

My lost friends

ABM MUSA

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HOSE were the glorious days of the sixties of the last century when journalism in East Pakistan blossomed out. So did our culture, literature and education. Groups of young professionals in their twenties, thirties and early forties showed their extra-ordinary merit in making revolutionary changes in all these spheres. This was especially visible in journalism. Unfortunately, we lost some of the pioneers on the threshold of our independence. They were my friends and partners in the struggle to make the profession of journalism free and independent. We had also struggled to make the profession viable and worthy of its reputation.

Those were also the days of fraternity and brotherhood that kept the journalists and others in different professions together and united. Some of them were lost, martyred by the anti-independence marauds. Of them some were a few years older than me, some younger. Some I still remember, some are slipping away from my memory. Still it is painful to remember them after 36 years. Yet at least on this day, December 14, this piece of writing is a reminiscence of

them in the way of discussing the part they played, their contribution in our struggle for liberation that caused their martyrdom. They come back to me on this day to the best of remembrance. With sweet memories of the past, there arises every year a new sense of hatred for those, Al-Badr and Al-Shams and their mentors who picked up and killed them at the last moment before we won the war. At the same time it hurts me when I realise that little does the present generation know about these martyrs, Shahid Buddhijibis. It is still more painful to me when I observe that their names are not pronounced or mentioned properly while discussing our Liberation War. It is also a shame that some of the killers are well-placed in different sectors of state and government management. This shame and the failure are of their compatriots and those of us who have fortunately over-lived them. We should also feel guilty that they were never properly introduced to the present generation. It's time we amend these personal lapses by bringing them to life at least on one day, December 14, every year.

Let me begin the introduc-



The writer (second from left) with Shahidullah Kaiser (third from left) at Beijing airport (1965).

tion with my senior friend Serajuddin Hossain. In those days of the sixties there were four newspapers that advo-

cated the right and legitimate demands of the people of East Pakistan, nay the Bangalees vis-a-vis Ittefaq. The Pakistan

Observer, Dainik Sangbad and also Azad at the later period. Seraj was the News Editor of daily Ittefaq and myself of the then The Pakistan Observer. Both of us earned the reputation of being earnest, straightforward, bold, fully devoted to objectivity of the profession and welfare of the professionals irrespective of our political beliefs. At the same time we were partners in leading the fellow professionals in their struggle for both making the press free from authoritarian military rule and in realising the demand for a better living condition i.e. Wage Board for the journalists and workers. Seraj was much senior to me, so much so that he was a close friend of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This friendship went back to pre-Pakistani days when both of them were students of Calcutta Islamia College.

So, our fraternal relationship was based more on professional interaction than personal acquaintance. This relationship became strongest during the '68-'69 movement, reporting on Agartala Conspiracy case in a similar method, especially while publicising the Six-point agenda of Bangabandhu. For this, Seraj and me with a few others were always under the surveillance of the then

Pakistani rulers. So it was not surprising that he was the target of the Pakistani collaborators in their plan to eliminate the vocal leaders in different professions. I still don't understand why did he, an open target of the murderers, not realise the reality and leave the country in time.

Shahidullah Kaiser was basically a politician, an active member of a leftist party. He was also a widely read writer and novelist. But his identity was more visible as a journalist than a litterateur. He also was my co-crusader in the activities of journalists union. He was an activist in both the fields and it was no wonder he was picked up by the Al-Badr, killer wing of Jamaat-e-Islami on or before December 14. His brother Zahid Raihan was also a friend of mine, who displayed his bravery in creating cinemas that depicted the misrule of Pakistanis. The saddest part of the history is that he was killed by the Biharis (whose present generation now aspires to be Urdu-speaking Bangladeshi) while searching for his lost brother at Mirpur.

What appears to be most mysterious is the martyrdom of Sheikh Abdul Mannan, popularly known as Ladoo-Bhai among both the journalists and the sportsmen in both wings of Pakistan. He was a sportsman of Mohammedan Sporting era of

undivided Bengal and a sports reporter of the daily Azad, later picked up by me to be the Sports Editor of the Observer. He was never in any way in politics. Of course, he was an activist in the sports arena of East Pakistan. At that time the most popular demand of the Bangalees was "parity" -- equal opportunity in all spheres, mostly economic and political arena. But there was a demand among the sportsmen and sports-lovers for share in the money spent by the central government for the development of sports. Ladoo-bhai was at the fore-front of this movement. This might have been the cause of his martyrdom.

