

The plot behind the tragedy

SHAMSUDDIN CHOUDHURY

THE people of Bangladesh, universally acclaimed for their extra-sensory vision and congenial wisdom, had no difficulty in reckoning well before the Bangabandhu murder trial commenced that Khandkar Mostaque was indeed the pivotal factor in plotting the gruesome killing of the nation's founding father, which marked one of the saddest episodes in the history of mankind.

Prior to the inception of the trial that belief was essentially inferential. What, however, was considered conjectural received evidentiary vindication with the progression of the trial.

Faruk-Rashid's interview

The statements implicating Mostaque, made by two of the accused, Col. Faruk and Rashid, during an interview with a London based television channel were obviously good enough evidence to rekindle popular belief in Mostaque's complicity. That, however, was not all.

As the trial proceeded, it became crystal clear from the deposition of a number of high profile witnesses, equipped with first hand knowledge and information, that Mostaque's role in the nation's most awful tragedy was primal.

Some extracts from the depositions of some such unimpeachable witnesses, as recorded below, irrefutably established that Mostaque was the key player.

Professor Khorshed Alam's testimony

In the witness box, the above named witness, a former professor at Comilla's Victoria College deposing as Prosecution Witness Number 43, stated: "Towards the end of March 1975, a conference was convened at Comilla Bard complex at the instance of Khandkar Mostaque and Mahub Alam Chashi. On the second day, while having tea with Taher Thakoor and two MPs in the lounge, I saw two army officers, one of them being Khandkar Mostaque's relative Major Khandkar A. Rashid, entering Khandkar Mostaque's room at the Bard Rest House. Mahub Alam Chashi also went into the room along with Taher Thakoor. They remained there for 30-40 minutes."

Prof Alam further deposed: "In June/July of the same year a seminar of the family planning and health department took place on the lawn of Daudkandi madrasa, during which time Major Khandkar A. Rashid, Major Faruk, Major Shahriar, and a few more army officers arrived in a military jeep. At the conclusion of the seminar, Khandkar Mostaque, Taher Thakoor, Mahub Alam Chashi, Major Rashid, Major Faruk, and Major Shahriar proceeded to Khandkar Mostaque's house."

In his oral testimony, the professor went on to state that at a subsequent stage he came to know from

various sources that Major Khandkar Rashid, Major Faruk, Major Dalim, Major Bazul Huda, Major Noor, Major Rashid, Major Aziz Pasha and some other army officers, having conspired with Mostaque, killed Bangabandhu and the members of his family.

This witness also confirmed during his deposition that Taher Thakoor, Major Rashid and Major Dalim had been his students.

Major General Shafiqullah's testimony

As Prosecution Witness Number 45,



this witness, who headed the Bangladesh army on the fateful night and before, stated in his examination-in-chief that as he was being led to a room at the radio station, Mostaque had exclaimed: "Shafiqullah, congratulations. Shafiqullah, your troops have done

an excellent job."

Gen. Shafiqullah deposed that he had heard Mostaque describing the killers as the Sunshine Soldiers.

Major General Khalilur Rahman's version

This witness, who was a brigadier and

was deployed as a director of the BDR at that time, deposing as Prosecution Witness Number 47, stated under cross-examination that he had a phone call from the wife of Brigadier Dastagir, Chittagong's divisional commander at the time in question. She told him that Brig. Dastagir wished to go to Chittagong Radio and say: "We do not recognise the Mostaque government, we will uphold the constitution."

General Khalil's evidence confirms that many top brass in the army were utterly disgusted at the killing of Bangabandhu and despised the killers, including Mostaque.

Mostaque, Mir Jafar and Brutus

Mostaque's loathsome intrigue is often equated with those of Mir Jafar in our part of the world and Brutus in the West.

However, in both instances, the victims knew before their deaths who the plotters were. Ironically, however, Bangabandhu could not. Even at the point of time when he breathed his last, he remained unaware of the fact that Mostaque, the person he had reposed a great deal of trust in, was the one who had masterminded the whole episode.

