

## Bangabandhu's assassination

*Declare this day as National Mourning Day*

THE nation observes with appropriate solemnity the thirty-second anniversary of the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the members of his family today. The day should serve as a moment for the nation to go into serious soul-searching about the tragedy and the terrible ramifications it has had on national politics since August 15, 1975. The time has surely arrived when as a society we need to have our perspective on the tragedy set in clear outline as a way of moving on. And that is a job that can be done through taking steps toward officially declaring August 15 as National Mourning Day. We would like to take this opportunity to point out here that The Daily Star has since 1993 editorially been demanding that August 15 be declared as National Mourning Day.

One hardly needs to reiterate the thought that the tragic happenings of August 1975 remain a dark spot on the history of this nation, particularly because of the clear absence of justice that was noted with regard to the murders under successive governments. It is a matter of grave embarrassment that Bangabandhu's assassins were given protection through an infamous indemnity ordinance that was again incorporated as law through the fifth amendment to the constitution. What remains galling for the nation is that most of the assassins were subsequently sent off to Bangladesh's diplomatic missions abroad in various capacities. At a later stage, some of the killers were even permitted to set up a political party and take part in the 1988 presidential election. Such episodes only went towards further undermining our national self-esteem, a phase that came to an end only when an Awami League government initiated the process of a trial of Bangabandhu's murderers through a repeal of the indemnity ordinance in 1996. We hope that the wheels of justice will turn fully and that the shame perpetrated in August 1975 will never be repeated.

Today, as we recall the contributions of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to our history and the pivotal role he played in the shaping of our destiny, we ask the powers that be that August 15 be officially declared National Mourning Day as a mark of respect to the great man. We are happy to observe that steps have been taken to correct the history of Bangladesh's struggle for freedom in school textbooks. It is a move that will surely go a long way toward removing the falsehoods that have distorted our history since August 1975. We understand that the President, the Chief Adviser and the chiefs of the army, navy and air force will visit Bangabandhu's grave in Tungipara today. We welcome the move. Their presence at the final resting place of the country's founder will surely be a true manifestation of the sentiments of the people of Bangladesh.

## Give police the wherewithal

*Criminal investigation badly hampered on low budget*

CONDITIONS under which our crime investigators perform their duties are appalling and deplorable, to say the least. An investigative report in this paper reveals that an investigation officer (IO), usually of the rank of sub-inspector of police, gets a ridiculous sum of Tk. 3 as daily conveyance, in addition to Tk 10 for three meals a day for an accused in custody sticking to the archaic rate of a hoary past. Besides, an IO riding a government allotted motorcycle gets a daily quota of 1.7 litres of gasoline. Those having their own motorbikes are given a meagre monthly allowance of Tk. 100 only.

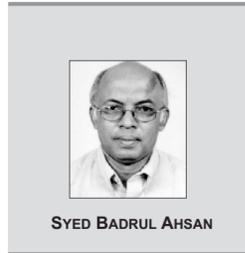
Imagine an SI's work load with all that logistic support: on an average he has about 15 cases in hand for investigation besides his regular chore of duties that runs into about 12 hours a day round the year. Currently, an IO has to prepare a case report that usually runs into 30 pages and that too in four copies before it is submitted to his superior officer for review and final clearance.

No wonder, IOs hardly investigate minor cases due to fund constraints, and where they carry out investigations at all these are riddled with flaws, only making for a weak prosecution and a poor conviction rate of only 8 to 10 percent.

We, therefore, fully endorse the proposal recently submitted by the police to the government seeking a budget of Tk. 31.84 crore for investigations covering cases of robbery, repression of women and children as well as those related to law and order.

Indeed proper investigation is the key to effective crime control. Surely under present circumstances where the police are working on an unworkably low budget it is not only the investigation that suffers but corruption is also spawned subverting the prosecution. This is tarnishing the image of our police force and undermining the effectiveness of law enforcement and justice system which can be largely avoided by giving the police the needed wherewithal.

## The tale of a troubadour



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

IT is the courage of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman you miss as you go through life. And yet it is something more, something of values that you associate with any remembrance of him.

He embodied some of the finest traditions that self-respecting people anywhere have, throughout the course of history, upheld in their lives. And among those values is the refusal to compromise, to undermine yourself through a convenient jettisoning of the ideals that you have always held dear.

