our annals. Both these tendencies have prevented his being accorded the rightful place in history.

Nobody can contest the fact that Bangabandhu played the most pivotal role in galvanising and uniting the nation and leading it eventually to a free Bangladesh. Let us not hesitate nor waver to accord him his rightful place in history. If we did so, we would only belittle ourselves.

## It's Akhaura now

*When will the culprits be caught?*

THE Akhaura shrine blast on Friday night only adds to the whole lot of bombing cases that have remained mysteriously unsolved to-date as something of a national shame. The bombs have been either detonated at, or near the venues of political rallies or religious gatherings killing and injuring scores of innocent people in the process. Just imagine the daring incident: as many as nine bombs were exploded with a blood-spilling, traumatic effect all around.

And, who carried out this act of barbaric cowardice? Well, speculations about the possible reasons have ranged from internecine conflicts in the shrine committee to religious extremists taking on 'shrine culture'.

From the looks of it, the authorities have taken a prompt action -- the officer-in-charge of the local police station has been suspended, the local administrative chief has been show-caused while two persons among the injured have been arrested by the police for their 'suspected involvement'. But don't they ring of familiarity with the initial handling of similar incidents in the past?

The point that must not be lost on all concerned is that bomb blasts have become the order of the day. Even the elite force, Rapid Action Battalion, was not spared either. Only the other day bombs were hurled at them in Chuadanga.

Undoubtedly, easy manufacture, trafficking and availability of bombs and small arms are clearly indicative of a huge surveillance failure. The other weakness is that the investigations go nowhere; actually hay-wire they go with political finger-pointing. To complete the list of shortcomings is the failure to prosecute the real culprits and hand out punishment to them. The net result has been the proliferation of the impunity culture with the heightened incidence of bomb blasts.

Let's hope that the authorities will wake up now and produce definitive results in their investigations, so that bomb blasts can be history and not a matter of endlessly growing forensic liabilities.

# Recalling the colossus

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

WHAT was he? A superman? An angel from heaven? He was perhaps someone beyond one's capabilities to describe. In my personal estimation it will be an exercise in futility to describe a colossus. Yet every year on August 15 I am invariably tormented with an excruciating but weird feeling within about the great soul.

The meteoric rise of Sheikh Mujib didn't occur overnight. Nor he was ever a selfish season bird in the political arena. He entered politics in late forties with a possible mission to serve the people of his country. And in such a cherished goal he was indeed a great visionary as well foreseer, as it was the ultimate path to freedom. A selfless, vigorously dedicated worker as he was right from the beginning of his school and college days, he was eventually destined to lead.

His innate leadership faculties sustained continuous development and careful grooming at the hands of none other than the spiritual child of democracy Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy. The memorable association between the two actors commenced in early forties when Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman was doing his studies in the Islamia College, Calcutta and was a resident student of the famous Baker Hostel. This eventually culminated into a literally eternal bond of love and affection. It grew so thick over the years that at one stage of his life Mr. Suhrawardy would consider himself incapable of doing his political chores in the erstwhile East Pakistan without Sheikh Mujib. To the latter as well Hussein Shaheed Suhrawardy was his immaculate conscience keeper, never in life to be forsaken.

I can faintly recollect the first time I saw Sheikh Mujib. It was during the penultimate days of British India. So far I can remember it was a couple of months before formal announcement of partition of India in August 1947. Notwithstanding the hectic parleys between the political leaders and the Viceroy in Delhi over the criteria for effecting partition of different provinces of India, the leaders of Bengal were divided on the proposed partition of Bengal. MA Jinnah and other Muslim leaders representing Muslim League evinced little or no interest in the ultimate dividing line in respect of Bengal and to some extent of Assam. In such a conflicting situation Mr Suhrawardy in a last minute bid, tried

NURUL ISLAM ANU

ASSESSING post-revolutionary political heroes is a challenging exercise. They are heroes because they are so different from the ordinary -- traversing the complex and difficult course of the history of a nation. In that journey they demonstrate qualities or virtues they have been endowed with so eminently by the creator to make history.

