

Remembering the four national leaders

Their supreme sacrifice must not go in vain

THE nation mourns today the passing of the four leading lights of the 1971 Mujibnagar government -- Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansoor Ali and A.H.M. Quamruzzaman -- on a night of conspiracy and murder most foul thirty five years ago. These men, all close associates of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, each of them a pivotal presence in the articulation of Bengali national aspirations in the 1960s and instrumental in the waging of a hard-fought guerrilla war against the Pakistan occupation army in 1971, remain potent symbols of our secular democratic aspirations. They symbolise, all these years after their death, the dreams of pluralism and national self-esteem which originally impelled us into a movement for autonomy and then an all-encompassing war of national liberation.

The murder of the four national leaders in 1975 was part of a well-laid, deep-rooted conspiracy to deprive the Bengali nation of effective leadership in the aftermath of the tragic assassination of Bangabandhu in August of that year. It was aimed at crushing any sign of the nation reasserting itself through restoring the constitutionality which had been rudely interrupted by murder and mayhem. In its totality, the murder of the four leaders in the putative safe confines of Dhaka central jail was a body blow to the very principles on which the state of Bangladesh was established through the sacrifices of millions during the struggle against Pakistani occupation. The fact that these leaders were killed in prison, where they had been confined for the preceding three months by the usurper regime of Khondakar Moshtaque Ahmed, remains one of the darkest episodes in the tortuous history of this country. Worse, that justice has not been done through tracking down the architects of their murder (despite a judicial process that was as inconclusive as it was intriguing) is for the nation a grave reminder that unless the full truth behind their tragic end is revealed, it cannot reasonably be expected to move ahead towards fulfilling its goals of attaining economic progress and political stability.

In the darkest moments of Bangladesh's history, in the absence of Bangabandhu, the four national leaders took upon themselves the onerous responsibility of forging the first ever Bengali government in history and through that seminal move charting our difficult path to freedom. In the post-liberation period, all these men, under Bangabandhu's leadership, expended their sagacity and their energy in the task of rebuilding a country shattered by war and convincing the world that Bangladesh was coming level with the rest of the world.

We remember them, today and always. History has already accorded them a high niche in its wide spaces. It is for us to pick up from where they left off and immerse ourselves in the task of building a happy, prosperous country -- for ourselves and for future generations of Bengalis.

Action against air-polluting factory welcome

We expect more of it to come

THE Department of Environment which has often been at the receiving end of criticism from environment activists because of what the latter saw as non-fulfillment of the former's mandate, has now really done something to merit public appreciation. It has fined Baset Steel and Re-rolling Mills in Shyampur area in the capital a sum of Tk 10.28 lac for having released toxic fumes into the environment posing serious hazard to public health.

The location, 25 kms off the capital city, however, has had a number of such steel and re-rolling mills which have been spewing out carbon dioxide and carbon mono oxide for the better part of the day with complete impunity. It is just that Baset Steel and Re-rolling Mills has been made an example of having ignored the DoE instructions to install fume extraction device in its chimney. So, plenty of more work is to be done to make the whole lot of steel and re-rolling mills compliant of the standard pre-cautionary procedures.

Perhaps it would not be out of place here to recall this paper's plethora of reports on the woes suffered by the local residents, students and commuters due to belching of dangerous smoke, thanks to the mills that did not have environmental clearance.

For all practical purposes, what has been proceeded against, in rather mildly legal terms, is just the tip of the iceberg insofar as the existence of the air-polluting industries goes, let alone the surface polluting ones like the tannery factories. The brick kilns have been a major source of carbon emissions, although some of these have turned to environment friendly manufacturing processes.

It is good to see that the DoE has a monitoring and enforcement wing which is bringing a dynamic facet to the DoE's otherwise impassive image. We can see that it needs a huge injection of capacity building, which can be a shot in its arm.



Tajuddin Ahmed



Kamruzzaman



Monsur Ali



Syed Nazrul Islam

The questions around November 1975

Perhaps there will never be any answers. Perhaps those who should have explained things, should indeed have played their part in averting all that colossal tragedy, will not speak to us at all. Many of them are dead. Many others pass slowly into old age. The curtain of silence which descended on the country in 1975 may never be lifted.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

NOVEMBER remains a potent reminder for the people of Bangladesh of how much they lost in terms of collective self-esteem in 1975. It is also, when you reflect after all these years on the macabre incidents that pushed us down the precipice in the three months between the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the murder of the four leading lights of the 1971 Mujibnagar government, a moment for us to raise all those questions to which we have never received any answers.