It will take hundreds of pages to elaborately discuss my close relationship with those who sacrificed their lives, journalists N. M. Mostafa, Abul Bashar or teachers and writers Munir Chaudhury, Mofazzal Haider Chaudhury, Jotirmoy Guhathakurta and others, on and around December 14, 1971. So my apologies to their bereaved souls and their heirs.

At the same time I would wish that the demand that has lately been raised for the trial of the war criminals and killers will never cease until realised.

The writer is a veteran journalist and columnist.

Martyred teachers and war criminals

DR. SYED ANWAR HUSAIN

HERE are at least three major defining events in our cumulative legacy of struggle for independence: the Language Movement, 1952; the Mass Uprising, 1969; and the Liberation War, 1971. The heroes who fell in all these events and shed their precious blood are honoured as martyrs. But the cliché-like question remains as to what extent Bangladesh, an entity that grew out of the blood of these martyrs, lived up to the values and ethos for which so much sacrifice was once made. This write-up is neither a litany nor a requiem for these martyred heroes; my humble purpose is to remember my three teachers in the Department of History, University of Dhaka. Unfortunately, however, this is not a traditional remembrance; this is an anguished remembrance, caused as it is by the time-specific circumstances of the present-day Bangladesh. This is the oddest of times as we have been told

now that there was no war of liberation, but a civil war only, and also that Bangladesh is not a home to any war criminal. History is turned upside down; and, how, I, for one, could forget who picked up my teacher Shaheed Ghyasuddin Ahmed in my presence were the people whose identity was not then unclear to me, nor it is now. They were the ones who could be unmistakably called the war criminals. Some of them picked up my teacher alive, and a few days after we had to retrieve the remains of his mutilated body. Do we need any more convincing evidence to prove the crimes of the war criminals. This is one evidence, and there could be many more such evidence, provided that we are sincere and earnest in looking for them, and making good use of the same.

I remember on this day of 14 December, my three teachers: Shaheeds Ghyasuddin Ahmed, Santosh Chandra Bhattacharya and Dr. Abul Khair. As mentioned above, of these three only the first one was picked up in my presence, the rest two had

the same fate the same day, but not in my presence. All these three teachers do loom large in my mind, and would continue to do so as long as I am spared this ephemeral life. But, for understandable reasons, my inside bleeding is more for Ghyas Sir as I do carry more vivid memory of how I witnessed his final moments before his disappearance.

All these three teachers of mine were picked up from their campus abodes at day-break on 14 December in 1971, and subsequently tortured and killed by some of those whose peers now cry hoarse that there are no war criminals in Bangladesh, nor was there any war of liberation. They are repeating those concocted lies that their Pakistani mentors said and continue to say. The baselessness of such contentions aside, the underlying meaning is that even after more than three and a half decades of the Liberation War there are some people in this ill-fated land of ours who await to be exorcised of the ghosts of those who actively collaborated in

perpetrating the worst ever genocide of the 20th century. It may also mean that this country still needs to be exorcised of the ghosts who committed ghatly crimes in 1971.

Let me come back to the memory of Ghyas Sir. As I travel down memory lane back to the early morning of 14 December 1971, I find myself in a small room behind the Mohsin Hall. I was an assistant house tutor in this dormitory, and Ghyas Sir a house tutor. On that fateful morning I was in that room which housed the motor for water supply. There was no water supply as the operator was absent under those unusual circumstances I was there fumbling to start the motor. Minutes later, Ghyas Sir was there with the same intention. In no time, we were joined by another senior house tutor Zahurul Huq (now retired professor of Philosophy). Although ourselves non-technical hands the three of us managed to improvise means to start the motor. Understandably, we were happy at such a feat of us.

But then, there was the anti-climax. A young man in the grey uniform wielding a three-not-three-rifle, his face half covered by a handkerchief, appeared at the entrance. We knew who could be the person in such a uniform; he was one of those whom we called and still call Razakaars. His presence was a knee-jerk for us. A chilling sensation ran down my spine. His voice came through his cover: "who is Mr. Ghyasuddin?". After a few moments of hesitation Ghyas Sir identified himself. Then he was commanded: "Hum Ko Saath Aiye". The peculiar mumbling accent gave us the impression that he was not an original Urdu-speaking person, but a Bangali. As Ghyas Sir hesitated to follow the command the rifle was pointed at his chest. Then he had to leave, and his parting words were: "Anwar, Choli." The remaining two of us were transfixed. It was a few minutes before we could get back our composure. Little did I know that I would not see my teacher again and hear his

sonorous voice (he had an unusually sonorous voice).

