

Ziaur Rahman: From sector commander to president

EDITORIAL DESK

GENERAL Ziaur Rahman, by the time he was assassinated in an army putsch in Chittagong deep in the night of May 30, 1981, had been president of Bangladesh for four years. If you add to that period the months in which he was effectively in charge as military leader of the country since November 7, 1975, you could say he was in control of Bangladesh for five and a half years. In all that time, there were no fewer than eight attempts against him. He did not survive the nineteenth, which was ostensibly led by Major General M.A. Manzoor.

Zia's place in Bangladesh's history was assured when, on 27 March 1971, even as the Pakistan occupation army went full-scale into its genocide of Bengalis following Operation Searchlight, he announced the independence of Bangladesh on behalf of "our great national leader Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman" from Biplobi Bangla Betar Kendra in Kalurghat, Chittagong.

In the following days and weeks, Zia linked up with other Bengali officers of the Pakistan army to organise guerrilla resistance against the Pakistanis. His was to be a pivotal presence, along with that of Khaled Mosharraf and K.M. Shafiullah and others, in the war the Mukti Bahini would wage against the occupation forces.

Once Bangladesh was liberated, Zia was appointed deputy chief of army staff by the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in which position he continued till August 1975. A few days after the bloody coup, which claimed the lives of Bangabandhu and most of his family members on August 15, 1975, Zia succeeded General Shafiullah as army chief of staff. On November 3 of that year, he was removed from his position and placed under house arrest by his successor, General Khaled Mosharraf.

Four days later, on November 7, 1975, a

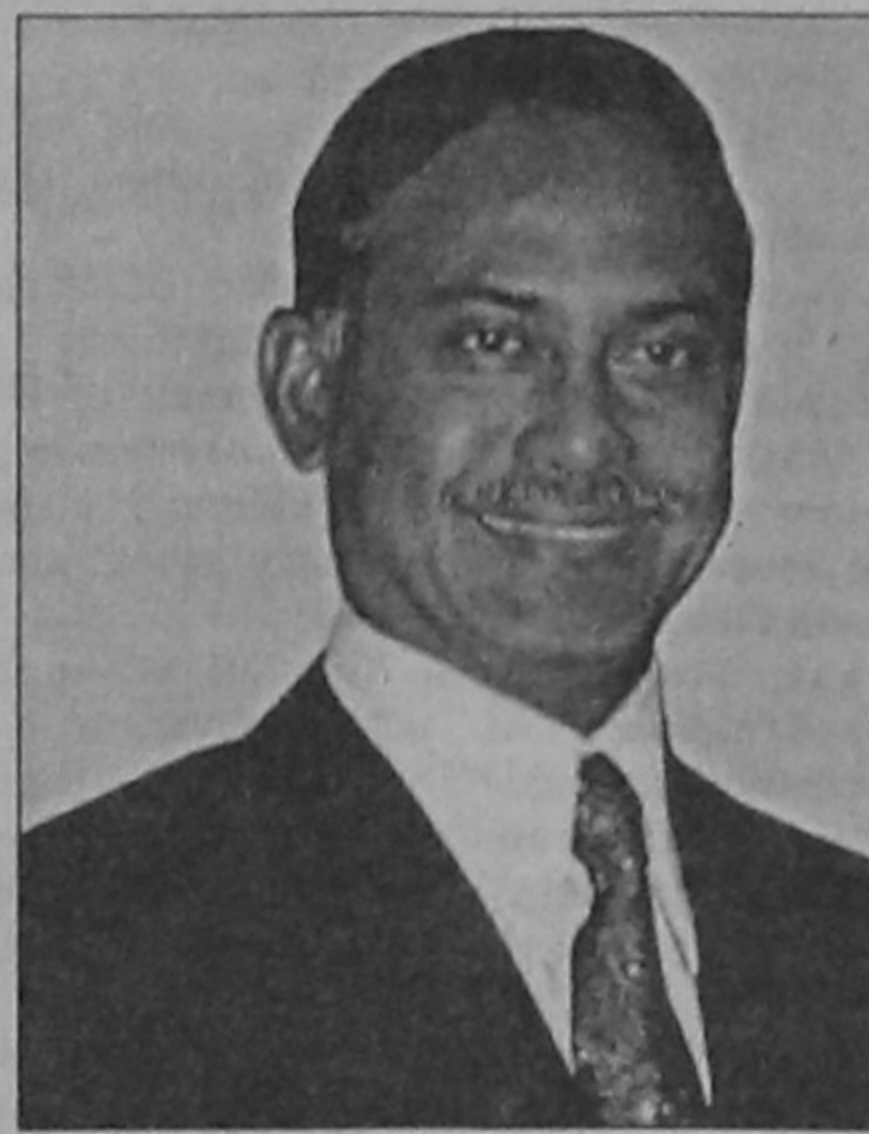
counter-coup spearheaded by Colonel Abu Taher toppled Mosharraf, who was murdered along with some other senior officers, and freed Zia. With Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem as president and chief martial law administrator, Zia joined Rear Admiral M.H. Khan and Air Vice Marshal M.G. Tawab on the team that would administer the country. All three were deputy chief martial law administrators. In July 1976, Col. Taher, charged with treason by Zia, was hanged in Dhaka central jail.