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Think back on all the mysterious goings on in the first week of November 1975. Khaled Musharraf and his fellow officers struck a good blow against the assassin-majors and colonels on November 3. The objective was to restore the chain of military command that had rudely been interrupted on August 15. Here you ask yourself: should that chain not have been restored immediately after it became clear that the conspirators had murdered Bangabandhu and his family?

Senior officers in the armed forces, especially in the army, had ample time to organise resistance to the assassins. The command structure at the highest levels, which included K.M. Shafiqullah, Ziaur Rahman and Khaled Musharraf, could have moved swiftly into arresting the coup leaders and ensuring a take-over of the government by Vice President Syed Nazrul Islam.

But, of course, that did not happen. In the weeks that followed, General Ziaur Rahman, as the new chief of army staff, displayed not the slightest ability or willingness or both to act against the killers, by then safely ensconced at Bangabhaban under the protective shade of Khondakar Moshtaque Ahmed.

So when you come to November 3, you remember the happiness that came in knowing that General Musharraf, along with Colonel Shafaat Jamil, Colonel Huda and Major Haider, had finally gone for decisive action. But it was action punctuated by a whole series of loopholes. Observe the new tragedy unfolding alongside what we thought was a triumph of good over evil.

Khaled Musharraf and his loyalists simply did not know, even as they stormed the gates of power, that the men who had murdered Bangabandhu

in August had killed once again. Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, M. Mansoor Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman had been shot and bayoneted to death, in the nocturnal hours, inside Dhaka Central Jail.

You ask yourself: why did this group of experienced, patriotic soldiers not make sure that even as they took charge their followers would ensure that these imprisoned national leaders would remain safe? What happened on November 3 was an eerie interplay of light and shadow. In the light we spotted a new dawn. The shadow showed us things spectral as the Mujibnagar men were silenced on the orders of those preparing to make an exit from Bangabhaban.

Musharraf and his men, in a new twist which demonstrated their weak grasp of realities, then let the killers and their families fly off into exile in Bangkok. The new regime chanced upon the corpses of the Mujibnagar leaders too late.

The questions keep piling up. When Khaled Musharraf emerged triumphant through confining Ziaur Rahman to the latter's home in the cantonment, why did he and his loyalists keep intact the deposed army chief's telephone links to the outside world? It was a mistake for which Musharraf would pay heavily. Zia was able to get in touch with Colonel Abu Taher, who then moved with alacrity to organise soldiers opposed to Musharraf and eventually bring him down.

Amazingly, Musharraf stayed busy in long negotiations at Bangabhaban to make certain the country would be his to control. He had little idea that troops from outside Dhaka were marching to the capital and that soldiers inside Dhaka cantonment were busily distributing leaflets portraying him as an Indian agent.

There are other questions. Khaled Musharraf took over on November 3. Why did he not inform the country immediately of the change? And why did Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television maintain a surreal silence for days before the country would know of the new realities?

Khondakar Moshtaque was not ousted on November 3. Not until November 6 did we know that Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem had succeeded the usurper at Bangabhaban. A coup is always a speedy, lightning affair. In this case, Musharraf and his men made their coup a long, lingering, laid-back happening. Our question is simple: why?

And what prevented the new order, if it was at all a new order, from going after the newsman who hours before the murder of the four national leaders on November 3 had told the world, falsely as it turned out, of the interception of a letter from the Indian authorities suggesting a freeing of the men and the formation of a new government under their leadership? The journalist was never able to produce the letter. His claim was never investigated.

You have another question that is once more a recalling of high tragedy: who authorised the murder of Khaled Musharraf, Huda and Haider on the morning of November 7? Many of the officers and soldiers who put these brave freedom fighters to death are still around. Justice demands that they be brought before the law, that high treason be penalised in constitutionally ordained ways.

(Today is the 35th anniversary of the murder of four national leaders in November 1975).

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Prime Minister's proposed visit to Japan

Relationship with Japan has become one of the priorities of successive Bangladesh governments. The heads of the government of Bangladesh, irrespective of their political affiliations, invariably visited Japan and met with Japanese leaders to strengthen relations in every possible sector.

HARUN UR RASHID

IT is reported that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will pay a three-day official visit to Japan from November 28, following an invitation extended by Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

The visit is timely, and is an important one because Japan has been a significant development partner of Bangladesh since 1972. It is reported that several agreements are likely to be concluded for projects in Bangladesh.

