



RIGHTING THE GRIEVOUS WRONG

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Aug 15 in world media

FROM PAGE 11

killers -- Lt Col Farooq and Lt Col Rashid -- for the current affairs programme "World in Action" on London's ITV.

In that interview broadcast on August 2, 1976, the killers described how they met the then deputy chief of Army Staff Major General Ziaur Rahman on March 20, 1975, and shared their plan to bring in a change in the country but, Zia said, "I am sorry, I would not like to get involved in anything like that. If you want to do something, the junior officers should do it themselves."

Lawrence Lifschultz who along with Martin Woollacott gave one of the most detailed accounts of what had happened on the night of August 15, revisiting the history of that night and the preceding days to reveal the conspiracy behind the putsch. The Guardian ran it as its lead story on August 28, 1975.

Four years later, Lifschultz wrote "The intrigue behind the army coup which toppled Sheikh Mujib" published in the Guardian on August 15, 1979.

Lifschultz wrote, "According to information obtained from senior US officials at the American Embassy in Dacca [sic] and from well-informed Bengali sources, it appears that the United States had prior knowledge of the coup which killed Mujib, and that the American Embassy personnel had held discussions with individuals involved in the plot more than six months prior to his death."

"In reporting the coup no foreign or Bengali journalist probed beyond superficial aspects of what had happened... The version of events that the [military] officers had acted alone, without prior political planning, was a myth that came to stand as fact," Lifschultz added.

Conspiracy

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then the deputy chief of army staff and a major general), because at least he was not tarnished," Farooq told the television channel.

"So after a lot of arrangements I managed to see him on March 20, 1975 in the evening. General Zia said, 'I am a senior officer. I cannot be involved in such things. If you junior officers want to do it, go ahead,'" he added.

Farooq elaborated that he had a stroll in the lawn with Zia and told him that the country was going to the dogs.

"We have to change it. We, the junior officers, have already worked it out. We want your support and your leadership," Farooq told ITV, as saying to Zia in the lawn.

In reply Zia said he was sorry that he could not get involved in anything like that. "If you want to do something, the junior officers should do it themselves," Zia was quoted by Farooq.

Zia then told his aide-de-camp that Farooq was not to be given any more appointment with him. Being turned away by Zia and also being assured that he would not intervene in any plan, the killers then went head hunting for a politician they finally found in Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, the then commerce minister.

The killers had their first talk with him in the first week of August 1975 and subsequently they met him on August 12, 13 and 14. Moshtaque was given a briefing about the plan that 'might lead' to killing of Mujib, Abdur Rashid told the TV channel.

"He [Moshtaque] said, well, if somebody has that courage [to kill Mujib] and guts to do it, well, that's a good thing probably for the future leaders. We wanted to know that he [Moshtaque] had no programme of immediately going outside the country anywhere," Rashid added.

Colonels Farooq and Rashid were ideally placed in Dhaka to carry out the coup. Rashid commanded the 2nd Field Artillery, and Farooq led the Bengal Lancers, the tank regiment.

With the coup in mind, the two army men started in March a series of night training for the units, twice a month. That they did as a camouflage for the troops movement on the night of the coup, because they thought any sudden unscheduled movement of soldiers on the night of the operation might be noticed.

The killers scheduled a night time training for the night of August 14. Their weapons were 28 tanks, eighteen 105mm guns, and 700 men that they had put together. One of the major concerns for them was about 3,000 members of the Rakkhi Bahini, a paramilitary force that Mujib had formed, stationed in Dhaka and armed with light weapons.

But the killers were hell bent on their targets. Their forces were divided into three teams -- one each to attack the home of Sheikh Mujib, his brother-in-law Abdur Rab Serniabat, and his nephew Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni. The teams were led by six young officers who had recently been discharged from the army.

"Killing Sheikh Mujib, Serniabat [Mujib's nephew's father-in-law] and Sheikh Moni [Mujib's nephew], I was 99 percent sure," Farooq told the TV. "What I was not sure was the aftermath. For that I used the tanks as a psychological threat."

