



Ordeals of plaintiff

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

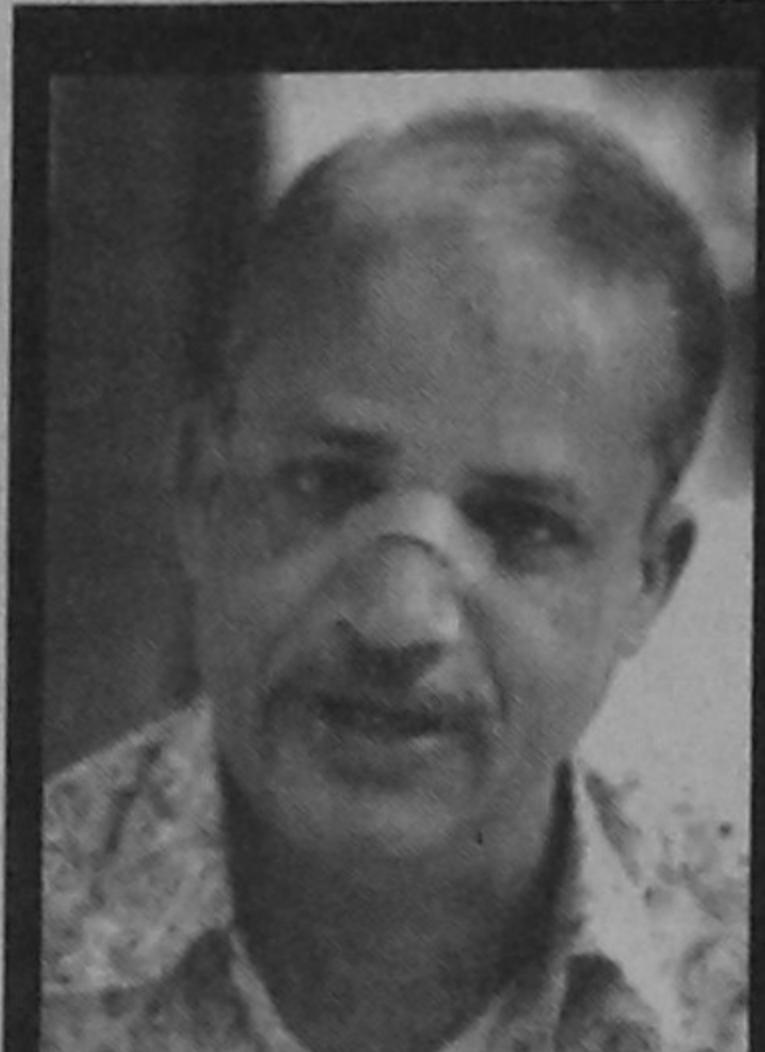
On the dark night of August 15, 1975, a young 22-year-old receptionist at Bangabandhu's residence was least prepared for the assassins, who would storm the house and kill eight people, including the father of the nation, while he himself would lay on the ground bullet-hit.

Receptionist AFM Mohitul Islam fortunately survived that day, but the trauma changed his life forever. He was tortured by some army personnel afterwards and later in life he lost his job, apparently becoming a "political victim" of the BNP-led four-party alliance government.

But his lifelong sufferings are about to be vindicated as the Appellate Division is set to pronounce today the final verdict of the killing case of Bangabandhu and his family members.

It was Mohitul who filed the case on October 2, 1996 with Dhanmondi police station as a witness to one of the darkest and heinous crimes in Bangladesh's political history.

"Since that day of assassination, my conscience was killing me. Even though I was a freedom fighter, I could not save either Bangabandhu or his youngest son Russell," Mohitul told The Daily



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Star at his Mirpur residence Monday.

"Driven by my conscience, I was taking preparation on my own. I gathered all my courage and went to Lalbagh police station to

file a case on October 23, 1976. Instead of taking the case, the sub-inspector on duty slapped me on my face. He took me out of the premises and said if this case was taken, he as well as the officials of the entire police station would die," Mohitul said.

"I burst out in tears as I was pushed out of the police station. I had much of hope, but I came out with my heart full of pain and frustration," he continued.

"But I was always confident in my heart that if there is Allah, the trial of this assassination will one day surely take place.

"Today in hindsight, I think I would have expressed my gratitude to that sub-inspector for not accepting that case back in 1976. I think he was right that if that case was filed, the killers would not have spared me and the trial would not have been fair," Mohitul pointed out.

The then young receptionist shares his ordeals that followed the August 15 killings.

"I was at a hospital for a few days for treatment of my injury. Then I escaped from the hospital to my village home in Jhikargachha in Jessore. Within a few days, the army showed up and took me to Jessore Cantonment," he said.

From Jessore he was sent to an

interrogation cell of the army at the Gono Bhaban in Dhaka. He was brutally tortured in this cell and repeatedly asked about the killers.

"Those interrogators were repeatedly asking me 'just tell us the names, we will try them,'" Mohitul recalled.

Tipped off by someone during detention, Mohitul was prepared not to fall into their trap. "So, I repeatedly told them that I didn't recognise anyone of those assassins. I had the impression that if I gave any names, I would be killed instantly."

