



The Daily Star

MARTYRED INTELLECTUALS' DAY SPECIAL

DHAKA MONDAY DECEMBER 14, 2009

1

Dying, in defence of liberty

IT is tears we shed this morning. It is the memories we go back to, of the illustrious men and women whom freedom came close to touching and yet could not. For in the final hours of our struggle for liberty, in the dusk that was to herald the end of Pakistan in these parts, these patriotic Bengalis --- teachers, writers, doctors, engineers, journalists --- were picked up and pushed to sudden death in the torture chambers of the Pakistan occupation forces and their local cohorts, the goon squads of the Jamaat-e-Islami known as al-Shams, al-Badr and Razakars.

The aim of the killers was simple: the soon to

emerge republic of Bangladesh could not be permitted to launch its freedom in the ecstasy that comes of victory. These collaborators of the army, indeed the army itself, decided that the new state of the Bengalis was to be maimed at birth as a way of ensuring that the new nation did not take off. The macabre plan was to zero in on its intellectuals, at various levels of society, and despatch them to an early end. For three days prior to the eventual triumph of the Bengali nation, the killer squads, faces concealed behind masks, scoured diverse areas of Dhaka looking for their victims.

Snatched from their families, these brave

Bengalis who like millions of their fellow countrymen awaited the dawn of freedom were to be murdered in cold blood. Rayerbazar would become yet one more metaphor for the genocide of Bengalis in 1971.

Today, it is our tears that speak of those we have lost. It is our cracking hearts that revisit the old streets of ancient sadness. And through those tears and cracking hearts, we recall the historical lesson: that those who die in the defence of liberty are those who symbolise the life force of a nation.

--Editor