

## 'Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!'

This morning, all across the land, we offer a silent prayer for the salvation of Bangabandhu's soul, for the souls of those who died with him and after him. And we will make a new pledge today, to ourselves, to generations of Bengalis to be.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE wheels of justice have turned and have turned fully and with purpose. Thirty-five years after the assassination of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the people of Bangladesh have kept faith with him. They have made good on their pledge to have his killers face the full force of the law, to have them answer for a crime they once proudly proclaimed before a horrified world. At long last, the long night of our shame is over. Today, as citizens of Bangladesh, we will inform the world beyond our frontiers that in this country that has suffered a great deal, that has been humiliated beyond measure by the unscrupulous and the murderous and the unnaturally ambitious, we are yet capable of calling forth in ourselves the will and the determination to reclaim for ourselves the decency and the sophistication that serve as the foundations of civilised living.

This morning we will not gloat over the sorry end of Bangabandhu's assassins. If there is anything we will remember today, it is the simple truth that we as a people have consistently and faithfully struggled for justice and fair play to define our lives. In the years before liberation, it was social justice that remained our goal; and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was that gigantic figure of history we trusted to voice our aspirations. He did a marvellous job of it, through instilling in us, the kind of courage and political faith, which comes, but rarely in the history of nations. And he led us to freedom in an epic struggle, the tale of which we mean to hand down to our children and our children's children in the times to be.

In the decades since Bangabandhu was cut down by the conspiracy of men stubborn about pushing Bangladesh back into the age of darkness, we as a people have crossed hurdles, skirted around impediments and endlessly fought against evil to ensure that his dreams, that our dreams, did not die in the absence of his leadership. We ensured, thirteen years ago, that the black law preventing a trial of his killers would be removed. We did that because when Bangabandhu fell, in the way Caesar had fallen, it was bloody treason that reigned supreme over us. No society believing in self-esteem, in inhabiting a world that promised equality of opportunity to all men and all women, could let treason and treacherous elements hold sway.

We have, we will tell men and women beyond our country this morning, set aside a grievous wrong. Nations that look the other way when their liberators are shot down, when morality becomes a casualty in the hands of the forces of darkness, are destined to be forgotten, in deserving fashion. We did not look the other way, despite the sinister march of serial dictatorship in the years after August 1975, despite the political chicanery of men too happy drawing political mileage from the tragic end of the lives of the Father of the Nation, his family and his political associates. And we have triumphed in our battle for the law to take over, for justice to be, once more, the yardstick by which we will chart our journey into the future.

This morning, all across the land, we offer a silent prayer for the salvation of Bangabandhu's soul, for the souls of those who died with him and after him. And we will make a new pledge today, to ourselves, to generations of Bengalis to be. It is that never again will we make space for assassins and for enemies of this country to barge into our homes in the witching hours of the night, to leave our individual and collective life crushed under the weight of their ferocity. Never again will politics be put to the sword and the gun by men uncomfortable with the glorious history of this land and its founding fathers and its good, patriotic citizens. The execution of Bangabandhu's assassins validates the cause of justice. But we will note that there are the other murderers on the run. Never again must the likes of these men and their patrons arise in the depths of the night to cast their long shadow of darkness over the bright, natural course of our lives, of lives anywhere across the world.

This morning, it is time to speak, in Shakespearean gravity, to Bangabandhu's soul: "Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!"

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ART WORK: SHAHABUDDIN

## The sinister darkness in which Sheikh Mujib died

Soldiers were picking up whatever they could. "Take whatever you want but don't kill us," Begum Mujib pleaded. But hearing the burst of firing, she came out. "You have killed him, kill me," she wailed. She was silenced forever.

A.L. KHATIB

THE evening of August 14, 1975 did not seem different from any other evening in August. Dhaka University was preparing to welcome Mujib the next day.

Mujib was arrested in March 1948, when he was a law student, for leading a black-flag demonstration against Jinnah on the highly emotional issue of making Bengali one of the two State languages.

Mujib was arrested again next year for leading a strike of lower grade university employees. When he was released, he found that he had in the meantime been rusticated from the university.

He would be visiting the university the next day as the chancellor.

Following the exploding of a hand grenade on the university campus, security arrangements for Mujib's visit to the university were tightened. Bomb blasts and grenade explosions had, ever since the Pakistani army's crack-down on Bengalis on the night of March 25/26, 1971, become almost a part of life in Dacca and did not disturb one's sleep. But there were rumours

Mujib returned home from Gano Bhaban around 8.30 pm. Russell, Mujib's ten-year-old son, was all excitement. He was one of the six boys

chosen by the principal of the University Laboratory School to welcome Mujib when he visited the university the next morning.

Kader Siddiqui, better known as Tiger (Baga) Siddiqui for his exploits in the Liberation War, was one of the governors-designate. When he was going to the Post Graduate Hospital in Dhaka to see his ailing mother on the evening of August 14, he saw a tank near Karwan Bazar. There was another tank near the hospital, which is almost opposite the Radio Station.

After seeing his mother, Kader drove down to Motijheel. Yet another tank; three tanks within a radius of one kilometre. He turned back. There was still another tank near the Engineer's Institute, hardly two hundred metres from the hospital. It was a little past 11 pm.