But the killers had one big drawback. They had no shell in the tanks.

"I did not expect that everybody would have common knowledge that we did not have ammunition. It was a game of sheer bluff," Farooq said.

But when Farooq rolled his tank to the Second Capital area, he found that the other 27 tanks were not following him. So Farooq rammed through the brick wall of Tejgaon Airport and found a brigade of Rakkhi Bahini lined up in full battle gear.

Farooq's tank driver was nervous and asked for instruction.

"I said, you drive past right six inches in front of their nose. Told the gunner to keep his gun pointed towards them, and told the rest of them to look brave. Those chaps kept on looking at us and we kept on looking at them."

Then Farooq went on to claim that when he reached Mujib's residence, the other members of his team told him that Mujib had already been killed.

"From there I went to the radio station to check if the radio station had been seized," Farooq said adding, "At the radio station Mr Khandaker Moshtaque had declared himself president."

Embarrassed

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He said the government could not appoint more than one judge on ad hoc basis though many legal experts maintained that the government could appoint as many judges as it needed.

Five of the judges who stated that they could not hear the case have now retired. However, Justice MM Ruhul Amin is currently the chief justice, and Justice MA Matin is now an Appellate Division judge.

When Caesar died...

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time in the history of free Bangladesh, a coup d'etat had taken place. That Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had been assassinated was no more in doubt. What was not known to the country at that point, though, was that a whole lot of other personalities had been murdered along with him.

Killers... as 'children of the sun'

In certain areas of the capital, Dhaka, newspapers printed overnight (before the coup got underway) carried images of a beaming Bangabandhu in conversation the previous evening with a special envoy of South Korean President Park Chung-hee. There was news too of Bangabandhu's scheduled visit to Dhaka University on the morning of 15 August. That was not going to happen anymore, of course. As the hours progressed, the assassins moved with increasing speed and efficiency. And, besides, there were quite a few others. Taheruddin Thakur, A.B.S. Safdar and Mahub Alam Chashi planted themselves at the radio station, the better to let the nation know they were in charge. The three services chiefs -- K.M. Shafiullah, A.K. Khondokar and M.H. Khan -- along with the police chief and the acting chief of the Rakkhi Bahini -- were taken to the radio station, where they swore allegiance to the new 'president.' It was hours after Bangabandhu had been murdered. And soon Moshtaq was there, to address the country, to eulogise the assassins as children of the sun. The nature of the darkness that had descended on Bangladesh was what Moshtaq, as 'president', made clear in his address: he ended it through a loud

exclamation of 'Bangladesh Zindabad.' Gone was Joi Bangla, the rallying Bengali battle cry of 1971 that had become part of life and politics.

Moshtaq went about his job briskly. With the killer majors and colonels forming a shield around him at Bangabhaban, he had members of Bangabandhu's cabinet, or most of them, brought over to the presidential palace. An ailing Phani Bhushan Majumdar, under treatment at PG Hospital, was forced at gunpoint to join the cabinet meeting. It was an experience that other ministers went through as well. Conspicuous by their absence was Vice President Syed Nazrul Islam, Prime Minister M. Mansoor Ali, Minister A.H.M. Quamruzzaman and former prime minister Tajuddin Ahmed. They had all been placed under house arrest. Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain, on his way back home after a visit to Yugoslavia, turned back and would reject all overtures by the regime to join Moshtaq.

Osmany, as Moshtaq's advisor
From this long distance of time and historical space, there are images that stand out among the many narrations of the tragedy of 15 August: Bangabandhu's inert body, together with those of his family members, lay in rapidly drying blood in Dhanmondi. The next day, all the bodies bar Bangabandhu's were buried in Banani. The soldiers helicoptered Bangabandhu's corpse to his village Tungipara in Gopalganj. He was buried hastily beside the graves of his parents. None of the villagers was permitted to take part in the janaza.