In his evidence, Professor Alam indicated that Bangabandhu would never believe that Mostaque could do him any harm and, hence, he used to burst into laughter whenever any of Mostaque's clandestine intrigues to his knowledge.

Death of Russell

Evidence has it (through

Prosecution Witness no 2) that

before the massacre at Road 32 was

over, Sheikh Russell was brought

downstairs. At that stage he was

screaming, expressing his desire to

be with his mother. Holding Muhiul

Islam, Russell, out of fright, said:

"Will they kill me?" A soldier then

dragged Russell upwards, saying: "I

shall take you to your mother."

A while later gunshots heralded

the brutal killing of Sheikh Russell,

who had wanted to live and be with

his mother.

With Russell's killing the tragic

scenario of wanton destruction of

the lives of the founding father of the

nation and those of his family mem-

bers came to a tragic and sadistic

end.

The writer is a former judge of the Supreme

Court. He represented the state as a Deputy

Attorney General in the Bangabandhu Murder

Case in the High Court.

Debt of honour

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

WHEN individuals lie, as they often do, we as members of the civil society cry shame on them and condemn them as liars because as a nation we would like to see truth prevail over untruth and justice over injustice. But when the state lies, it hurts the nation most grievously. It makes a whole rends the fabric of the very soul of the state and the ethos and the lofty ideals on which rests our claim on statehood and nationhood.

This state of ours which we all created in 1971 with the singular aim in view of upholding the principals of truth and justice in this country lied for the first time when in the early hours of August 15, 1975 the state-controlled radio and television went on the air and kept misinforming the people of the catastrophe that had befallen the people in these words: "Mujib, the tyrant and the traitor, has been removed."

The truth was that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the most benevolent and beloved leader of Bangladesh, had been brutally assassinated together with his entire family including his minor son Russell by a few misguided elements of the army at the behest of the then Awami League leader Mostaque Ahmed as a part of an international conspiracy to rob this country of enlightened leadership and take the country back to pre-March 26, 1971.

The state lied for the second time

when it secretly enacted the infamous indemnity law to indemnify the killers of Bangabandhu and his family members and kept the entire nation in the dark about it. The truth was that these self confessed killers had not only been indemnified against any prosecution and trial but rewarded as well by job secured in the country's diplomatic service for the crime they had committed.

The fact that a man like Sheikh Mujib, who is the very epitome of Bangladesh, was brutally murdered together with almost his entire family in his own home and in his own country and by his own countrymen principally for his leading role in carving out an independent and sovereign Bangladesh and that the men guilty of this gruesome murder were indemnified and rewarded by no less a man than Ziaur Rahman, a gallant freedom fighter, will remain a stigma for this nation for years to come. It pains me to think that the conscience and the soul of this nation was in limbo all these years when these killers and their patrons lived in dignity in this country as if they committed no crime by doing what they did.

Leave aside Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami who have been the major beneficiaries of the August 15 tragedy. What about other political parties, the judiciary, the bar, the intelligentsia, the learned and educated segment of our people, the Islamic clerics who speak of justice and human rights?

Did they ever feel any shame by

remaining silent spectators of the ballyhoo of the state condoning murder so gruesome and dastardly when it was their moral duty to raise their voice in favour of justice and truth?

No. We are all ashamed as a nation because of our collective inaction. But the shame did not stop here. It continued even after the AL government of Sheikh Hasina succeeded in bringing this murder case for trial in 1996 because the trial remained stalled for over six years since 2001 for want of sufficient number of judges who could constitute a three-member bench of the Appellate Division to hear the petition for leave to appeal against the High Court verdict of death sentence in this murder case.

As per law those of our learned judges who had felt "embarrassed" in the past to hear and those who have already heard this case can not sit on the bench. The British left this country and the subcontinent some 60 years back but the colonial legacy left behind in our judicial system continues even now because it suits our judiciary and our government of the day to stall or deny justice to our people.