They evoke excitement and are never dull or boring; they are tree-shakers; they gamble with life with amazing ease for the realisation of ideals they believe in; they infuse a lethargic nation with inexhaustible energy with the dexterity of a magician. They embrace fame with grace and face abandonment with courage, remaining confident in the underlying strength of the ideals they champion; they are idolised and despised; they are controversial and yet noble. They are most often rebels restlessly uncomfortable with the existing order and relentless in their efforts to create a new future for humanity.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, one of the greatest Bengalis of all times, belongs to this rare breed of political heroes.

This is a tragic day to remember him -- the day when he was brutally assassinated by a group of military adventurers abetted by unscrupulous and self-seeking politicians. It was a debased and heinous act conducted under the guise of a dubious claim to patriotism. It represented the ominous induction of the overthrow of constitutional government through violence and an invitation to a process of military dictatorship.

The process was to inspire and foster horrendous distortions in the political evolution of Bangladesh from which the nation is yet to recover. The verdict in the most celebrated criminal case of the nation is yet to be executed by the conniving abettors. How long would the nation be subjected to the agonising spectacle of a judicial "embarrassment" with the custodian of the constitution blissfully remaining inactive in correcting the process?

Should the theory of the judiciary acting outside the concept of overall

# One morning thirty years ago

ARSHAD-UZ ZAMAN

THREE decades ago today the newly independent Bangladesh faced the greatest tragedy of her short existence.

Through a disastrous blow, an attempt was made to snuff out the independent existence of a state full of promise. Indeed we may recall that the name of the state was attempted to be changed from the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh. The Islamisation process unleashed on that day continues even today.

On August 15, 1975, an elaborate death trap that was laid where Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of the state, along with members of his family -- a total of 35 members -- perished.

The events of August 1975 were completed on November 3, when the killers of Bangabandhu, before escaping from Bangladesh, murdered in Dhaka jail, four top leaders of the Awami League, men who had provided superb leadership during the Liberation War throughout 1971. The neat plan of the massacre was to wipe out the leadership of Bangladesh and also destroy the leadership of the Awami League which had led the Bangalees to victory.

The plot to paralyse Bangladesh by the massacre of the towering leadership of Bangabandhu, has been eminently successful. Bangladesh has not taken a single step forward. On the other hand, the state has regressed in almost every field.

Bangabandhu was eventually succeeded by the head of the armed forces Gen. Ziaur Rahman, who was one of the sector commanders of the Liberation War of 1971. Shortly after taking over power, he brought about sweeping changes in

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will stand tall, majestically looking into the eyes of history, remaining defiant to the vicious propaganda of the enemies of the revolution as he remained defiant to the monstrous repressive machinery of the Pakistanis. This is a position he has earned at a cost unparalleled in contemporary political history. From one who had the rare honour to serve him, this column is a humble tribute to the sacred memory of that great soul. Let him be as glorious in death as he was in life.