General M.A.G. Osmany, who had in January given up his membership of

Parliament in protest against the Fourth Amendment to the constitution, linked up with Moshtaq to become his defence advisor. Men like Taheruddin Thakur were suddenly ubiquitous by their presence nearly everywhere. A few days after the coup, Major General Shafiullah was replaced as army chief of staff by his deputy, Major General Ziaur Rahman. Soon, Air Marshal A.K. Khondokar would make way for M.G. Tawab.

In the wake of the coup, the Pakistani government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto cheerfully welcomed the fall of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the emergence (wrong, as it turned out) of Bangladesh as an 'Islamic republic.' Pakistan decided, on the morning of the coup, to dispatch a consignment of rice and cloth to the 'brotherly people' of Bangladesh. Within days of Bangabandhu's murder, Saudi Arabia and China, states that had withheld diplomatic recognition of Bangladesh, acknowledged Bangladesh as an independent state.

Indemnifying murder
And yet Moshtaq's hold on power was tenuous at best and erratic at worst. The assassin majors and colonels ensconced themselves at Bangabhaban and would not return to the cantonment despite instructions and requests to do. New army chief Zia appeared reluctant to press the matter, which in turn began to fuel grumbling among senior military officers on the issue of a restoration of the chain of command in the military. Osmany was not proving to be effective either.

And amidst all the confusion, the regime decreed an indemnity ordinance that blocked

any future judicial action against the assassins. The ordinance would subsequently, in 1979, be incorporated as part of the Fifth Amendment to the constitution by the Zia military regime.

Moshtaq expended his efforts in trying to give his regime a semblance of legitimacy through wooing Members of Parliament, all of whom belonged to the Awami League. He did not succeed, though he was able to send Abdul Malek Ukil and Mohiuddin Ahmed, senior Awami League politicians, abroad to argue his case. That did not work out either. Meanwhile, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, A.H.M. Quamruzzaman and M. Mansoor Ali had been incarcerated at Dhaka central jail. By October could be heard clear rumblings of discontent in the army. Brigadier Khaled Musharraf, chief of general staff, was keen on persuading Zia to restore the army chain of command. Zia proved to be either unwilling or unable to comply. It was then left to Musharraf to plan the moves that would correct conditions. Along with Colonel Huda, Colonel Shafaat Jamil and Major Haider, he strategised his moves and by early November 1975 was ready to move against Moshtaq and his assassin-accomplices.

Musharraf's rise and murder in prison

On 3 November, Musharraf and his loyalists struck. As an embattled Moshtaq presided over a cabinet meeting at Bangabhaban, Colonel Shafaat Jamil and other soldiers rushed into the room. Jamil told Moshtaq he was a usurper and had no right to call himself president. What followed was swift and much of it remains unclear even today. At one point,

Moshtaq agreed to quit the presidency but also insisted that the killer majors and colonels be given safe passage out of the country. Zia was replaced as chief of army staff by Khaled Musharraf, who was elevated to the rank of major general. Musharraf stayed on at Bangabhaban, apparently negotiating with Moshtaq over the shape of things to be. Meanwhile, Bangabandhu's assassins made their way to Dhaka central jail in the depths of the night and demanded to be allowed into the premises. When the jail authorities hesitated, a call from Moshtaq settled the issue: let them in, said the 'president', and let them do what they wish to do.

And their wish was soon to be fulfilled. They ordered the prison authorities to bring Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, A.H.M. Quamruzzaman and M. Mansoor Ali into one cell. Once that was done, the soldiers burst in and sprayed the four leaders with bullets. For good measure, they bayoneted them and made sure the life had gone out of them. Within the next hour or so, all the majors and colonels who had murdered Bangabandhu and his family and now had put the four national leaders to death were on a plane out of the country. They were safely in Bangkok by the time news of the gruesome killings at Dhaka central jail filtered out to the world.