Even as the round table conference went on in Rawalpindi in 1969, President Ayub Khan suggested to Mujib that he take charge as Pakistan's prime minister. The Bengali leader spurned the offer. It was a natural gesture on the part of a man who had defied the winds and the trends of the times to come forth with the Six Points in 1966. It was Bengal that mattered to him. Nothing else did, or would.

It was all in character for Bangabandhu. He never flinched from doing or saying anything he thought was right, or made good sense. In December 1969, as Bengalis remembered Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy on his death anniversary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman let them, and by extension the world outside their own

## GROUND REALITIES

**Bangabandhu was the troubadour who moved through the hamlets and villages of Bengal, disseminating the message that freedom from colonial rule and emancipation from economic exploitation were of the essence. Go into the remote regions of the country and you will chance upon men who still recall their "Muzibor" and everything he stood for.**

parameters, know that thenceforth East Pakistan would be known as Bangladesh. One hardly needed proof that Mujib had come a long way.

Back in 1957, he had caused not a little distress to Suhrawardy, then Pakistan's prime minister, by asking him bluntly if Bengalis could not opt out of the state Jinnah had cobbled into shape. Suhrawardy reprimanded him for entertaining such thoughts. Mujib then simply bided his time. When it came, he knew the task he needed to perform. His dedication to the causes he espoused was complete and without ambiguity. His disillusionment with Pakistan having taken a firm shape by the early 1960s, he knew which path he needed to take. And he took it resolutely. There was little room in him for second thoughts.

Bangabandhu was the troubadour who moved through the hamlets and villages of Bengal, disseminating the message that freedom from colonial rule and emancipation from economic exploitation were of the essence. Go into the remote regions of the country and you will chance upon men who still recall their "Muzibor" and everything he stood for. And what he stood for came alive assertively in 1971, when seventy five million Bengalis prayed for him even as he languished in solitary confinement in

Pakistan.

All politics, all religion, in that year of tragedy and decision focused on Bangabandhu. An entire war of national liberation was shaped and waged in his name. It was no mean feat, one that Fidel Castro remarked on when he met Bangladesh's founder at the Algiers Non-Aligned summit in 1973. That Bangabandhu was a tall man, and not just in the literal sense, was what delighted Castro. And it subdued other men, like Nigeria's Yakubu Gowon. A hostile King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was quickly shocked into silence by the courage of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Faisal, a man without vision, could not understand why the Bengalis had driven Pakistan out of their lives. Mujib then lectured him soundly on what Islam signified, and how the Pakistanis had distorted the faith.

Principles, then, were what served as Mujib's fundamental political premise. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came calling in January 1971, clearly to ask for a share of power with the majority Awami League, Bangabandhu made it clear that Bhutto's People's Party needed to be where the electoral judgement had placed it, in parliamentary opposition. It was a position he would maintain in the tumultuous season of March 1971, despite the growing pressure

on him to relent. The Six Points could not be trifled with. And when the Pakistan army tried to shoot them down, he went for a single point: he declared the nation's independence before being seized by the army.

There was always presence in Mujib's pronouncements. He calmly told a western journalist at the height of the Agartala conspiracy case trial in 1968: "You know, they can't keep me here for more than six months." In the event, he was a free man in the seventh month. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s he went on reassuring Bengalis that freedom would come into their lives. And it did. He prepared for freedom in the way only a man believing in constitutional politics would. He was not a revolutionary, which was why he was not willing to go for a direct confrontation with the Pakistan government. Neither was he an adventurer, for which reason he warded off all calls for a unilateral declaration of independence on March 7, 1971.

And yet the oratory of that day remains part of history, of the Bengali psyche, for everything it pointed to, for the clear set of guidelines he left for his people to follow in the event of his absence from the political scene. It was these guidelines that Bengalis worked on for nine months. His words, his image,

his idealism, all of these served as a metaphor for the armed struggle for freedom.

By the time the state of Pakistan took flight from Bangladesh on December 16, 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had evolved further, into a liberator in the mould of Simon Bolivar, in the mould of everyone who had ever traversed a path to collective freedom.

On a January day in 1972, as he spoke to the world on his arrival in London from Pakistani incarceration, he knew he had turned into an embodiment of history. He spoke of the joy of freedom inherent in the epic liberation struggle that the 1971 war had been.