With this military-backed interim government headed by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed and the new local judiciary under the stewardship of Chief Justice Muhammad Ruhul Amin in place things look to have brightened up both at the administrative and the judicial level in the context of the nation's perception on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his

murder case as we go through the annual rituals of commemorating the tragedy of August 15, 1975 this year. There is visibly a sea change in the matter of our appraisal on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as an icon and as a man who loved his people so passionately as no other man or woman would ever do.

The government move is afoot to correct whatever distortions have been made in the history of this country by the immediate past BNP-Jamaat alliance government and accord Sheikh Mujib his rightful place in our history. And most importantly the long awaited bench in the Appellate Division to hear the petition for leave to appeal against the High Court verdict of death sentence in the Bangabandhu Murder Case has been set up and hearings have already begun.

This government with no political axe to grind has to its credit a number of laudable achievements during its seven months tenure. It has hauled up political big wigs and high profile criminals who have so long defied the law and continued plundering and looting our state property on a scale beyond comprehension. It has successfully recovered much of the looted money and property. It has begun the process of bringing these criminals to justice as per law. It has revived our faith in democracy and our ability and commitment to govern to the benefit and welfare of the teeming millions of our people. It has succeeded in large measure

in depoliticising the various national institutions and restoring their lost dignity and commitment to serve the cause of justice and service to the people and the country. It has been successfully facing the challenge of the ongoing flood. Together with the armed forces it has stood by the flood affected people, almost half the population and given them shelter, food and medical care while the "Awami" and "Jatiyatabadi" politicians have been safely ensconced in their luxurious homes in Dhaka.

Going by the records of good deeds done by this government so far, it will be in the fitness of things that the trial of Bangabandhu Murder Case is brought to a speedy and just conclusion during the tenure of this government. Let there be no more dilly-dallying and foot dragging in administering justice in this case. The image of our judiciary has already sunk very low together with the sagging image of this country during the undemocratic and anti-people rule of the immediate past BNP-JI alliance government. While it is a truism that justice delayed is justice denied, nothing is more profane and sinister than when not only the guilty is not punished but the guilty is not tried to be punished. When we speak of the independence of the judiciary as mentioned in Article 94(4) of the constitution, we do so because nothing bolsters the image of the country and that of its judiciary better than vindication of justice and truth at the hands of the judiciary. Let our judiciary come out

of the dark clouds which have been obscuring its vision for a pretty long time and deliver justice and justice alone.

As long as the national flag of Bangladesh will keep fluttering at the United Nations and at our missions abroad and at important public buildings within the country, it will continue to remind us of the debt we owe to this legend and icon Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who led us to freedom from Pakistani rule in 1971.

Now that he is no more with us, the best tribute we can pay to his memory is by upholding the principles of democracy, secularism, national unity and cohesion, communal harmony and Bengali nationalism that he held close to his heart till the last moment of his life and by bringing to justice those who murdered this great man in cold blood during the wee hours of August 15, 1975.

Brigadier General Shamsuddin Ahmed is a freedom fighter and former Military Secretary to the President of Bangladesh.

Our greatest hero

JUNAIDUL HAQUE

AFTER the birth of Bangladesh, in the early seventies, a tall and bespectacled gentleman stood up to address the General Assembly of the United Nations. Leaders of more than a hundred countries stood up and clapped for full five minutes!

The handsome leader of the Bengalis nodded to his right and nodded to his left, smiled to his front and smiled to his back, but the clapping didn't stop. He had to wait for an unusually long time to begin speaking. And he spoke in his favourite mother tongue, a language for whose rights young people had shed blood on the streets of Dhaka during Pakistan's colonial rule.

The love and respect showered on him by the people of the world definitely made his people proud. Yours truly was a teenager then, and has remembered the UN incident with great pride all his life. Our leader was a Nelson Mandela, a Mahatma Gandhi, a George Washington to people around the globe. He was the architect of a nation's birth.

