

## Murder most foul...

### Bangabandhu's signal contributions remembered

We observe today, as we have for the last so many years, the anniversary of the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members with due solemnity. It remains our belief, as well as that of everyone else who believes in decency and a sense of morality, that the murder of the nation's founding father was a terrible blow to our self-esteem as a nation and to the fabric of our national politics. The question of politics apart, the fact is that throughout his life Bangabandhu symbolised for us the struggle that needed to go, and indeed did go, into the emergence of a people ready and willing to make supreme sacrifices in defence of collective national dignity. When he was cut down on August 15, 1975, it was not merely the fall of an individual but the collapse, however temporarily, of a symbol as well.

Today, therefore, it is a strong sense of mourning, of national loss engendered by the tragic incidents of August 1975 that bring the people of Bangladesh together in paying tribute to the leader on whose watch they once went into the movement for autonomy, which again was followed by a spirited, armed struggle for freedom. Today, all these years after the assassination of unquestionably the greatest political figure in our history, we are at liberty to inform ourselves and our children that it was the qualities of leadership in Bangabandhu that earned for him the pre-eminence he has always enjoyed in Bangladesh's history. His courage in the face of adversity, his adherence to principles in defence of the rights of his people and his belief in the strength of the popular will have consistently served for us as ideals in our constant striving for a pluralistic order. Bangabandhu provided leadership to us at a time when we needed it most -- in the 1960s and 1970s. It was a defining moment for us when we went to war to free ourselves from colonial rule under his leadership.

More than three decades after his tragic end, we note with a sense of satisfaction the recent judgement of the High Court regarding the observance of National Mourning Day and the caretaker government's subsequent move to implement the decision. It is our belief that Bangabandhu, as we have said before, should remain above partisan politics by virtue of the unifying role he played in our transition from a colonised province to a free country. Let his position and let the observance of National Mourning Day from now on be immutable realities of national life.

We pray for the souls of Bangabandhu and his family.

## EC should pursue the matter till the end

### Move to verify affidavits of newly elected mayors and councillors welcome

THE EC's move to have tax, wealth and police records of the winners at the city corporation and municipality polls probed by the NBR and the police department for their veracity is a move we support. Set against the backdrop of a universal public demand for a break with the past in terms of having public representatives with clean records and reported apprehensions that persons with dubious distinctions might have crept back into reckoning, this measure by the EC should be helpful in clearing the air of any misgiving. In fact, this step will strengthen newly elected leaders to carry out their task, assuming that they come clean.

The fact that a candidature based on wrongful statement, if any, was not screened out prior to election, does not preclude action on the part of the EC against the person concerned even after the election. The electoral law actually provides for cancellation of candidature of an elected representative to the city corporation or the municipality if he/she is found guilty of submitting false information or concealing facts before the EC. The cancellation of candidature automatically leads to nullification of his/her election to the post even after taking oath of office.

This is for the first time in the country's history that financial statements and police records of people's representatives are being audited by the NBR and the police with the live prospect for taking action against misdeeds. In the past, inquest would only be attempted to be made against public representatives of a fallen government by a victorious one by way of exacting vendetta and vice versa that neither served the purpose of law nor of a transparent system. No wonder, honest leaders have been in short supply.

That being elected makes one a holy cow, puts one beyond reach and elevates one to immunity from legal processes is a myth that needed to be exploded. We are glad that this is being done. The mayor and councillor elect for their part should themselves welcome the filtration process whereby their statements will be verified and the genuine ones will stand vindicated in the public eye. They will then be able to pack power and credibility into their actions as local leaders.

We would, however, expect the investigations to be completely impartial, unbiased and expeditiously conducted so that it is positively result-oriented serving the ends of transparency and justice. The EC, for its part, should pursue it to its logical conclusion.

## The remorseful day

MAHBUB HUSAIN KHAN

"After the torchlight red on sweaty faces  
After the frosty silence in the gardens  
After the agony in stone places  
The shouting and the crying  
Prison and palace and reverberations  
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains  
He who was living is now dead..."  
What the Thunder said -- T.S. Eliot

WHAT is now the aftermath of the thunder we had generated in 1971, culminating in victory on December 16, 1971? In 1971, we ceased to be governed by alien rulers, because we had become ungovernable by outside authority. Self-assertion, self-determination was too strong.