In April 1977, President Sayem resigned and handed over charge to Zia, who quickly organised a referendum to legitimise his rule. In June 1978, as president, chief martial law administrator and chief of army staff, Zia organized presidential elections in which his superior during the War of Liberation, General M.A.G. Osmany, opposed him. In the event, Osmany lost and President Zia went on to organise his political front, which came to

be known as the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Earlier, the regime had promulgated an ordinance allowing political parties to engage in open politics, which ended the one party BKSAL system. He also allowed publication of newspapers closed by the state takeover of all newspapers. He is, therefore, credited with the restoration of multi-party politics and removal of state monopoly on media. However, as a result, even those parties which had opposed the independence of Bangladesh came out in the open with their rightwing programs. With the repeal of the 1972 Collaborators Act, Zia made it possible for all pro-Pakistan elements to take part in politics in independent Bangladesh.

General elections were held in February 1979. The results were a resounding victory for his BNP. Over the next two years, General Zia remained focused on consolidating his rule through ensuring his control over the military and



politics. During his time, politics in Bangladesh undertook a distinctly rightwing turn. The assassins of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

and the four national leaders were accommodated in the nation's foreign service.

But no move by Zia was more controversial than the incorporation of the infamous Indemnity Ordinance in the constitution through the Fifth Amendment. By this act, the men responsible for the murders of August and November 1975 were rendered immune to prosecution. It was on the strength of this ordinance that for a long period of twenty-one years Bangabandhu's killers could not be brought to trial.

Ziaur Rahman joined the Pakistan army in the early 1950s. In 1965, he saw action in the Khemkaran sector during the Indo-Pakistan war. By the time of his death, he had promoted himself to lieutenant general in the Bangladesh army. He was only forty-five when he was murdered.

(Ziaur Rahman, president of Bangladesh and the country's first military ruler, was assassinated in Chittagong on May 30, 1981)

The era of women empowerment and 39 lashes

There is no excuse for tolerating such a heinous act in rural Bangladesh during the so-called era of women empowerment and emancipation. Most importantly, it makes one doubly puzzled that no politician has come forward and shown empathy towards that poor injured girl in the hospital.

MOAZZEM HOSSAIN

I wish I did not have to write this piece. One must do it since there has been a silence on the part of the commentators and the politicians, except this daily which published a strongly worded editorial on this issue on May 26. Moreover, the incident had taken place next door to the upazila where I come from. Yes, I am talking about the recent incident at a village in Daudkandi, where a girl was whipped with 39 lashes in the presence of a few hundred people the outcome of a decree of a local salish.

This is not the first occasion that such a crime has been committed by the so-called moulanas and their accomplices in this nation. The aim of this piece is to remind the politicians at all levels that, under any circumstances, this kind of

atrocities cannot be allowed and must be stopped immediately by making new laws if required.

There is no excuse for tolerating such a heinous act in rural Bangladesh during the so-called era of women empowerment and emancipation. Most importantly, it makes one doubly puzzled that no politician has come forward and shown empathy towards that poor injured girl in the hospital. Perhaps they do not want to be stigmatised, and feared a backlash from the bigots.

Some readers may have thought that the village where the incident took place was located in a remote and illiterate part of the country. No, Daudkandi has one of the highest literacy rates, close to 80%, and is located not too great a distance from Dhaka (only 50 km).

Politically, this is certainly one of the



Getting punishment instead of empowerment?

violence-ridden areas of the country, although it has a very high level of per capita income. Although the famous Goalmari fight had taken place here during the war of liberation (Pakistan army even lost some of its officers in this fight), the post-liberation period has been infested with violence after violence.

The infamous killers of the father of the nation come from this area (Khandakar Mushtaq and Col. Rashid). Since General

Zia's time this locality has been dominated by BNP-Jamaat politics led by Khandakar Mosharraf, who lost the last election to AL's Subed Ali Bhuiyan.

If I am correct, neither the incumbent MP, nor the former MP, has visited the victim until now. None of the 45 MPs elected in the women's quota has visited the poor girl, either. One may ask, what kind of democracy we are heading towards democracy for the elite, or democ-

racy for the masses?