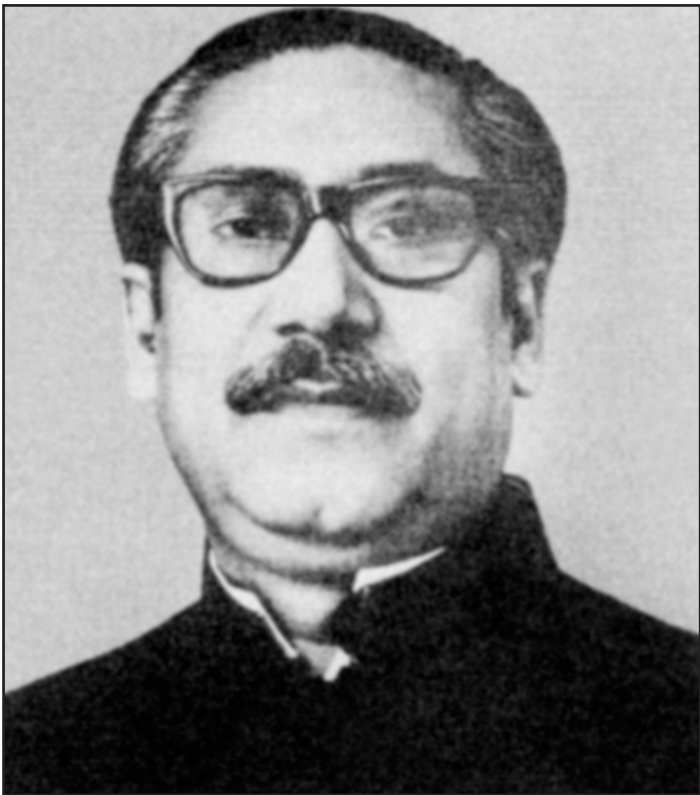
social accountability be acceptable as a part of jurisprudence? Why is a Law Minister, showing unwelcome and morally unacceptable enthusiasm in commuting the sentence of a murderer, suffering from an induced indifference to perform his constitutional responsibility as the chief law enforcer of the republic?

Is not the Prime Minister accountable to the nation for setting a dangerous precedent of murder going unpunished in a society committed to the ideals of rule of law? Is selective impunity going to be a regular feature of the administration of justice?

Revolutions, the process of realisation of their objectives, and the heroes of the revolution will always be subjected to the inescapable scrutiny of history. A ruthless sense of honesty and objectivity has characterised this process. In post-independence Bangladesh an ominous tendency to "administer" history and scarify it at the altar of subjectivity has been most pronounced. Regrettably much of distortion has been directed at Bangabandhu, the hero of the independence movement and the father of the nation.

This vicious propaganda is well-conceived, articulately administered, and has a sinister consistency. The glory of the independence movement and its finest days - March 7, March 26, December 16 - are observed by state controlled media without even a scant reference to this great name. The television screen remains barren and incomplete without a pictorial presentation of that majestic figure.

Dear readers, is it honest history being presented to a future generation about a glorious past they can legitimately feel proud of? Why should text books lie about history to a young impressionable mind -- confusing an entire generation?



This process has been brilliantly illuminated with fascinating and authentic records by the eminent historian, Muntasir Mamun, in his book entitled: "Itihash Bikritir Itihash" --a must read for those seeking the truth.

This process of distortion and tarnishing of Bangabandhu's image has been extended to ridiculous propaganda campaign on invented issues -- Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did not want to see Bangladesh independent, and was prepared to succumb to the temptation of becoming Pakistan's prime minister.

People who are knowledgeable about the political career of Bangabandhu would testify to the vicious and baseless character of such assertions. In his politics and the defiant political positions he assumed, he demonstrated the critical difference between a mere political agenda and a philosophy imbued with a noble commitment to emancipate an exploited people, defiant and ready to lay down his life for the cause. To make the point, I feel tempted to quote excerpts from one of my previous columns.

"His commitment was intense

and absolute; he took his message with relentless determination to the people, spread it from village to village inspiring the common man continuously to the content of his message. Suffering imprisonment for 17 years of his life, under grave threat several times -- Agartala conspiracy case -- arrest in 1971 -- he continued to gamble with life -- with an astonishingly serene confidence, remaining loyal to his cause. His thunderous voice roared on the historic 7th of March at the Ramna race-course in a feat of rare eloquence -- Bangladesh, as a nation was born."

Bangabandhu has been accused of failing to define the core of the nationhood or erecting the edifice of a new state. Nothing can be more untrue than these malicious allegations. He continuously endeavoured to identify himself with the dream of a secular democratic Bangladesh where the poor man's economic interest is safeguarded against any form of exploitation.

As a political practitioner he enacted the constitution in 1972 incorporating this core element of nationhood. Debates about socialist experiment apart, the economic interest of the common man and its guarantee has formed a core element in any form of economic management in Bangladesh. He put an end to the dogma of unbridled capitalism as a cure to Bangladesh's economic ills and even the most capitalist of financial managers has to recognise this inescapable reality. He elevated the status of the common man from being an object of economic exploitation to that of an economic beneficiary.