Eerie silence

In a broad sense, between 3 and 6 November, Bangladesh was in a state of grave uncertainty. The radio station was off the air. There was little sign of a government at work, despite the fact that Musharraf had taken over and Zia was under confinement at his cantonment home. Amidst the uncertainty,

Musharraf's mother and brother Rashed led a procession to Bangabandhu's Dhanmondi residence, demanding that the killers of the Father of the Nation be placed on trial. It was not until the afternoon of 6 November that the mystery began to lift. Moshtaq was replaced as president of Bangladesh by the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem. In the evening, President Sayem addressed the nation over radio and television. He condemned the murderous acts of 15 August and 3 November. An inquiry committee to probe the killings in prison, he informed the country, had been formed. And he declared that general elections would be organized to take Bangladesh back to democracy.

Khaled Musharraf dies

The anti-climax came in the early hours of the next day, 7 November. Through the clandestine efforts of Colonel Abu Taher, soldiers loyal to him and General Zia moved to free the latter from confinement. Outmanoeuvred, Musharraf, Huda and Haider tried valiantly to rally their loyalists. They failed. And then they fled. Pursued by soldiers supporting the counter-coup, they were caught and murdered in cold blood.

On the streets of Dhaka, soldiers moved along in trucks and on tanks chanting slogans of 'nara-e-takbeer' and 'sipahi-janata biplob zindabad.'

Hope had flickered for a time all too brief. On 7 November, darkness struck back with fury. It would linger long and hard.

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Bloodbath on Road 32

FROM PAGE 1

Inside Mohitul's office, Bangabandhu stepped beside a table and pulled Mohitul to the ground. Right then house help Abdul brought Bangabandhu's punjabi and glasses from the first floor. The president quickly put them on and came out into the veranda. He shouted at the sentries.

"There have been firings all around. What are you doing?"

And off he went to the upper floor where his wife, sons Russell, Jamal and wife Parvin Jamal Rosy and brother Sheikh Abu Naser were sleeping. He did not realise this would be his last meeting with his family.

House help Rama was sleeping on the veranda in front of Bangabandhu's bedroom. It was around five in the morning. Suddenly the door opened and Begum Mujib emerged.

"Criminals have attacked Serniabat's residence," she said.

Rama sprang up from his sleep. He ran down in panic and went outside the front gate and saw some army men advancing toward the House 677 with weapons raised and firing bullets in the air. An unknown fear gripped him. The immediate person he thought of informing about this impending peril was Sheikh Kamal, Bangabandhu's elder son.

He again entered the

house and ran up to the second floor where Kamal and his wife Sultana were staying. He woke Kamal up and somehow blurted out that the army had attacked their house.

Kamal quickly put on his trousers and a shirt and ran to the ground floor. Rama took Kamal's wife Sultana to the first floor where the rest of the family was sleeping.

Rama also woke up Jamal who put on a shirt and trousers and went to his mother's room. His wife followed him there.

All hell broke loose outside as bullets pinged and whizzed around. He heard somebody groaning downstairs. Little did he know that his brother Kamal was getting mutilated by those stinging bullets.

Mohitul saw Kamal coming down to the ground floor. He stood on the veranda and roared: "Army and police members, please come with me." He was trying to locate the sentries.

Just then the killers appeared -- three to four army men in khaki and black fatigues. Automatic weapons held at waist level in front of them. They stopped right in front of Kamal. Mohitul and Nurul Islam, a police officer, stood dumbfounded behind Kamal.

Mohitul recognised Major Bazul Huda in khaki uniform. He had met him before. Without a warning, Huda shot Kamal first in the leg. Kamal jumped to

Mohitul's side by the reception room.

"Tell them I am Sheikh Mujib's son Sheikh Kamal."

"Don't shoot him," Mohitul pleaded. "He is Sheikh Kamal. Sheikh Mujib's son."

The killers could not care less. Guns blazed again and bullets bored through Kamal again. He fell dead.