Alas! Great powers don't like freedom-loving nationalist leaders. They prefer henchmen. So our great leader got only three years and a half to rule the land he had freed after a fight of two decades or more. Mountains were made out of molehills, and there were conspiracies galore. Finally, there was a tragic end to his life. He was killed with almost his full family. Even his ten-year-old youngest son was not spared. His two daughters were abroad and escaped death. One of them became a successful prime minister of this country twenty-one years after his death.

Thirty-two years after his death, he is still the greatest leader of this land. He will remain so perhaps a hundred years later too. People love and respect him. They have forgotten his follies, which are unimportant. They remember his great qualities, which are important.

He loved them to a fault, and they loved him in return. As the poet reminds us, so long our rivers will have water in them, our people will have affection for him.

The present government feels the necessity of evaluating him properly. The chief advisor and the army chief have visited his mazaar. The army chief has publicly called for proper recognition for him. This would not have been necessary if external and internal conspirators were still not active. Conspiracy against the architect of our

independence, against the Father of the Nation! This would not be possible anywhere else in the world, not even in India or Pakistan. Why are we so mean, so selfish?

People who directly opposed our independence pass judgments on him, and a section of our press prints such words with importance. Some people are ready to put his photograph on the wall along with those of five other leaders. There are always crooked people ready to belittle the best son of Mother Bengal. They were ready to worship M A Jinnah. They found nothing wrong with the respect received by Mahatma Gandhi in India. What, then, is wrong with Bangabandhu?

Bangabandhu was not a brown sahib, drinking Scotch whiskey and speaking English. He was a simple, middle class man. That is a mental block for some of us. We are used to worshipping sahibs. Or some of us are plain crooks.

We can worship Jinnah, but not the simple, punjabi-clad, fish-eating leader from Gopalganj, who had spent his life fighting for our rights. Our perversity defies logic at times.

If Bangabandhu had not been born, we would not have been a free nation on December 16, 1971. He was the undisputed leader of our freedom struggle. President Ziaur Rahman never failed to call him a noble leader. Even President Ershad once told the parliament that he was a little mouse in comparison with the great mountain named Bangabandhu.

People around the world respect him as the founding father of our nation. But why do some of his political opponents fail to show the unconditional respect that he so richly deserves?

This time a neutral caretaker government is in power. Bangabandhu's death anniversary deserves observation at the state level. Disrespecting him is disrespecting the nation. If we forget him, what shall we be left with? He is the best flower of our thousand-year-old garden of politics.

During our war of independence he was the most popular leader in our history. People fasted for him and prayed for him. A poet wrote that when he raised his hand, even trees stood at attention.

History won't forgive us if we fail to show proper respect to our greatest hero.

Junaidul Haque is a writer and columnist.

History books and the lost generation

MD. ANWARUL KABIR

THOSE who were mere children during our Liberation War and who finished their schooling in the post-1975 era, and the later generations, are not aware of the true history of our Liberation War. As a member of one such generation, I consciously feel that the distorted history has divided the nation into pro and anti liberation shibirs. This, in turn, brought about the political turmoil and volatile situation that we see now.

1971 united the whole nation (except a few collaborators of the Pakistani army) with the spirit of the Liberation War. People of all walks of life became freedom fighters in one way or another. Some actively joined the war, and millions, though they did not directly take part in the war, gave moral support to our war of independence. These people were, in fact, silent freedom fighters, among whom many sacrificed their lives, wealth, and efforts for the great cause.

In essence, we may claim that the emergence of Bangladesh was possible due to the collective efforts of the people of the soil. So, naturally, after liberation these collective efforts should have made Bangladesh a prosperous country, as envisioned by many following the spirit of the liberation war. Ironically, Bangladesh has failed miserably to achieve the very objective of liberation.

To unveil the causes behind this

failure, we need to shed light on August 15, 1975, the blackest day in our national history. August 15, 1975, can be marked as a turning point for our country, from the light to the darkness of despair. On this day, with the brutal killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, the monumental icon of independence and founding father of Bangladesh, the nation had to bury the spirit of the liberation war. So, in independent Bangladesh in 1975, the freedom fighters were defeated and the enemies of the liberation war, the collaborators with the Pakistani army, won, reversing history by implementing their well designed conspiracy.