After two days of torture, Bangabandhu's APS Shahriar ZR Iqbal helped Mohitul get out of the cell.

"After 34 years, the verdict will free me from the pain that has been eating out my heart. This verdict would also wipe clean the shame for the nation," he observed.

Mohitul had continued his government job and got promoted to the post of an assistant director at the Directorate of Relief in 2002.

"I was dismissed from job within six months of the alliance government rule," he said. Mohitul was also deprived of pension and other service benefits.

Now 56, Mohitul is still trying to be reinstated.

Aug 15 in world media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Even before the people of Bangladesh could come to terms with the fact that the nation's founding father had been assassinated, the world media were prompt to pick the putsch for drawing very diverse sorts of analysis.

And understandably so, if someone sees the historic political events centring the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the fateful night of August 15, 1975, begin unfolding during that particular juncture of time through the prism of Cold War realities.

In its August 16, 1975 issue, the Washington Post reported from New Delhi, "A military-backed government believed to favour both Islam and the West took power in Bangladesh today after a bloody predawn coup."

The report portrayed Mujib as a leftist president. "The overthrow claimed the life of leftist President Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the impoverished country's independence movement who had assumed near dictatorial powers," it wrote.

The newly installed president, Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed said in a broadcast 18 hours after the coup that Mujib was responsible for Bangladesh's poverty. "There was corruption, nepotism and attempts to concentrate powers on one hand," the Washington Post quoted Mushtaque as saying.

It commented that the death of Mujib was a personal blow to the then Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi, who had

often endorsed Mujib's policies of secularism and socialism, the two pillars of her own government.

Soviet newspaper the Izvestia published news of the coup on an inside page without any comment.

Soviet communist party's mouthpiece the Pravda, however, contended that political observers in various countries were asking if "forces hostile" to the aspirations of Bangladesh people might exert "an influence of future developments in the country".

"This anxiety is well-founded since such forces actually exist," Pravda asserted. "These are imperialism, Maoism and internal reaction."

Exactly one week after the August 15 massacre of Bangabandhu family, Christopher R Wren wrote for the New York Times from Moscow, "The Kremlin, in its first substantial reaction to last week's coup d'état in Bangladesh, hinted today [August 22] that the overthrow of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman might sway her away from the Soviet Union and toward China."

Indian newspaper the Hindustan Times reported with Dhaka dateline on September 1 that Chinese recognition comes a week after the Soviet Union recognised the new regime and a few days of India's official statement that it would continue its relation with Mushtaque government.

On the eve of the first anniversary of Mujib's assassination, Anthony Mascarenhas of the Sunday Times took an interview of two of the self-proclaimed

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Minus the leader they recognised the country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan was the first country to recognise the Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed government on the first day of the bloody changeover on August 15, 1975. The prompt recognition of the new government installed by the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proved that Pakistan merrily accepted the assassination of Bangladesh's architect.

Saudi Arabia, which had withheld recognition of newly born Bangladesh for nearly four years after the liberation, also came to recognise the country. On the second day of the changeover, it recognised the new government led by Moshtaque, a conservative political

leader who was widely known for his anti-India attitude.

When the killers of Bangabandhu and forces behind the new government swiftly consolidated their grip on Bangladesh, Dhaka and Peking established diplomatic relations.

China was the major country that did not recognise Bangladesh as an independent nation before the August 15 changeover. The Chinese recognition of Bangladesh on the world map came on August 31, 1975 after the Moshtaque-led government was installed.

Moshtaque was widely known for his pro-Western sympathies and anti-Indian attitudes. After the Liberation War, the pro-western lobby led by Moshtaque became

stronger and started influencing the government policies from 1973. So, it was not unlikely that the US, though opposed Bangladesh's Liberation War, would provide support to the Moshtaque government.

Quoting a State Department spokesperson, The Washington Post in a report published on August 16, 1975 said the US was prepared to conduct normal diplomatic ties with the new government.

According to The Washington Post report, Britain reacted coolly to the news of the takeover. "A foreign ministry spokesman said that Mujib had been slain "will be received with widespread regret in this country... Sheikh Mujib was a well-known and much respected statesman who

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A happy moment: Bangabandhu with his family. Only Hasina (extreme right) and Rehana (second from left) are alive.

Mohiuddin's confession

FROM PAGE 7

tank force coming through Mirpur Road towards south. He showed 'V' sign with his finger and directed him to go to Ganabhaban. Later, on their way to Ganabhaban they heard about the death of Sheikh Mujib and also heard that Major Dalim was broadcasting the killing of Sheikh Mujib on Radio. They went to Ganabhaban followed by Brigadier Mashrur Haque and Captain Aziz. In the meantime, Col Atiqur Rahman from Army Headquarters and Brigade Major Hafiz and other officers from the Army Headquarters came to the Ganabhaban and heard the address of Chief of 3 Forces, Police and BDR Chiefs on Radio declaring their allegiance. The senior officers of the Army Headquarters congratulated them and left Ganabhaban.