Humility and basic decency defined Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He never forgot names and always remembered faces, even those he had come across in his youth. He surprised the Indian journalist Nikhil Chakravarty when the latter turned up at Bangabandhu's news conference in late January 1972, in Dhaka. The two men had not met since 1946, and Chakravarty certainly did not expect Mujib to remember him. He was mistaken. As Bangabandhu entered the room, his gaze fell on the journalist. Then came the question, "Aren't you Nikhil?"

The rest hardly needs to be recounted. Bangabandhu remembered the names of simple men, of peasants and labourers, inasmuch as he recalled the names of unknown political workers. It was a trait that endeared him to millions, who then spotted in him a guiding spirit who would light their way out of the dark woods. His respect for academics was beyond question, as men like Professor Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury, Professor Abdur Razaque, Dr. A.R. Mallick

## Our divided nation

**But we should take into account that a divided nation can't prosper. Democratic values will not work in a country where people do not value its past glories, achievements and traditions. Patriotism will not awaken within the people unless they get united under a common nationhood and national hero. Unless and until we understand this simple logic and act towards this direction, our freedom will be a mirage.**

### NAZRUL ISLAM

THE current sorry state of the country after 36 years of independence is not desirable but definitely unavoidable. Perhaps, this is the ultimate destination of a country whose people fail to agree on some fundamental ingredients essential for nation building. The ingredients are nationhood, national hero, and patriotism. A nation can't march forward on a democratic path without these ideological subjects.

For giving birth to a nation, there is a need for a national leader or leadership to construct what famous Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci calls the "headquarters" of a movement. Nations or people become capable of meaningful and effective political action only when they are organised. They become a people or "historical subjects" only when they are organised as such.

The leaders of the Awami League laid the foundation of the "headquarters" of the subsequent movements during the fifties. In the sixties, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman came to the forefront of the leadership, especially after the death of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy in 1963.

The subjugation, repression, and economic deprivation meted out to the Bengalis by the Pakistani rulers

brought them under a single banner of Bengali nationhood. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had emerged as an unparalleled leader, acted as a catalyst in consolidating this nationalism. The historic 6-point demand was not only a charter for leading the country towards independence but was also a testimony to Bengali nationalism.

Through various movements and struggles, Mujib guided the nation towards the independence struggle. Bangladesh was born as an independent country after 9 months of bloody war under his leadership in 1971, although he was in a Pakistani jail.

We got an independent Bangladesh, but the process of formation of the nation based on Bengali nationalism, which was in its infancy during the 50s and 60s, still continued.

In fact, it takes a long time to consolidate nationhood. India had entered the process of becoming a nation in the late 19th century, and the process continued for several decades after independence in 1947.

Finally, India now stands on a solid foundation of Indian nationhood through unifying its people, taking into account regional, religious, caste, ethnic and linguistic differences.

But the process of becoming a nation or a "people" stopped suddenly after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. The nation-in-the-making process would have been consolidated but, instead, it had not only been stopped but was counteracted through another formula of Bangladeshi nationalism conceived by a journalist-turned minister of Ziaur Rahman's cabinet.

And the seed of disunity was thereby implanted in the very core of a nation. The poison-tree that was sown in the late 70s still continues to pour venom and manages to keep the country divided.

As I have already mentioned, in reference to leadership for carrying out a movement, especially a national movement, we find that the countries, which are born through war or mass struggle must have a national hero. In other words, the birth of a nation is closely linked to a national leader.

We can cite here the examples of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi of India, Mohammad Ali Jinnah of Pakistan, Kamal Pasha of Turkey, Gamal Abdul Naser of Egypt, Sukarno of Indonesia, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Mao Tse Tung of China, and so on.

All these leaders, who had played

the leading role in carrying out movements in their respective countries, are respected and revered by their fellow countrymen and leaders. There might have been controversies centring them but, for the sake of national unity, the countrymen kept the heroes above all debates.

A pearl is formed around a tiny particle. Without the particle, apparently having no face value, formation of this precious gem is not possible. Similarly, a nation can't be formed without a particle -- a national hero. And you can't create a hero at your whim.

Heroes are created through struggles. Bangabandhu became a national hero through leading the nation into the independence struggle and freeing the country from Pakistani occupation. But we have failed to give him due recognition. We killed him.

Like Bangabandhu, Gandhi was also assassinated. But the Indians never forgot their national hero, and keep him above all controversy. They did it because the Indian leaders understood that they needed a hero who could keep the nation united.