Japan opened its embassy in Dhaka in March, 1972 after according recognition to Bangladesh on February 10, 1972. Soon after the opening of the embassy the Japanese government sent Takashi Hayakawa to Bangladesh to assess the needs of the new nation, followed by a team of Japanese experts. Japan came forward with aid, trade and investment in Bangladesh.

Relationship with Japan has become one of the priorities of successive Bangladesh governments. The heads of the government of Bangladesh, irrespective of their political affiliations, invariably visited Japan and met with Japanese leaders to strengthen relations in every possible sector.

It may be recalled that in October 1973, Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who visited Japan had laid the solid foundation of bilateral relations. In 1975, their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince

and Crown Princess of Japan visited Bangladesh.

Subsequently, all heads of government of Bangladesh visited Japan to strengthen bilateral relations. President Zia visited Japan in April, 1978, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 1997 and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in 2005.

Japanese assistance to Bangladesh continues to be multi-faceted, involving sectors like, infrastructure, energy, education, healthcare, human resource development, agriculture, and institutional capacity building. Japan also provides funds to NGOs for projects that are directed toward welfare of the poor.

Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), a conglomerate of Japan's Export-Import Bank and Official Aid Agency, is a key player in channeling development assistance to Bangladesh. Japan's official development assistance has three components -- grant aid, technical co-operation and loans.

The Meghna Bridge was built at the cost of \$7.9 billion with the Japanese assistance. This is perhaps the single largest project with Japanese assistance anywhere in the world.

In 2009, Japan provided \$800,000 for technical assistance for the construction of the 5.5 kilometre long Padma Bridge, and the JBIC has committed to provide about \$300 million for the same purpose.

Japan is keen to support the power sector in Bangladesh after completion of formulation of the ongoing compre-

hensive power development master plan for attaining stable power supply up to 2030. JICA is reportedly conducting the formulation of the master plan on the basis of diversification of fuel resources to be completed by the end of this year. It is reported that necessary technology transfer from Japan would be carried out in the master plan.

Japan's contribution to humanitarian programmes after each natural disaster in Bangladesh has always been substantial. Japan is often the largest donor.

In 2009, State Foreign Secretary of Japan Ms. Seiko Hashimoto visited Bangladesh and disclosed that Bangladesh had been included in a part of the Japanese prime minister's flagship project, "Cool Earth Partnership," at a time when global climate change has had adverse effects on Bangladesh.

Japan's International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has agreed to provide Tk.490 crore as budgetary support for the next three years to cope with environment related disasters, and will cancel a debt of Tk.700 crore from its Debt Cancellation Fund.

Japanese Ambassador Tamotsu Shinotsuka, on December 17, 2009, reportedly stated that restoration of damaged embankments, dredging of rivers, construction of monorail network in Dhaka and development of renewable resources were some of the areas in which Japan could provide assistance to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh figured in the consideration of many Japanese investors for her strategic location in the mouth of the Bay of Bengal and as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. Japanese investment in Bangladesh ranks 4th among the foreign investors in the country.

So far, about 146 projects with 100% investment or joint venture between Bangladesh and Japanese companies

have been registered with the BOI, amounting to \$1,193,769 million. In 2009, Japanese telecom giant KDD entered the Bangladesh market, acquiring 50% stake in BracNet, a leading local internet service provider (ISP).

An important characteristic of Bangladesh's relationship with Japan is the way in which diversification of bilateral economic relationship may develop, in which the full potential of cooperation can be realised for mutual benefit in trade, business and infrastructure.

During the visit, Bangladesh may request Japan to assist in the following ways:

- To invest in Bangladesh's priority sectors of development, especially in infrastructure projects;
- To establish Bangladesh-Japanese Business Forum for opportunities in setting up joint ventures in the private sector;
- To build partnership with Japanese industry in various fields, including establishing outlets in Bangladesh for manufacturing parts for Japanese industries;
- To transfer technology and funds to exploit renewable energy sources, such as solar, tidal waves and winds;
- To help human resources development for earthquake disasters.

Against this background, the visit of the Bangladesh prime minister will be a milestone in bilateral cooperation in diverse fields. Furthermore, both countries may cooperate in addressing regional and global challenges confronting them with pragmatism and imagination. It is clear that both countries can and should do more together. This is an aspiration that people of both countries share.

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