Mohiuddin returned to the Army Headquarters after Jumma prayer. Thereafter, Farooq, Rashid, Dalim, Rashed Chowdhury, Bazlul Huda, Shahriar, AKM Mohiuddin, Mazed (absconding convict), Ahmed Sharful Hossain, Lt Kismat (absconding convict) and others (whose names he could not recollect) went to Ganabhaban and formed an unwritten command council and through Khandaker Moshtaque, began to run the country.

Soon after, Major General Ziaur Rahman was appointed Army Chief of Staff, he said.

He stated that wholesale discontent was growing in the Army and a rebellion was imminent. Farooq and Rashid were keeping in touch with the Army Chief of Staff Major General Ziaur Rahman to tackle the situation but he expressed his inability. Later on, there was a revolt against the Command Council situated at the Bangabhaban, ultimately, on November 3, 1975, he heard that the Majors who used to stay at Bangabhaban, left Bangladesh with their families.

On November 4, he heard that the leaders of the Awami League who were in jail were killed before their departure. On November 6, he (Mohiuddin) with the help of some troops rescued Ziaur Rahman from his house and declared him CMLA. On assuming power Ziaur Rahman gave the Majors, who were earlier sent abroad, jobs in the diplomatic missions.

As such he (Mohiuddin) thought that Ziaur Rahman was also involved in the incidents of August 15, 1975.

His life, struggle

FROM PAGE 1

missionary school. However, in 1934, he had a break of studies, which lasted four years, owing to an operation on one of his eyes.

Having completed his studies from Islamia College in Calcutta in 1947, Bangabandhu took admission in law at Dhaka University. However, his active involvement in politics led to his expulsion from the university in 1948. It was also the year in which he went to jail, twice. That was but the beginning of a political career that would lead to innumerable spells in incarceration for the future founder of Bangladesh.

By 1954, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had transformed himself into an activist politician thanks to his involvement in the formation of the Awami Muslim League in June 1949. At the provincial elections of March 1954, the Awami League played a pioneering role in the creation of the Jukto Front, which convincingly defeated the ruling Muslim League by winning 223 seats out of a total of 237. The AL alone won 143 seats. Mujib won his seat from

Gopalganj and joined Sher-e-Bangla's cabinet as minister for agriculture and forests. The new ministry was, however, dismissed under Section 92-A by the Pakistan central government at the end of May. Mujib was arrested at Dhaka airport on his return from Karachi. He was to remain in prison till December of the year.

In 1955, Bangabandhu was elected member of the Pakistan constituent assembly. On 25 August, as moves got underway to establish One Unit in West Pakistan and change the name of East Bengal to East Pakistan, he demanded a referendum or plebiscite on the issue. It was also the year when his party shed the term 'Muslim' from its name and became the Awami League. By 1956, Mujib was a minister in the provincial government of Ataur Rahman Khan. In May of the following year, however, he resigned in order to focus on the organizational activities of the Awami League.

Following the imposition of martial law throughout Pakistan on 7 October 1958, Bangabandhu was arrested on

11 October and implicated in one case after another. Released after fourteen months, he was re-arrested at the jail gate. He was freed in 1961 after he had filed a writ petition before the East Pakistan High Court. On 6 February 1962, he was arrested again but released on 2 June. He travelled to Lahore in September and assisted his leader Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy in the formation of the National Democratic Front, an alliance of political parties opposed to the Ayub Khan regime.

Following Suhrawardy's death in Beirut on 5 December 1963, Sheikh Mujib revived the Awami League in January 1964. It was a move which clearly demonstrated his desire to mould the party along the lines he thought would turn it into a voice of the Bengali masses. He campaigned all over East Pakistan to drum up support for Miss Fatima Jinnah at the upcoming presidential election. He was arrested by the regime fourteen days before the election but later freed by order of the High Court.

In February 1966, Mujib

announced the Six Point programme of regional autonomy at a conference of Pakistan's opposition parties in Lahore. In May, he was arrested under the Defence of Pakistan Rules. While in prison, he was charged, in January 1968, with conspiracy to break up Pakistan through what was given out as the Agartala conspiracy case. A mass upsurge forced the withdrawal of the case on 22 February 1969. The next day, at a huge rally at the Race Course, Mujib was officially honoured by a grateful Bengali nation as Bangabandhu --- Friend of Bengal.

Bangabandhu took charge of free Bangladesh as prime minister on 12 January 1972. The Jatiyo Sangsad adopted a constitution for the country in December 1972. In early 1975, Bangabandhu went for a change in the system of government, became president of the country and declared a Second Revolution. In the pre-dawn hours of 15 August 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated, along with most of his family, in a bloody coup that was to take Bangladesh back to medieval darkness.

launched its genocide on 25 March 1971, Bangabandhu declared Bangladesh's independence early on 26 March. He was arrested soon afterward by the army and flown to West Pakistan, to be put on trial on charges of treason. After a trial in camera, he was sentenced to death by a military tribunal in early December 1971. Pakistan's defeat in Bangladesh and the emergence of the Bengali nation saw him return home a hero, the father of his people, on 10 January 1972.

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