T.S. Eliot also wrote: "April is the cruellest month..."  
For us as a nation, August is the

"cruellest month." The president of the country, and the Father of the Nation, was assassinated on August 15, 1975. Almost exactly thirty years later, on August 21, a public meeting being addressed by his daughter was bombed.

Also, on August 17 of that year, there was bombing by extremist groups throughout the country. As of this week, though some headway has been made in respect of nabbing the culprits of the August 17 bombings, not much progress has been made in respect of nabbing those involved in the August 21 bombing of the Awami League meeting. And for the last five years, the trial of the president's assassins has stalled in the highest court of the country.

"The sole country under the sun that is endowed with imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for lettered and ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bond and free, the one land all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

BANGABANDHU Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, with most members of his family, was gunned down in the pre-dawn hours of August 15, 1975. When daylight broke, it was an eerie scene at 32 Dhanmondi, the spot that had been witness to so much of history in the lives of the people of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu's body, as also those of everyone else, lay where they had fallen the whole day and the night that followed. Soldiers swarmed everywhere. Cameramen, all serving the government at different points, were brought in to record what remains the most gruesome episode in the history of Bangladesh. It was not until the next day that most of the dead were buried in Banani.

Bangabandhu's killers made sure, though, that the Father of the Nation did not find a resting place in the nation's capital, for there was the danger that his grave would in time become a hallowed spot. They helicoptered his body all the way to his village Tungipara and buried him there hastily and unceremoniously. State-run radio and television then served up an untruth: the dead president, the nation was informed, had been interred with full state honours. It was anything but.

Just what dire possibilities the nation was up against came through within moments of the carnage at 32 Dhanmondi.

Announcements on the electronic media began with Islamic invocations and ended in similar fashion. What was most pronounced, though, was the alacrity with which 'Joi Bangla', so long the national slogan, was replaced with the Pakistan-like 'Bangladesh Zindabad'.

It was a Friday when Bangabandhu was murdered. Khondokar Moshtaque, his commerce minister now in the position of president, offered Juma prayers at Baitul Mokarram, a clear indication of the threat secular politics suddenly faced as a result of the bloody coup. In the weeks and months that followed the coup, except for the very brief interregnum of General Khaled Mosharraf's coup d'etat in early November, the principles underlying the 1971 War of Liberation went on a nosedive.

In the five years of General Ziaur Rahman, Bangladesh's first military ruler, the lurch to the right became too well pronounced to be missed. It was the elderly journalist and Zia loyalist Khondokar Abdul Hamid who spoke for the regime in February 1976. The people of this country, he told a stunned gathering of Bengali intellectuals, would take inspiration from "Bangladeshi nationalism," a concoction that patently militated against the historically acknowledged Bengali nationalism that had gone into the struggle for autonomy in the 1960s and national independence in 1971.

Bangabandhu's tragic end remains symptomatic of the ramifications coming from it. In the twenty-one years that elapsed after his death and till the time his party, the Awami League, returned to power under the leadership of his daughter in 1996, it was the entire political nature of the country that went through darkness. Politics mutated into intrigue as the Zia regime permitted the emergence in Bangladesh's politics of the rightwing forces that had associated themselves with the Pakistan occupation army in 1971.

Leading figures of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Muslim League and other parties, reviled for their collaborationist roles in 1971, came together to prop up the Zia regime, a united effort that was to throw up in time the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. And with that came something more sinister: a conscious, concerted move to pit Ziaur Rahman, by virtue of his announcement of independence on March 27, 1971, against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a brazen effort towards rewriting history. It was conveniently not given about that Zia's broadcast had repeatedly referred to Bangabandhu as the "great national leader." For understandable reasons, the Zia speech was never broadcast in all the years he held power.

And power was applied ruthlessly in the Zia years. The period remains noted for the systematic manner in which leading military figures of the War of Liberation

were eliminated one after the other. The process, of course, had begun barely three months into the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. On November 3, four leading members of the Mujibnagar provisional government -- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, A.H.M. Quamruzzaman and M. Mansoor Ali -- were murdered in Dhaka central jail, whence they had been lodged after August 15, by the very soldiers who had put an end to Bangabandhu's life.