As far as women's empowerment goes, Daudkandi region should be at the top since numerous women from this area have occupied high positions in the government, higher education, private businesses and NGOs over the last half a century. In terms of transport and information networks, this locality is one of the more developed areas, thanks to the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway as well as the rural road networks established on the southern side of the highway (where the victim's village is located) since independence.

It is unimaginable how such an incident can occur in such a place. I have no doubt that it has nothing to do with poverty, backwardness in education or infrastructure and unemployment. It is more due to the so-called Islamic education introduced in this area, with numerous madrasas being established over the last decade or two. There is a union called Mohammadpur, which is next door to the victim's village. Mohammadpur is at the top in providing madrasa education per head if compared with other similar regions. The moulana, who is under custody now in connection with the salish, belongs to one of these madrasas. No wonder that

the Bideshwar the girl was whipped 39 times and sent unconscious to the hospital.

It does not mean that I am against religious education. Certainly, the education the Madrasa Board is presently offering cannot be friendly to the cause of empowering women. Having 85% success rate in recent madrasa exams (equivalent to SSC) is another area that must also be scrutinised closely. Alongside with Arabic as a second language, there should also be vocational English introduced together with courses on social sciences.

One may argue that the Bideshwar incident is an isolated case and does not need any close attention from the administration. This cannot be right. There is a correlation found between violence against women and traditional Islamic education, here and elsewhere in the Muslim world. The 39 lashes and subsequent silence from the politicians, once again, remind us of the ground reality how and where the empowerment movement is heading to in 21st century Bangladesh.

Dr. Moazzem Hossain is the author of Democracy's Roller Coaster Ride in Bangladesh.

Save rivers, save Dhaka

The rate at which the rivers surrounding Dhaka are being polluted and encroached on threatens an inevitable environmental cataclysm. Dhaka is really a dying city with its rivers, which had so long been acting as its arteries, being throttled to death.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE four rivers, Buriganga, Shitalakkhya, Turag and Balu, that surrounded Dhaka city are being polluted by industrial wastes and encroached upon by land grabbers to such an extent that they could cause an environmental disaster for the city dwellers.

The Buriganga, which was once a mighty river of vigorous flow, has now been turned into a septic reservoir, as about 22,000 cubic meters of toxic tannery wastes are directly dumped into it everyday. According to a survey, around 50 to 60% of pollution of the Buriganga is caused by lethal industrial wastes and the rest by domestic wastewater.

Both banks of the Turag, the main tributary of the Buriganga on the northern side of the city, have been grabbed for development, and it has been contami-

nated by lethal industrial wastes, making it one among many rivers in the country to face environmental devastation.

Originating from Brahmaputra, the Turag has a total length of 78 kilometers, out of which 23 kilometers flow along the city. Not only the banks but also the bed of the river near Ashulia and Birulia has fallen to the greed of the land grabbers, who have erected huge structures at various points.

The Shitalakkhya, a major tributary of the river Buriganga on the southern fringe of the city, is another cruel victim of huge encroachment and severe pollution. The unabated dumping of industrial wastes and sewage has polluted its water to such an extent that it is impossible for any aquatic life to survive there. Its surface water has turned pitch black and emits a bad smell.

The Balu, which flows on the eastern

side of the city, is also being sacrificed to the greed of powerful people who have grabbed both of its banks and the bed. The river that once flowed in abundance is now dwindling. The grabbing of its bed has gone to such extent that it has become quite difficult to recognise its existence at many points. The waste emitted by the industries set up along the river has heavily polluted its almost stagnant waters.

The statistics available with the Department of Environment (DoE) says that 365 textile mills, 198 tanneries, 149 pharmaceutical units, 129 engineering workshops, 118 chemical and pesticide factories, 92 jute mills, 63 rubber and plastic units, 38 food and sugar factories, 10 paper and pulp mills, 5 each of cement and fertilizer factories and 4 distilleries are polluting the rivers.

According to the Environment Conservation Act 1995, each industrial unit should have effluent treatment plants (ETP) in order to get clearance from the DoE, which is mandatory for getting power and gas connections. The caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed had directed the owners of the industries to install ETP at their respective industries by October 31, 2007. But most of them defied the directive and the government did not take any action against the violators.

Ironically indeed, encroachment and pollution of rivers have been going unabated despite the existence of at least 38 government bodies entrusted with the task of protecting rivers. The caretaker government, in a drive in July 2001, cleared huge portions of encroached Buriganga, Turag and Shitalakkhya rivers, but failed to prevent the encroachment.