Customarily, the history of a country is written by the victors. For instance, British historians, during the reign of the British Raj, assailed the character of Nawab Sirajuddoula of Bengal. Nawab Sirajuddoula, as a Nawab of independent Bengal in 1756, fought against the East India Company, the forerunner of the British regime. The unfortunate defeat of Sirajuddoula, and the victory of Robert Clive, led the British regime to write the biased history demeaning Sirajuddoula and his associates.

Similarly, the victors of 1975, who were the defeated forces of 1971, deliberately distorted history, especially that of our Liberation War. In fact, the enemies of our country, the collaborators, are very shrewd. So, after the fall of the patriotic freedom fighters in 1975,

they started to fabricate the history of Liberation in their own ways. Indeed, they were aware of the implications of the history and its long time impact on the nation. They knew that the revelation of the true history of our Liberation War would put them in the dustbin, and that they would never be able to come to power.

The distortion of history had been initiated during the post-Mujib era, especially in the textbooks of schools and colleges. They knew that if the new generations, which had not witnessed the war of independence, could be kept in the dark concerning the history of the liberation then one day they would be successful. This turned out to be true in the later phases.

The new generations have learned the biased history fabricated by the victors of 1975. This history has not revealed the whole truth; rather it has created smokescreens surrounding 1971, the glorious event of the Bengali nation.

For instance, in our history textbook in school, we read that the freedom fighters had fought against occupying forces in 1971, but who the occupying forces were is not mentioned. The role of Sheikh Mujib in the Liberation War is limited to only two or three sentences.

Rather, the role of the late president General Ziaur Rahman (then major in the Pakistani army) has been overemphasised, depicting him as the key

organiser of our war of independence.

This overemphasis was to such an extent that one may think that if Zia had not read the proclamation of our independence, the emergence of Bangladesh would not have been possible. Shamelessly, our history text deleted the fact that Ziaur Rahman announced the said proclamation on behalf of Sheikh Mujib. (If Ziaur Rahman were alive then he would have felt ashamed seeing this fabrication of history!)

Again, the history books do not reveal the roles of Jamaat-Islami and its infamous leaders like Golam Azam, Motiur Rahman Nizami, and Ali Ahsan Mujahid, who collaborated with the Pakistani army in 1971. We have not learned about the role of the former president General Ershad during our Ali al-Mujahid. He was the chairman of a special tribunal in the Lahore cantonment, which tried Bengali soldiers who tried to flee to India with a view to participating in our war of independence. Had the true roles of the above mentioned heinous people during our Liberation War been reflected in the history books, then they certainly would not have been able to come to power.

Our history courses had utterly failed to teach us the background and the spirit of the Liberation War. This history does not indicate that the war of independence was, in fact, a continuous struggle from 1952 to 1971, and has not focused

on the historical 6 points or 11 points demands, which can be regarded as the charters of independence. The fabricated history does not address the Agartala Conspiracy Case against Sheikh Mujib which, in turn, transformed him into Bangabandhu. It does not indicate the significance of Bangabandhu's speech of March 7, which can be compared with the Gettysburg Address delivered by Abraham Lincoln, the great American leader.

Nationalism, secularism, and socialism, were the major ideas of our Liberation War. Abandoning the much hated "two nation theory" in 1971, the people of this land embraced Bengali nationalism and secularism as basic mantras for our salvation. But in our history texts this reality has not been reflected at all.

The manipulated history, as designed by the beneficiaries of 1975 and the collaborators of 1971, has successfully confused the generations. Perhaps due to this confused state, the people from the younger generations voted for and elected (as the lion share of the voters are from these generations) the identified collaborators of 1971 as members of the Parliament. For the same reason, people did not raise their voices much when war criminals like Nizami or Mujahid emerged as ministers in the last alliance government.

The change-over in 1/11, and the