They told the people that, despite his limitations as a human being, they must get united under the umbrella of a national leader like Gandhi.

And what did we do? We not only killed Bangabandhu, we also assassinated his character. We tried to replace him by others. We destroyed his all achievements. Despite ready-made references available in front of us, our rulers intentionally discarded those and tried to infuse their own theories to make a new nationhood and national hero.

And what was the fallout? The

country's people are still divided. To us self-interest is the best interest; individual is greater than party; party is greater than country. Our businessmen earn money here but accumulate it in foreign countries, our meritorious sons get foundational education here, but serve foreign nations, our intellectuals live on the sweat of the poor, but serve the interests of multinational companies.

Patriotism is the by-product of nationhood and national hero. If a person finds her/his identity (nationhood) and gets shelter under an "umbrella" (national hero), patriotism will automatically arise within her/him.

Can you find an Indian who compromises with national interest? That does not mean that all Indians are angels. There are corrupt people, plunderers, and thieves, but they all are patriotic.

After three decades of independence, we are lamenting over our achievements. In fact, nothing mentionable has been achieved, or whatever was achieved stands on a false foundation.

We are reprimanding politicians indiscriminately for this failure. But we are not investigating the root cause behind it. How can a country thrive on democracy when its formation has been aborted? How can the people of a country get united when its national hero has been defiled?

Nathuram Godse killed Gandhi, but the Indian nation-in-the-making was unhurt. But the assassins in Bangladesh not only killed Bangabandhu but also killed the Bengali nation-in-the-making.

The death of a person, Mujib, would not have figured so promi-

and Dr. Abdul Matin Chowdhury would know.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a natural. He laughed uproariously, and deeply. Anecdotes made him double over with laughter. He himself was a purveyor of tales garnered through his travels all across Bengal. A sense of humour, undiminished despite the long years in prison, marked him out from other politicians. When Abdus Samad Achakzai remarked, on meeting him in 1970, that Ayub Khan had turned him into an old man, he replied: "Ayub Khan ne tum ko bhi buddha bana diya hum ko bhi buddha bana diya" (Ayub Khan has made you an old man and has made me an old man as well). Welcoming Bangabandhu to his country in 1974, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahiyani of the United Arab Emirates noted that, like him, Mujib was a sheikh. "But there is a difference," said Bangladesh's leader. "I am a poor sheikh." Both men burst into laughter.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the story of a man who scaled the heights of greatness and yet did not lose touch with the dew on the grass. Here was a Caesar. When comes such another?

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nently if the growth of nationhood was unhindered. But the plotters were aware of the fact that their mission would fail if Bengali nationalism, based on which the country got independence, was not wiped out. After introducing Bangladeshi nationalism, they knifed the constitution and abolished secularism, another ideological weapon of our liberation struggle.

Against the backdrop of 11/1, many people are providing prescriptions to get out of the ills that have engulfed the country. Some think that our ailment will be cured with the ongoing symptom-based treatment. But we should take into account that a divided nation can't prosper.

Democratic values will not work in a country where people do not value its past glories, achievements and traditions. Patriotism will not awaken within the people unless they get united under a common nationhood and national hero.

Unless and until we understand this simple logic and act towards this direction, our freedom will be a mirage.

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## Mujib and the Declaration of Independence

Even then, all these arguments can be ignored, but the course of history cannot be changed. This is what history is. We can hold it down or repress it. But we cannot stop it. The caretaker government should take great care of the history of the liberation war, bring all these into consideration, and go about the job of amending the text books of the primary and secondary classes in right earnest.

### RASHID ASKARI

THE vow to reveal the rights and wrongs of the history of our Liberation War, and to give individuals the credit they deserve, is a welcome gesture on the part of the caretaker government. The chief of the army General Moeen U. Ahmed has made an overt declaration that they will settle the long-standing disputes about the history of our independence, and deal with them fairly and squarely on the basis of fact.

This sounds very good indeed, especially to those who want to read an undisputed history of our Liberation War, which has undergone huge distortion at the hands of vested quarters and political governments. Party intellectuals held repeated

postmortems of history to use it in their favour. This tug of war with our history has caused serious harm to our national integrity.

The impressionable young learners have been the worst victims of this. They are confused with the frequent changes in the historical accounts, which are in a state of flux in keeping with the change of the governments.