We desperately need a powerful body, legislated to mete out punishment, to free the rivers from the clutches of the encroachers and polluters, instead of having so many non-functional ornamental bodies.

The Daily Star has done a splendid job taking the first crucial step of bringing to light the shocking condition of Dhaka's four rivers by printing a series of reports, which has prompted the High Court and a parliamentary body to take some effective steps towards saving the rivers.

The HC has ordered the government to immediately stop the construction of illegal structures on the banks of the rivers and to explain why an order should not be served to restore the rivers in question to their former state. The JS body has formed a sub-committee to take steps to save the rivers surrounding Dhaka.

The rate at which the rivers surrounding Dhaka are being polluted and encroached on threatens an inevitable



Choking to death.

environmental cataclysm. Dhaka is really a dying city with its rivers, which had so long been acting as its arteries, being throttled to death.

We have seen civil society movements in the recent past to save the Buriganga, which resulted in a temporary respite for the river without any permanent solution because of the lack of determined and well-coordinated efforts.

There are reasons to believe that the

"Save Rivers, Save Dhaka" campaign, a joint initiative of The Daily Star and Channel-i for fighting to save the rivers that skirt around the Dhaka, could be seen a success as it has already created a new dimension. Therefore, the conscious dwellers of the city should join the campaign to save the Dhaka's rivers and consequently save Dhaka.

A.N.M. Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Remembering a litterateur

MOHSENA REZA SHOPNA

A poet and writer of renown Khaleda Adib Chowdhury passed away on May 28, 2008.

She was my chhoto mami. But many a time the phone would ring to rejuvenate a lethargic afternoon; "Hello Shopna" her voice would invite me for an informative exchange of views relating not to family problems or achievements but to the political and social change in Bangladesh.

When we came back to Bangladesh in early 1972 from Lebanon, after my father, ABM Motahar Husain, Commercial Counsellor, Pakistan Embassy, declared allegiance to the new government, we put up at her home. There were no confines to her happiness

It reminded her of her own stay with us in Karachi when she first went to work in West Pakistan. She stayed for quite some time enjoying every moment with her sister-in-law, my-mother Laila. Of late she was morose most of the time, perhaps for her illness, perhaps for the modest recognition of her work, though she has received the Bangla Academy Award.

Insomnia was her major problem, her only desire from God was, "Please give me my portion of sleep."

"Telling the mute tale of love..." were the words pronounced by poet Kazi Razi on the 28th of May, 2008 when she first heard of her friend's sad demise. She could at the moment only reflect on the notable works of Khaleda Adib Chowdhury:

Amar Deho Amar Haat (1978), *Pantho Tomar Bhalobasha* (1983), *Tomar Onongo* (1986), *Duhaate Andhar Kete* (1993), *Hae Badhon Lotar Kadon* (1995), *Premar Kobita* (1998), *Nirob Narisius Obhimaan Aache Bedonae*, Poems (2001)

Her famous Agni Zaha Kareni Daho is a telling commentary in the history of Bangla literature. Poet Nasir Ahmed recalled some famous lines from one of her poems which clearly informed us that she had become aware of her counted days.

She knew her time had come to depart, but astonishingly how could a person in her seventies be so romantic, express such unending love and display endless pain! In her book of poem *Amar Deho Amar Haat* you get all of

these in one pack.

Her books for children have also brought her laurels. National Professor Kabir Chowdhury says, "She has kept her vibrant mark of creativity here".

In the last few weeks of her ailment I could not bear to see her condition in Apollo Hospital. The lovely and entertaining Mami had undergone a metamorphosis. Her hair had turned silver, there were numerous needles attached to her thin body and the patches of scars from blood transfusion on her white hand showed signs of severe pain. It was quite obvious that the hour had come to separate us from the great poet whose bosom was full of romance but now lying helplessly uttering "Allah aar koto." The long craved for sleep had finally come.

Born in 1937, Khaleda Adib hailed

from Comilla Pailgasa Chowdhury Bari. My Mama, Anwarul Haq, who also died of cancer was Director Finance, BTMC. All her three children are well established. Sangita is in business, Tanvirul Huq Probal is now President of "Rehab" and Shumona a well known artist and singer. Khaleda had been a government officer, teacher, journalist and finally a writer. Her published works number over 42. She is no more, but she will be alive in our hearts through her writings, which are full of love for mankind.

Some recognition may be noted here: Bangla Academy Literature Award, Alaul Literature Award, Poet Jashim Uddin Parsiahd Literature Award, Bangladesh Lekhika Shongho Award, Agrani Bank Shishu Shahitto Award, M Nurul Kader Foundation Shahitto Award, Dhaka



Mahila Club Podok, Ushi Shahitto Award (Comilla) etc.

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