Any post-revolutionary situation is characterised by misdirected passion and certain dangerous centrifugal tendencies. Sometimes it tends to degenerate into anarchy. Bangabandhu could clearly see the

need for a cohesive political focus which would neutralise these centrifugal tendencies. His personal charisma and image provided the critical element in ensuring this national cohesion, and he engineered it consciously out of a deep realisation of a post-revolution Bangladesh.

With arms all around, the civil administration disrupted and paralysed, restoration of order and establishment of the civilian authority were essential pre-conditions to Bangladesh's sovereign existence and its recognition by the rest of the world. He achieved these with amazing speed. The task was enormously complex and the writer of this column having the privilege of serving this great man at that formative stage most humbly testifies to that astounding achievement.

The fundamental pillars of Bangladesh as a new state were clearly identified by Bangabandhu with a clear vision and the superstructure was laid under his caring guardianship.

Creators of a distorted history engage themselves in an ignoble purpose. They tinker with the surface of superficiality and are destined to fail because history moves onward to eternity with a pristine purity and self-sustaining virtue. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will stand tall, majestically looking into the eyes of history, remaining defiant to the vicious propaganda of the enemies of the revolution as he remained defiant to the monstrous repressive machinery of the Pakistanis. This is a position he has earned at a cost unparalleled in contemporary political history. He was scornfully indifferent to the allurements that were held out to him to derail him from his mission.

From one who had the rare honour to serve him, this column is a humble tribute to the sacred memory of that great soul. Let him be as glorious in death as he was in life.

Nurul Islam Anu, a former member of CSP, is a political activist and columnist.

Over the last 30 years we have drifted very far. It is time to remember that without Bangabandhu Bangladesh was unthinkable. Let us rekindle in our hearts the clarion call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: "The struggle this time is the struggle for emancipation, the struggle this time is the struggle for independence." No nation will be respected if it continues to deny its Father.

the constitution. Thus secularism, one of the main pillars of the constitution, achieved after a quarter century struggle with Pakistan, was erased from the book. Socialism had to go -- and the only two pillars that survived were democracy and nationalism.

During the War of Liberation, under the magnificent leadership of

Bangabandhu, Bangalees had united as never before in history. Only a handful of collaborators, the Razakars, had joined hands with the Pakistani forces. Their leader Gholam Azam had sought refuge in Pakistan.

