What We've Lost

Each year we commemorate the Martyred Intellectuals Day on December 14. On the 42nd anniversary of this day, *the Star* Magazine looks at contributions of some of these remarkable individuals in an attempt to understand how the country would be if they had lived.

UPASHANA SALAM



A sculpture depicting the killings of the intellectuals in 1971.

December 14, 1971. Mere days before our independence, Pakistani troops systematically rounded up, tortured and killed most of the brightest minds in the yet to be free East Pakistan. This final act of atrocity was carried out in the hopes of destroying the future of the country, to maim the nation permanently. Contrary to the Pakistani regime's expectations, Bangladesh survived this blow, and it continues to survive several other attacks on its existence. But the scars remain and so does the question: Would things be different had we not lost the very people who seeded the idea of nationalism in every Bengali heart?

How aware are we about their respective contributions that made them special targets of the Pakistani regime? Each of the martyred intellectuals was instrumental in the fight for liberation. However, not many of us are aware that each one of them was remarkably talented in their own fields. It wasn't chance that brought them to the attention of the Pakistani dictators; they were chosen because they were the cream of the crop, representing the educated, cultured, erudite section of a subjugated population.

Munier Chowdhury, for instance, is mostly remembered as one of the most outspoken critics of the Pakistani regime, but not many people know that Chowdhury redesigned and modernised the keyboard of the Bangla typewriter in collaboration with Remington typewriters of the then East Germany in 1965. Over the years, his creation, the 'Munier Optima' keyboard, paved the way for further steps in improving the Bangla keyboard.

Always a revolutionary, Chowdhury was jailed for two years for his involvement in the Language Movement in 1952. Interestingly, even though he was allowed to continue his education at Dhaka