History records how the perpetrators of the crime of killing the finest souls of the land have over the years gained in political strength to the extent of sharing power. This has been so, as history records again, because of the pathetic bankruptcy of our political leadership. True, there is no alternative to politics in managing affairs of the state; but this kind of politics is an anathema to such a proposition. Let us pray that this kind of politics does not come back.

At the end of the Peloponnesian War, 431-404 B.C. (Between Athens and Sparta) Pericles, the Athenian leader delivered the funeral oration in honour of the fallen heroes wherein his closing words were: "I have paid the required tribute, in obedience to the law, making use of such fitting words as I had. The tribute of deeds has been paid in part; for the dead have been honourably interred, and it remains only that their children should be maintained at the

public charge until they are grown up: This is the solid prize with which, as with a garland, Athens crowns her sons living and dead, after a struggle like this."

What have we done to crown our martyred intellectuals after a struggle like the Liberation War?

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Achho Ontore Chirodin

ROQUAIYA HASINA NEELY

IT'S been 36 years since the liberation of our country. A long time has passed by. Long enough to forget a lot of things. Another 14 December has come. So here I am writing again. Even though it's been such a long time, but whenever I think back to that day in 1971, when my father, SMA Rashidul Hasan, was taken away from us forever, it only seems like it was yesterday. Events of that have been etched into my memory forever because that was the last I saw of him.

It was about 9 o'clock in the morning. We were in Anwar Pasha Uncle's house. After breakfast my father and uncle and a few of us were in the sitting room. Uncle and father were deep in conversation about the on-going war, when

there was a knock on the door. A few students in khaki uniform came to look for Rashidul Hasan and Anwar Pasha Sir. I ran inside to get my mother and when we came back out again they were already gone. From the veranda we saw them being blindfolded and taken away along with other teachers in a dirty EPRTC bus. That was the last we saw of him. Two days later we got our independence but I never got my father back and the nation didn't get back its intellectuals. I believe the Pakistani army devised this plan of crippling the nation at the beginning of the war. Near the end when they knew they were about to lose they carried the plan out with the help of their cohorts.

My father always inspired his students to be brave and work for saving the nation and its people and their duties

towards the country. As a result, he was black-listed and even held in remand for 12 days with other teachers in September 1971. At that time I saw my mother running around in bewilderment seeking any news she could get. My older brother, my younger sister and I used to be with her all the time. We had to go the VC's house quite a few times. Sayed Sajjad Flossain was the VC of Dhaka University then.

One day I remember him saying to my mother in quite a reproachful tone, "Why are you running around restlessly? Rashid should be taught a lesson. I have heard he tells things about the war and an independent nation to the students. You go home with your children and be patient." He was like an older brother to my father. My father respected him but even at that young age I

could tell their opinions did not match. They often got themselves into debates. My mother didn't like this. She used to tell my father not to argue with him, since he was like an older brother. He told her you wouldn't understand, it is because of Pakistani minded people like him that we Bengalis are oppressed and harassed in such a way.

Every child looks up to their father. Father always plays the role of an ideal man in their life. So it was in my case. Every time I read his diaries I am fascinated by how someone could've led such a beautifully organised life. He wrote every day. Underneath the activities of the day he often wrote down a 'thought of the day'. Reading these we understood later on how much love and respect he had for the Bengali nation and how concerned he really was

and how much the liberation of the country meant to him.

The diaries on 1970 and 1971 are kept at the national and liberation war museums so here's a small part from his 1969 diary which I have with me.

Friday 21, February 1969: (9, Falgun 1375)

"Ayub kha announced over the radio that he wouldn't stand for president's position in the upcoming election."

Thought of the day

"Nobody can hold the position as a ruler for long by neglecting the needs and wants of the people of the nation. The power of the ruler lies in the hands of the people. The ruler should be the representative of the people, and the people's trust in him should be the source and base of his power. A true ruler is always in reality the

humble servant of the people." Our country tops the corruption list year after year. Flood, poverty, illiteracy, price hike that is what the world knows about us. Our present chaos has faded out our glorious past. It's not because we lack food, clothes, education but because our nation now lacks good people. That is why in 36 years we have not been able to bring the war criminals to justice. It seems quite ironical that in the 21st century I still find myself having the exact same thoughts as my father did in 1969 when the country was ruled by the Pakistanis.

The Bangladesh we are living in now is not the one that our martyrs dreamt of.

The writer is a daughter of martyred intellectual SMA Rashidul Hasan.



In the dim and distant past...