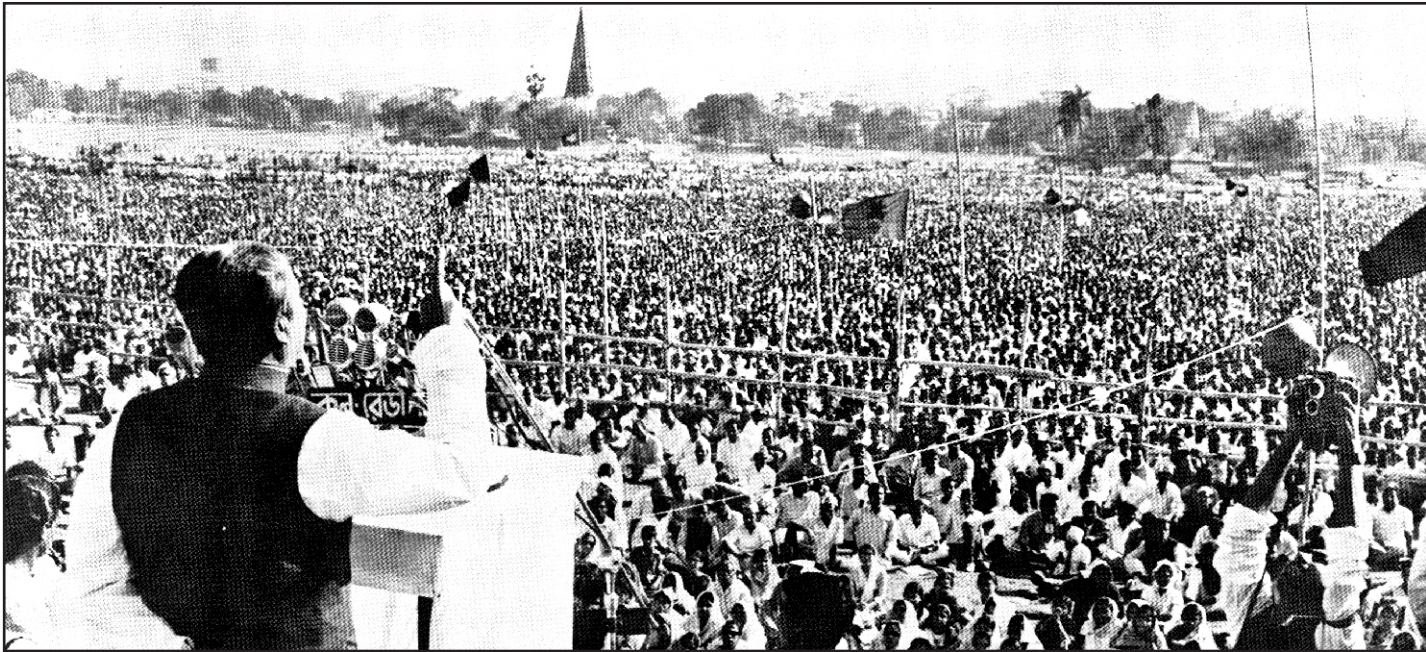
Through amnesty of one and all not only were the traitors allowed to return to Bangladesh, but they were

allowed to participate in the political life of the country. Thus Gen Ziaur Rahman, the Liberation War hero, became an ally of the so called religious forces, forces which had been rejected by the people in the general elections of 1970 and ever since.

Gen. Zia's six years in power were marred by frequent coup

attempts and finally he was murdered by some disgruntled officers of the army. Some of them have been hanged, but it has never been clearly established who were the real killers.

Gen. Zia was succeeded by Gen. HM Ershad. Thus a military regime seemed to perpetuate in Bangladesh. A veneer of democracy was



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maintained as Gen. Ershad held sham elections.

In the political field appeared two ladies -- Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and President of the Awami League, and Begum Khaleda Zia, the widow of Gen. Ziaur Rahman and President of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Gen. Ershad continued his reign for nine long years by playing one lady against the other. In the late eighties the two ladies finally joined hands and a mass uprising toppled the dictatorship of Gen. Ershad. Like his predecessor Gen. Zia, he too went on Islamising the constitution. Thus he injected Islam as the state religion, destroying totally the secular polity of Bangladesh.

Since the events of August 15, 1975, the constitution of Bangladesh has been so severely mauled by the two military regimes that it looks extremely difficult to repair the damage. Yet for Bangladesh to regain her lost image and specially for her to take back the seat of honour in the comity of nations, there is no alternative to return to the constitution of 1972. Let us recall that the Constitution of 1972 was the fruit of the War of Liberation, which the nation fought as one soul. It is also a document which allowed us to take our seat among the civilised nations of the world.

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Arshad-uz-Zaman is a former Ambassador.

Bangabandhu and 18 of his family members were brutally murdered by a handful of disgruntled army personnel. The unearthly betrayal that precipitated such a heinous crime and dastardly act had been secretly contrived by those who used to enjoy love and affection from the Father of the Nation. To our utter misfortune we continued to be the miserable witnesses to a series of treacherous acts and a world of wretchedness and ingratitude among those beneficiaries of Sheikh Mujib's selfless personal attention and affection.

desperately to persuade Jinnah not to agree with the proposition on Bengal partition. His plea was that Bengal being a Muslim majority province Jinnah could insist for an undivided Bengal to the British authority. Jinnah wanted to be sure about the majority status of Muslims in Bengal. He asked for formal election. Suhrawardy accepted the challenge and in meeting the challenge he organised a massive campaign in the entire province. In such a course he was present in Barisal. School and college students were seen spontaneously participating in such campaign. There as a school student I too joined team that went to different mufassil areas of the district by motor launch. On board was Mr. Suhrawardy himself and among many others, Sheikh

Mujib. That was the first time I came across the future leader of Bangladesh.