Kader Siddiqui drove on to the Rakkhi Bahini camp near Gano Bhaban in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. Anwarul Alam Shahid, Deputy Director of the Rakkhi Bahini, told Kader Siddiqui that the Bengal Lancers had been authorised to take out three tanks. But why were there four tanks? Shahid said, "You may have seen one tank twice." Could be. Shahid was a former student leader and had fought in the liberation war. There was no reason to doubt what he said.

Tank manoeuvres were a Thursday-night routine and twice a month the Bengal Lancers and the Second Field Artillery held combined exercise.

It was late by the time Kader Siddiqui returned home. He asked his sister not to wake him up in the morning. He had been leaving home early for many days now, but the training program for governors-designate would end the next day with a lunch meeting at which all the ministers would be present. He could take it easy.

Brigadier Jamil, the president's security chief, spent a restless night. His wife was ill, and he had to escort the president to the university in the morning. It was not a new duty for him, but he was very uneasy. He had been appointed director of the Field Intelligence Unit, but handing over charge of the Unit to him had somehow not been completed still. Jamil's wife asked him to go to sleep. "I can't sleep," he said.

Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed too spent a sleepless night. There were a number of visitors to 54 Agha Mashi Lane, Moshtaque's house in old Dhaka. One of the visitors was his nephew Major Rashid.

Taheruddin Thakur was like a cat on hot bricks that night. Any call would make him jump. He tried to calm his nerves with prayers. He had a bath and got ready as if he had to keep an appointment at an unearthly hour. A guest in the house wondered why Taheruddin was so tense.

Kamal, Mujib's son, came back home after midnight from the university campus, where last-minute

touches were being given to the preparations to welcome Mujib. At the same time finishing touches were being given to a plot at the Dhaka cantonment.

When it was still dark, Col. Farook addressed the Bengal Lancers, whom he had trained to hunt in killer packs. The Lancers in their black overalls were like the hordes of Satan in Milton's Paradise Lost.

Farook spat fire and venom. He said that Mujib had sold the country to foreign powers and was going to break up the army and disband the Lancers. He played on their fears and incited them in the name of Islam. It was time to strike.

They moved out in three columns. Their targets were less than two kilometres away.

In the glimmering before dawn, the Rakkhi Bahini hurriedly took up positions in front of their camp near the MNA's hostel in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. Most of them were wearing lungis and were bare-footed. While some living in the area were still wondering what was happening, the Rakkhi Bahini were withdrawn. A tank raced down the airport runway, bridged a wall and trained its gun on the camp.

Thirty tanks were deployed at strategic points in the city.

The houses of Mujib, his brother-in-law Abdur Rab Serneabat and his nephew Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni were surrounded simultaneously.

Soldiers started shooting at Mujib's house from all directions. Bullets were whizzing in through the windows on the first floor, where all the bedrooms

were. A bullet grazed the hand of Sheikh Nasser, Mujib's younger brother.

They all took shelter in Mujib's dressing room, which was the least exposed. It was a repetition of March 26, 1971, when Pakistani troops had encircled the house. Mujib rang up some officers. Begum Mujib tore a strip from her sari and bandaged Nasser's hand.

Kamal came down and asked the guards to take action, but they had been 'neutralised.' While Kamal was still trying to persuade the guards to act, Major Huda entered the house with some men. The guards saluted him. One of the men with Huda shot Kamal.

Meanwhile, Brigadier Jamil was hurrying to Mujib's house. When his jeep was only a few hundred metres from Mujib's house, some soldiers who were waiting near Subhan Bagh mosque barked: "Halt." Jamil identified himself. They knew who he was; they had been posted there to intercept him. "We have orders to shoot anyone who passes this way," they threatened. When Jamil did not heed their warning, they shot him.

Soldiers were by then swarming all over Mujib's house. They found a room closed on all sides -- it was Rehana's bedroom. They forced a door open, sending a cupboard full of things crashing to the floor.

"Let me see what they want," Mujib said and came out of the room as he had done on the night of March 26, 1971. He had faced the Pakistani soldiers. These were his own men.

Mujib was wearing a checked lungi and a white kurta.

Mujib met Huda on the staircase. "It is you. What do you want?" Mujib asked. "We have come to take you," Huda said. "Do you think it is fun?" Mujib thundered. "I will not allow the country to be ruined." Huda was unnerved. A servant cried: "Kamal Bhai is dead." Havildar Moslemuddin, who was coming down from the terrace, swore and opened fire from behind with an automatic weapon, riddling Mujib's body with bullets.

Soldiers were picking up whatever they could. "Take whatever you want but don't kill us," Begum Mujib pleaded. But hearing the burst of firing, she came out. "You have killed him, kill me," she wailed. She was silenced forever.

Jamal, his wife Rosy, and Sultana, Kamal's wife, were still in the dressing room. A burst from a sten gun and the three were dead.

The gunmen found Nasser in a bathroom and shot him. Russell was cowering in a corner. "Take me to my mother," he whimpered. "We will take you to your mother," one of the homicidal maniacs said. A police officer pleaded for Russell's life: "He is only a child." The officer was killed. Yet an arm of Russell had been shot off, yet he begged: "Don't kill me, don't kill me." The answer was a bullet. Russell lay dead by his mother's side.

The article is an extract from the work, Who Killed Mujib? by the eminent journalist (now deceased) A.L. Khatib. This piece was first printed in The Daily Star, August 15, 2008.