On November 7, it was the turn of General Khaled Mosharraf, a valiant, intellectually oriented soldier reputed for planning military strategy in 1971, to be murdered by troops loyal to Zia. And with him died Colonel Huda and Major Haider, both freedom fighters. In the Zia era, as many as eight abortive coups took place, with the plotters subsequently being arrested and swiftly disposed of. The attempted coup by a group of air force men in October 1977 led to summary trials and swift executions.

General Zia died in the nineteenth coup, again a botched one because its leading figure, General M.A. Manzoor, a freedom fighter, proved unable to sustain it. Manzoor was apprehended within days of the Zia killing and was murdered in cold blood by Zia loyalists. In the period following Zia's death in May 1981, a number of military officers, many of them freedom fighters, were tried in

camera and sentenced to death. They were all hanged, twelve in all. Brigadier Mohsinuddin headed the list of the condemned.

Political negativism, as distinct from the liberal ethos that had defined the Mujib years, gained intensity and increasing currency in the Ershad years. For all his personal esteem for Mujib, General Ershad, having taken power in a coup in March 1982, went systematically into the job of a communalisation of the secular Bengali state. He decreed Islam as the state language and cheerfully went into setting up religious motifs on walls all over town.

It was in his time that Bangabandhu's murderers were permitted to form a so-called political party known as the Freedom Party. Colonel Farook Rahman, one of the leading elements in the August 1975 assassination of Bangabandhu, contested the presidential election of 1988 and even went on television and radio to address the nation. He and his kind were of course being protected by the notorious Indemnity Ordinance which had in 1979 been incorporated into the nation's constitution by the Zia regime. And, to be sure, the Ershad regime was only furthering the cause of the Zia system.

As one of his earliest moves in power, Zia had tampered with the constitution by doing away with secularism and socialism and bringing in a corrupted form of nationalism. By the time the gen-

eral elections of June 1996 came round, Bangladesh no more resembled the liberal, nationalistic experiment it had been in 1971 and the three and a half years in which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman governed.

Bangladesh in the post-Mujib period moved away from its close links with the Soviet Union and India to more cordial ties with the United States. With China and Saudi Arabia according diplomatic recognition to Bangladesh within days of the Mujib murder, the new rulers in Dhaka consciously nurtured ties with the two countries. Pakistan set up its diplomatic mission in Dhaka; Libya offered a home to Bangabandhu's murderers. At home, Hamidul Haq Chowdhury and Gohar Azam, having been Pakistan loyalists in 1971 and having lived in Pakistan during the Mujib years, came back home to reclaim their politics and their property. Khan Abdus Sabur, who on the eve of liberation had described the soon-to-be-born Bangladesh as the illegitimate child of India, took his seat in Bangladesh's Jatiyo Sangsad.

Suffice it to say that the death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led to Bangladesh's retreat from the civilised world. The lights went out of our lives. Darkness came over a once vibrant, verdant land.

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## The day they killed Bangabandhu