Sheikh Mujib, like Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq, was gifted with an enviable memory. He could remember anyone even seen after 20-25 years. When I met him in the motor launch during election campaign I was barely 15 in 1947. I wouldn't imagine that he would instantly recognise me when we met again 6-7 years later in Barisal town. Mr MA Karim of NAP Bhasani was with him. Karim Bhai was about to introduce me to him. But he didn't have to. Sheikh Saheb asked me: "How are you? Where is Bahauddin?" I informed him that my elder brother Kazi Bahauddin was then in Dhaka. "Tell him that I was in your town".

Incidentally, it may be mentioned my elder brother (who was later Director General, Immigration and Passports, died on Oct 1-2, 1998) was also a very close political associate of Bangabandhu. Their personal relationship was very informal.

My last meeting with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a spiritually tinged one. I met him in dream in the dying hour of night on August 12-13, 1975. It was again in my home town Barisal where he went for a meeting of the party workers. The meeting was held on the upper floor of a two-storey tin shed. After the meeting he came down bare-footed. He saw me standing at the foot of the wooden stairs. He requested me to bring down his footwear which he left upstairs forgetfully. I ran up the stairs and climbed down hurriedly. He was not

there. I woke up crying when my wife asked me: "What happened? Why are you crying?" I said "nothing happened. Just a bad dream perhaps."

In the morning I asked an Imam of a nearby mosque on the possible interpretation of the dream. I tried my best to dismiss it for superstition and within 48 hours I got the shock of my life. The religious interpretation of my dream had been that if somebody in power was seen walking bare-footed, it would mean an impending tragedy befalling him. It could also suggest dethroning a king or unseating someone in power forcefully. So our beloved leader and 18 of his family members were brutally murdered by a handful of disgruntled army personnel. The unearthly betrayal that precipitated such a heinous crime and dastardly act had been

secretly contrived by those who used to enjoy love and affection from the Father of the Nation. To our utter misfortune we continued to be the miserable witnesses to a series of treacherous acts and a world of wretchedness and ingratitude among those beneficiaries of Sheikh Mujib's selfless personal attention and affection.

Bangabandhu was indeed a large hearted person throughout his life. Despite political rivalry with personalities like Khan A Subur, Fazlul Kader Chowdhury, Shah Azizur Rahman, he had tremendous love and affection besides personal respect for many of them. That's how he was spontaneously prompted into taking personal responsibility for the life of Khan A Subur and FK Chowdhury immediately after the war of liberation. The returning freedom fighters were all out to punish those who sided with Pakistan or who didn't support the liberation war. Sheikh Saheb sent down his emissaries to the two persons and by way of manipulation and display of personal concern for the two lodged them inside jail. It was a strategic decision that eventually saved both from the bitter wrath and vengeance of the MuktiJoddhas."

However, the public amnesty that

was granted to the opponents of the war of liberation, hated as Razakars, Al-Badars, and the like didn't prove to be a fully justified dispensation. Here his inborn soft-heartedness proved suicidal in as much as that it provided those beneficiaries opportunities to regain the self-same venoms to strike. And among the first victims Bangabandhu and almost all of his family members lost their lives. Besides, those assassins already sentenced to death by the lower court are now awaiting their turn to get free. Their expectation is reasonable because a good number of those allegedly taking active part in jail killing of November 03, 1975 are enjoying free life. It is about half a decade that the appeal of the convicts is lying pending and unattended. In this the ulterior motive is being widely talked about. It is expected that the government initiates quickest action to remove all the hurdles (created artificially) to hear the appeal. Shall good sense prevail on them?

Kazi Alauddin Ahmed is a management consultant.