This long-drawn-out hostility between the two major rival parties, Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), revolves around their two political idols -- Mujib and Zia.

The caretaker government seems to be making an attempt to bury the hatchet between these two parties by settling the dispute about who really declared independence of

Bangladesh.

The government appears to be taking a conciliatory step to please both the parties. It seem to be keener on mediation than on unearthing the truth.

The government recognises Mujib as the Father of the Nation and Zia as the declarer of independence on Mujib's behalf. This is good. Mujib was the undisputed leader of our independence and deserves this appellation, regardless of anybody's recognition. And Zia read out the declaration note on behalf of Mujib on March 27, 1971.

This is surely based on hard fact, but the question is how far this reading out of the declaration note of March 27 could be considered as the formal declaration of the independence of Bangladesh, which was

virtually made on March 26, 1971. History should be treated dispassionately, with cool and clinical impersonality. It does not bother about negotiations. So the facts about the declaration of our independence should be taken into consideration by the government.

It is Mujib and only Mujib who, for the first time, formally made the declaration of the independence of Bangladesh on March 26, 1971. S. A. Karim in his Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy writes that the wife of M.R. Siddiqi was given over telephone an urgent message from Bangabandhu received through the wireless operators of Chittagong. The message reads as follows: "Message to the people of Bangladesh and the people of the world. Rajarbagh police camp and Peelkhana EPR suddenly attacked by Pak Army at 2400 hours. Thousands of people killed. Fierce fighting going on. Appeal to the world for help in freedom struggle. Resist by all means. May Allah be with you. Joy Bangla."

This message from Bangabandhu was then taken as the declaration of

independence, which was read out by M.A. Hannan, general secretary of district (Chittagong) Awami League at 2:30 p.m. On this basis, March 26 was declared Independence Day.

The declaration of independence made by Major Zia took place on the following day (March 27, 1971). As a matter of fact, Zia made two speeches. In the first speech, he claimed himself as the president of Bangladesh and urged upon the people to fight the Pakistan army.

When this unauthorised speech created confusion among the people, the Awami League leaders asked Zia to read out a text prepared by A. K. Khan to nullify the effect of the speech he had previously made.

Zia followed the suggestion and made a second speech, where he categorically mentioned that he was speaking on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the great national leader.

Zia's speech, however, had an electrifying effect among the fighting men and the civil population. But it was more to the credit of an ex-officio person than to the credit of Zia, the very person. In other words, it was a

demand of the situation.

Had there been some other army official, a major or a colonel or the like, the effect would have been the same. Moreover, March 27 has not been declared Independence Day on the basis of Zia's declaration.

So, Zia should not be said to have declared independence of Bangladesh. He only read out the message of declaration on behalf of Mujib, which, too, has an historic significance that was duly recognised by the Mujibnagar government.

In addition, the constitution, which was accepted as the "Declaration of Independence" on April 10, 1971, by 403 elected MPs and MNAs also bears the testimony to the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu.

Under that constitution was formed the first government of independent Bangladesh (Mujibnagar Government) with Mujib as the first president.

The constitution of 1972 was later written in the light of that constitution. As it is put in the sixth section of that constitution (Declaration of Independence):

"Whereas in the facts and circumstances of such treacherous conduct Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed leader of 75 million people of Bangladesh, in due fulfillment of the legitimate right of self-determination of the people of Bangladesh duly made a declaration of independence at Dacca on March 26, 1971..."

Again, in Section 10 of that constitution, Mujib's declaration of independence is confirmed:

"We the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh ... thereby confirm the Declaration of Independence already made by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman"

That Mujib declared independence is an historical truth, which is properly substantiated by the Declaration of Independence of April 10, 1971, which can be considered as the precursor of the constitution of 1972.

Bangabandhu is regarded the Father of the Nation for his contribution to the birth of our nation. Although this is a much bigger thing than being the claimant for a declaration, never-

theless, facts cannot be reduced to fantasies.

To show Mujib as the architect of the declaration of independence has got very little to do with his being the founding father of the nation.

Even then, all these arguments can be ignored, but the course of history cannot be changed. This is what history is. We can hold it down or repress it. But we cannot stop it. The caretaker government should take great care of the history of the liberation war, bring all these into consideration, and go about the job of amending the text books of the primary and secondary classes in right earnest.

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