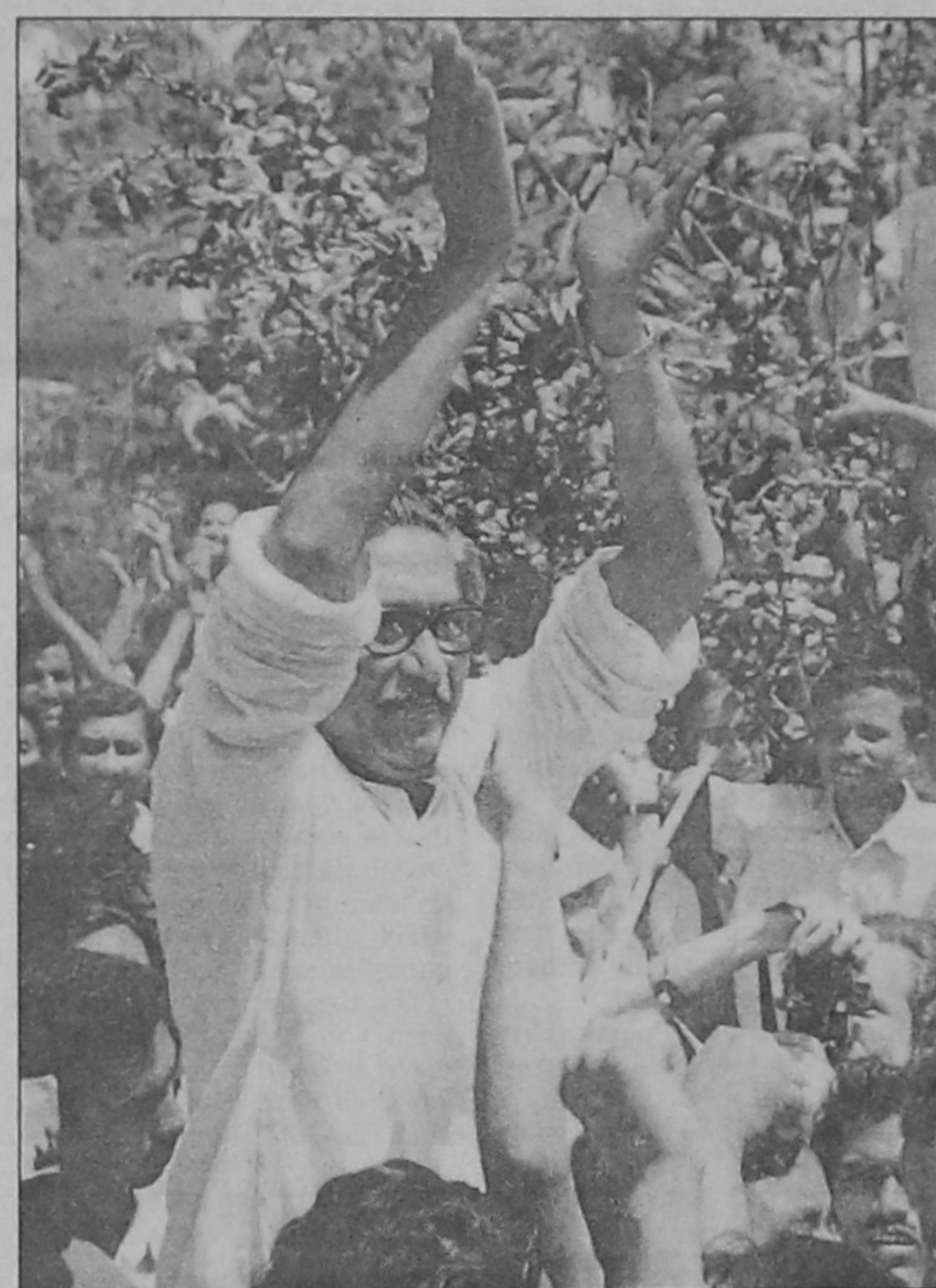
JUNAIUDUL HAQUE

IT was Friday, August 15, 1975. It was one of the most tragic days of our history. It reminded us of the dark night of March 25, 1971. The Father of the Nation, loved and respected in Bangladesh and the world over as a great hero, lay dead on the stairs of his famous residence at Road Number 32, Dhanmandi Residential Area. He was only fifty-five. We were twenty-year-old sophomores of Dhaka University.

Who killed Bangabandhu? His people, whom he loved to a fault? No! They were unhappy with a few activities of his government but they never even dreamt of killing him. They who control the world like people who obey them. They don't like nationalist leaders and great patriots like Bangabandhu or Allende. Thus, Allende dies but General Pinochet lives on and makes life miserable for his countrymen.

There are many such instances in the Third World. If you want to kill a great leader, make him unpopular through planted journalists, corrupt and disgruntled bureaucrats and dismissed soldiers. Use some of them during his killing. Then get obedient people to rule the country and serve your purpose. No wonder our High Court has ruled that governments, which succeeded Bangabandhu and his cabinet were not legal. They had captured power by sheer force.

At dawn on August 15, I got up to hear from my parents that Bangabandhu had been killed along with his family. Even ten-year-old Sheikh Russell was not spared. My initial reaction was of great shock. I was dumbfounded with sorrow. Bangabandhu didn't



deserve a death like this! He was our greatest politician. His love for his country and his people was beyond question.

Who could kill our greatest patriot? The radio and TV were announcing his death at regular intervals. A certain Major Dalim was claiming credit for his death! Who was he? We had never heard of him before!

There was fear, there was confusion. There was silent sorrow among his followers and people who admired him. There was

celebrations too -- we later heard. There were a few people chanting 'Pakistan Zindabad' somewhere in old Dhaka. There were a few Biharis, celebrating his death in Mohammodpur. But the patriotic Bangalee was silently shedding a tear or two for him. How could a Nelson Mandela or a Yasser Arafat get killed by his own people? They wondered.