Kamal was only the first small game for the killers. They were looking for the giant. They asked some soldiers to keep watch on Mohitul and the police officer who also suffered a bullet wound in the leg.

In heavy steps they hurried to the first floor where their main target lived. After some time, Mohitul heard the loud voice of Bangabandhu. Gunshots rang out. Mohitul did not know what was happening up there. All he could do is hope that Bangabandhu was not hurt.

But Havildar Quddus saw the terrible event playing out before his eyes.

He was detained from the moment the killers had gone inside the residence boundary. Now they ordered him to follow them to the first floor. He numbly obeyed.

As Huda and Nur stepped on the landing of the staircase, Major Mohiuddin and his soldiers appeared at the top. With them was Bangabandhu. They were

coming down.

Quddus was just behind Huda and Nur. Nur said something in English that he could not understand. To this, Major Mohiuddin and his men moved to the side.

"What do you want?" Bangabandhu asked.

Nobody answered. Suddenly, Huda and Nur pulled the triggers and bullets from their Sten guns rained down on Bangabandhu.

The president collapsed on the stairs, silently, and died and blood flowed first around the landing and then down the stairs. He was still holding his favourite tobacco pipe in one hand and a matchbox in the other.

Mohiuddin, Nur, Huda and others went down and out of the gate through the south side of the house.

For them, the mission was accomplished.

Rama saw Bangabandhu dying in a hail of bullets. He was walking behind the group of Mohiuddin who brought the president out of his room. The killing over, the army men ordered Rama to get lost.

Trembling and feeling weak in his knees, Rama slipped into the bathroom of Begum Mujib's room. Sultana Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and his wife Rosy, Sheikh Russell and Sheikh Naser were all holed up there. Naser was bleeding from his hand.

Rama told Begum Mujib that Bangabandhu had

been killed.

Just then the killers returned and kept knocking on the door. The soldiers were too impatient to wait. They fired on the door. A terrifying moment of noise, cordite, flying bullets and splinters.

Then Begum Mujib softly said, "If we will have to die, let's die together." And she opened the door and begged for the lives of her family members.

The army men then herded Sheikh Naser, Sheikh Russell, Begum Mujib and Rama towards the stairs.

Begum Mujib stopped as she saw Bangabandhu lying in a pool of blood on the stairs. She broke into tears and said: "I won't go further. Kill me here."

The killers took Begum Mujib back into her room. Quddus then witnessed another most terrible thing that was to haunt him for the rest of his life. Major Aziz Pasha and Risaldar Muslemuddin started firing from their Sten guns. Begum Mujib, Sheikh Jamal, his wife Rosy, and Kamal's wife Sultana stumbled on the ground with bullets in their bodies.

The killers took Naser, Russell and Rama to the ground floor and made them stand in a line beside Mohitul.

Sheikh Naser pleaded: "I am not into politics, I do business for a living."

Mohitul heard an army officer telling Naser, "We won't hurt you. Take your

seat in that room."

He took Naser into the bathroom attached to Mohitul's office and opened fire.

Mohitul could hear Sheikh Naser begging for water. One of the army men winked at another, "Go and give him some water."

Then the other army person went inside the bathroom and shot Naser again.

The most horrifying thing happened next. The killers went up and came down with Russell, Bangabandhu's 10-year-old son -- bewildered and devastated. He first held Rama close and then Mohitul.

"Bhaiya (brother), Will they kill me too?" the child asked.

"No Bhaiya, they won't kill you," Mohitul said. He had no idea what was next.

An army man in khaki uniform wrenched Russell away from Mohitul. The child wanted to go back to his mother.

"Take him to his mother," Major Pasha ordered an army havildar.

The havildar with a mischievous smile held Russell by his hand and took him to the first floor. Russell was wailing. Then came another burst of gunshots.

A little later, Major Farooq Rahman met Bazul Huda at the gate.

"All are finished," Huda announced.