Soviet Union through transforming the nature of socialism, Manik could play a leading role in bringing Bangladesh's communists closer to the masses. And then came a day when Gorbachev fell; and around him it was the Soviet Union and international communism that collapsed in a heap. It is to Manik's credit, though, that at a time when communism was fast turning into a fading phenomenon, he was able to keep aloft the banner of the CPB in Bangladesh. People of my generation were persuaded that with men like Manik around, politics could not but retrieve the decency we had lost in this country after August 1975.

But perhaps doubts about the future of Left politics, about his own career had already begun to creep into Manik's consciousness. We will never know why he decided, at the precise point when we needed to hold on to socialist ideals despite the battering they were receiving nearly everywhere, to jettison the CPB and link up with Kamal Hossain's Gano Forum. Saifuddin Manik's decision to be part of an enterprise that had nothing of the communistic about it perturbed us greatly. Much as we admired Kamal Hossain's efforts to introduce a new strand in Bangladesh's politics, we could not see why a communist, and a prominent communist at that, should see fit to leave his lifelong ideology behind him and join hands with a politician whose pro-West leanings were rather pronounced. Communists never turned their backs on their politics. It was a lesson we had learnt through our interaction with history. Yes, communism did go through its schisms, but no one who has been a communist in his mature years has ever gone for a repudiation of his beliefs. In the eyes of my generation, Saifuddin Manik had repudiated himself when he quit the CPB and climbed on the Gano Forum bandwagon. Except that the Gano Forum did not quite turn out to be a bandwagon. With time, Manik became an increasingly marginalised and nearly forgotten figure even as Manzurul Ahsan Khan and Mujahidul Islam Selim set about reinventing the CPB.

Saifuddin Manik was, for all his later change of political perceptions, a politician who knew what needed to be done for the country. His heart, as they say, was in the right place. It is saddening that circumstances, those he created and those that arose despite him, in the end overtook him and left him way behind the men and women to whom he might have provided strong, charismatic and meaningful leadership.■

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