Well, they killed Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi too, didn't they? Some argued with themselves. Years later, I learned

that the first procession to protest the death of Bangabandhu was organised by the boys and girls of Chhatra Union in nowhere else but my own district Kishoreganj.

They warned the real killers that the death of this great patriot would turn Bengal into a Vietnam. Student leader, Kazi Abdul Bari led the procession. He had to suffer inhuman torture in jails for his noble protest against injustice. I feel honoured today to get a chance to salute this brave student leader. May Bangladesh be blessed with more Baris and not with Mushtaqes and Dalims.

What were the Chhatra League leaders and workers doing? They went into hiding because they were the most wanted people for the Mushtaque government. Many faced arrest and torture later on. I myself saw Abdur Razzak escaping through Dhanmandi Road Number 15 and Rayer Bazar. He was a big and healthy person then with no diabetes. We wanted him to escape, live and then protest. I saw him when curfew was withdrawn for an hour and a half for Juma prayers.

We were not political activists but we were young and patriotic and not exactly cowards. A few of us got together and walked up to Bangabandhu's residence, which was less than a mile from our area. There was army patrol on the roads and police guard in front of Bangabandhu's residence. We heard that tanks were guarding Khandker Mushtaque in the Bangabhaban. We were not allowed inside Bangabandhu's residence but nobody disturbed us when we sadly stood in front of House No. 32 and quietly saluted the greatest son of Mother Bengal.

The killing of the full family was too great a shock for us. We spotted

bullet marks on the walls. An uncle of mine worked for BTV as a news journalist. He had a chance to see Bangabandhu's dead body the next day as a member of the BTV news team. We had listened to him in rapt attention when he told us what he saw inside.

Before the curfew was clamped again on August 15, we also managed to see Sheikh Moni's residence. There were big signs of machine gun firing on the walls. Women and children were not spared in this house too. Why this mindless killing? To spread fear? To terrorise the people and keep them quiet?

There was no Awami League worker to be seen. There was not even a Bengali nationalist to protest his death. These two types were shedding silent tears. Dhaka had suddenly gone back to the Pakistani days, it appeared. It was a heart-rending experience for us.

Thirty lakh people had embraced martyrdom for nothing? There were rumours galore. Bangabandhu was alive and not dead? Sheikh Kamal had escaped too? India could attack us any time. O God, keep Bangabandhu alive! This man doesn't deserve such a death. We silently prayed for him.

Khandker Mushtaque claimed himself President since the morning but took the oath in the evening. The Acting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Syed A.B. Mahmud, administered the oath to him. The Vice President, ten Ministers and six State Ministers also took oath. There were a few respected names in the cabinet.

Were they forced to join Mushtaque? The three services chiefs were present. Members of Parliament charged with corruption by Bangabandhu were also

present. Mushtaque, it appeared, wanted to tell the world that only Bangabandhu was corrupt and his ministers had no fault.

The silence of the Rakhi Bahini surprised many. A formal reaction of the Indian and the Russian governments was not coming. Ambassador Samar Sen was in Delhi. The Pakistan government was quite happy. Bhutto's reaction said it all. We recollected that both Bhutto and Kissinger had visited Dhaka a year or so back.

Bangladesh Betar had instantly become Radio Bangladesh. What was wrong with the Bangla name? The curfew helped Mushtaque to take control in less than fifteen hours. People talked about his cunning. A few secretly called him the new Mir Jafar. He spoke to the nation in the evening. His nice words couldn't remove our fear and anxiety.

We were happy to note that the stalwarts of the Mujibnagar government didn't join Mushtaque. Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Captain Mansur Ali and A.H.M. Kamruzzaman didn't betray their leader. Abdus Samad Azad, Zillur Rahman, Abdur Razzak and Tofayel Ahmed didn't join Mushtaque either.

We went to sleep with heavy hearts. We loved and respected the martyred Bangabandhu even more. He had his tragic flaws but he was our greatest hero, wasn't he? He was our greatest hero of the past, the present and the future. My twenty-year-old heart profusely bled for him. I was a budding writer. How could a writer not weep over the death of his land's greatest patriot?

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through its guardians, the faceless, nameless, all-enduring voters. That would be the real harvest of

Spring, 1971, and prove to us and the world that Bangabandhu lives amongst us, in our souls, and

forever in our minds and the minds of the generations of Bangladeshis to come.

