

## Editor's Note

As every year, this year too we are commemorating the loss of the most brilliant of our journalists, academics, educationists, humanists and social workers. All of them were luminaries of our intellectual firmament. They were victims of a planned elimination strategy chalked up by the Pakistani occupation forces, and carried out by their cohorts, the Razakaars and Al-Badars, on the eve of our victory in 1971. The idea was to deprive the newly emerging nation of its brain and its soul.

Those we lost during those fateful days of 1971 cannot be replaced nor their contributions to the nation replicated in full measure. These were men and women who had been associated with the struggle for the rights of the Bengalis from the very seminal stages of our freedom struggle soon after 1947, when our rights were trampled by the might of a cruel and callous regime uncaring to the rightful demands of the majority people of the country. It is for the succeeding generations to learn from the lives of these people and draw inspiration from their sacrifices, and emulate their works as much as possible.

On this very painful day, while we pay our homage to the martyred intellectuals we would also like to convey our heartfelt sympathies to their families who have had to bear the loss personally, a loss that can never be made up, a sorrow that cannot be forgotten.

In this supplement we publish a collection of articles some of which are reminiscences, while some are accounts of colleagues and friends and very close relatives which shed light on the persona and the qualities of some of those we lost on this day forty-one years ago.

--Editor

## Crippling a nation

DR RAFIQUK ISLAM

**I**N 1971 the peace committees were set up to repress the pro-Liberation War Bengalis. Added to this problem were the Razaakars who were composed of the Bengali black sheep. The Al-Shams and EPCAF were composed of the Biharis. And that was not all, secret death squads like the Al-Badr were also set up in which there were many Dhaka University (DU) students also. These cultural Razaakars had prepared the list of those intellectuals and professionals who were actively working for the liberation of the land from within the beleaguered country, and handed that list over to Major General Rao Farman Ali. The Al-Badr had secretly picked up these intellectuals towards the end of the War. These people were first taken to the torture chamber at Mohammadpur Physical Training Centre where they were brutally tortured. Later, they were taken to the killing grounds in Rayer Bazaar and Mirpur.

The Al-Badr was comparable to Hitler's fascist Nazi Gestapo or an SS force, whose job it was to eliminate the Jewish intellectuals. The Liberation War of Bangladesh commenced with the killing of the teachers of DU, and authors and journalists. It is to be noted that it also ended with the brutal killings of DU teachers and the country's leading authors, journalists, doctors, engineers and teachers.

Dead bodies of many of those who were killed in Rayer Bazaar could not be identified. Those that were killed in Mirpur and buried in mass graves were later identified and re-buried next to the Dhaka University mosque.

Rayer Bazaar was then an inundated area because there was no flood-protection embankment. Those intellectuals who were killed on 14 December, 1971 were left in a derelict brickfield that

was submerged in water. The dead bodies were left to be eaten by dogs and vultures and had been rotten and disfigured in such a manner that it was not possible to identify the bodies of Munier Chowdhury, Mofazzal Haider Chowdhury, Shahidullah Kaiser etc. While looking for Shahidullah Kaiser after liberation, Zaheer Raihan disappeared from the Mirpur area.

We came to know about the Mirpur killing ground long after Independence. And it was done

leave Dhaka even after they were repeatedly warned by the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro.

I was asked the same question by Justice Abu Syed Chowdhury, after his return from London, at the Hatirpool residence of Professor Munier Chowdhury. I tried to make them understand that these intellectuals were not living in their own residences during the closing stages of the war. All of them were hiding, yet they were found out and picked up by the killers. This could not have been

humanity were committed for which nobody has been tried yet. Although the university authorities were forced to take action against a few teachers and staff, they were subsequently rehabilitated by the court or through political influence.

The killing of the intellectuals had left such an indelible mark on our minds, particularly on the teachers and students of the Bengali Department, that for us the most important task was to preserve the memory of the martyred intellectuals. And from these thoughts we had buried our colleagues killed in Mirpur beside the university mosque. The initiative to observe December 14 as Martyred Intellectuals Day every year was taken by the Bengali Department of Dhaka University. And from December 14, 1972, the practice of observing the Day by the Bengali Department through placing of wreaths on the graves beside the DU mosque and at Jagannath Hall, and also at Mirpur and Mohammadpur killing fields was started. The contribution of Dhaka University to the Liberation war of Bangladesh is indeed glorious.

During the time of the first tenure of Sheikh Hasina's government an appropriate monument was built at the Rayer Bazaar Buddhijibi graveyard as a memorial to the martyred intellectuals. But regrettably, except for December 14 of every year this historic memorial is left uncared and unattended for the rest of the 364 days.

At present, the martyred intellectual memorial built in memory of the brightest sons of the soil is being used for all kinds of anti-social activities. This is a disgrace for the nation.

The writer is Professor Emeritus, University of Liberal Arts.

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with the help of a bus driver of EPRTC, whose bus was used to carry the intellectuals to the killing ground. A police DSP helped find the driver and bring him over to Dhaka from a village in Tangail. The driver then helped identify these dead bodies. They were buried after performing postmortem and the religious rites. After the Namaz-e-Zanaza I was asked by a very agitated Tajuddin Ahmed, the Prime Minister of Mujib Nagar government, as to why these intellectuals did not

possible by a foreign army if their colleagues, neighbours and students were not behind this.

Is it incomprehensible that only because of differences of opinion, those of us who were our colleagues, neighbours or students would secretly find out my hiding place and pass it on to Major General Rao Farman Ali through the Academy of Pakistan Studies?

It is unbelievable but true that between March 25 and December 16, 1971, such crimes against

