

Rashomon and the murder of Major General Abul Manzur, Bir Uttam

Second part of second installment

LAWRENCE LIFSCHELTZ

(iii) The Special Operation

The Nayaks and Subedars whose testimonies were taken by the CID describe being gathered together on the evening of June 1, 1981 by Captain Kazi Emdadul Haque, and told they were to be part of a "special operation".

According to recent press reports, Captain Emdad was an active duty officer at the time of these events in Chittagong. Emdad's role is described by the five rank-and-file soldier in the affidavits and testimony that they provided to the CID.

We are not publishing the names of the soldiers because we feel it is important to keep their identities confidential. We say this, even though, their names are undoubtedly known to General Ershad and his co-accused. Yet, it is our duty not to make public their names. Unlike others whose names we do reveal the more vulnerable of the soldiers in the Bangladeshi social hierarchy places them in greater jeopardy.

There is also another reason for discretion. It is clear from these testimonies and the testimony of various officials that it was the plan of senior military officers to create a false narrative, a bogus story that implicated these soldiers in Manzur's murder, thus deflecting attention away from any direct involvement of high-ranking military officers. If these testimonies are accurate, it is clear that this group of Subedars and Nayeks were being meticulously set up as scapegoats, whereby senior officers could later blame them for Manzur's death.

According to the testimony of Subedar #1: "Captain Emdad [later Major] selected some of us for a 'special operation' and said that an important order has been issued by the military top brass. Major General Manzur was under police custody at Hathazari Thana. We had to bring him from there. On our way back with the Major General, we were to stop at some convenient place within or outside the Cantonment, and then eliminate him."

Habilder #1 told the CID that after picking up Manzur their unit was told by Captain Emdad: "[We] were to bring him back and on the way he [General Manzur] should be killed at some convenient place. This order came from [the] high command. We had no option."

Subedar #2 told in his testimony: "Captain Emdad (also Company Commander of Hameed Company) briefed us about the operation. In the briefing, he said that General Manzur and his family members have been arrested by the police and are in police custody. We will have to bring them from there and finish them off at a convenient place."

The exact phrase "convenient place" is found in virtually each of the testimonies. Nayek #1 phrased it in this way: "Per the instructions from the Top Brass [according to Captain Emdad's briefing] we were to get them from there and kill Manzur Sahib at an expedient time and place as we brought him back [to the Cantonment]."

According to Habilder #1, the place that was ultimately deemed "convenient" was inside the Cantonment near the firing range: "We took General Manzur out of the jeep and walked 300 yards north, took a left turn and brought him to a hill. After reaching there, Captain Emdad talked with General Manzur in a low voice.

Then he [Emdad] asked me whether I could shoot the General. I said, "I cannot do that." He asked Nayek #2. He also refused. Finally, Nayek Malek agreed. He shot General Manzur in the head with a Chinese rifle following the order of Captain Emdad. General Manzur fell down to the ground."

Habilder #1 then describes what he next saw: "We came back to our jeep. Another jeep was already there. Two officers came out of the jeep. They were Lt. Colonel [Shamsur Rahman] Shams and Major [Mostafa] Kamaluddin [Bhuiyan]. They asked if we had finished our job. Captain Emdad responded that it had been finished. They wanted to see the dead body of General Manzur and asked Captain Emdad to go with them."

Subedar #1 describes what he saw: "Someone standing in front of the other jeep wanted to confirm if the Captain with us was Emdad. He then asked if we had done our "job". As we walked closer I identified the couple of officers there. One was Lt. Colonel Shamsur Rahman Shams and the other was Major Mostafa Kamaluddin Bhuiyan (now Lt. Colonel). They wanted to confirm the General's death first hand and wanted to go to the location where General Manzur's dead body lay. As the three officers, including Captain, Emdad, started to walk, we intervened and cautioned Captain Emdad not to go alone, and then joined the officers. As we reached the corpse of the General, Lt. Colonel Shams tested the pulse and verified death." Subedar #1 put the time "been 11 and half-past 11 [on June 1st] when Malek shot the General with his Chinese rifle."

Habilder #1 describes how after Lt. Colonel Shams "examined the dead body", the soldiers transported General Manzur's body to the CMH (Combined Military Hospital). With this task behind them, Habilder #1 said: "Leaving the dead body in the morgue, we went back to the EBRC (East Bengal Regimental Center), deposited our arms and went back to the barracks." The night's bloody "job" was over.

In light of General Ershad's constant repetitions over the years about "angry" or "agitated" soldiers having killed Manzur, Subedar #2's testimony is especially interesting when it comes to this specific aspect of the crime. According to Subedar #2: "Up until reaching the EBRC area inside the cantonment we saw no rebel or unruly civilians or soldiers anywhere. On the next day June 2, 1981, in the morning we heard that Major General Manzur was assassinated by a group of reckless soldiers."

If what Subedar #2 and his colleagues testified is true, then the "job" they did was done quietly and with little agitation. Nor, were they "irate" or "reckless". The key element for them was that they were following direct orders from the "top brass" and the "high command" which left them, as Habilder #1 put it, "no option".

Whether one of these soldiers chose to obey an illegal order to murder an army officer in their custody is an important question. To kill an officer, a rank-and-file soldier or a civilian while that person is in custody is murder. However, this is not the question or the issue being addressed here.

What needs to be focused on is the particularly curious way in which the senior officers were interacting with the soldiers under their command. Clearly, as Habilder #1 reports, he

and Nayek #2, refused to kill General Manzur when Captain Emdad allegedly asked them if they would carry out this last step of the "special operation". Habilder #1 reports that allegedly a soldier known as Nayek Malek acceded to Captain Emdad's request to shoot Manzur.

This specific aspect of the accounts given by the soldiers is intriguing. Several superior officers including Captain Emdad, Major Kamal and Lt. Colonel Shamsur Rahman are reportedly at the site of the Cantonment's firing range waiting for the "job" to be done but none of them steps forward and takes responsibility for what the Nayeks, Habilders and the Subedars were being asked to do. Why didn't Lt. Colonel Shamsur Rahman, Major Kamal or Captain Emdad step forward and do the "job" by shooting General Manzur themselves? Instead, they hang back in the shadows, waiting for verification that General Manzur has been murdered by an ordinary soldier. Why would they do this? Why was it so essential that an ordinary

this fashion with every possible legal protection provided by the military code of justice having been violated.

In fact, it appears that an official Press Release setting forth precisely the "reckless soldiers" narrative had been prepared for distribution by the "top brass". According to General Moinul Hussain Chowdhury, then Adjutant General of the Army, the DGFI was the organization tasked with getting the word out.

In his book, *Silent Witness*, General Moin states how he argued with General Ershad and Major General Mohabat Jan Choudhury, Chief of the DGFI, about their determination to publicly declare that Manzur had been involved in General Zia's murder without first conducting a thorough investigation.

Moin regarded it as absurd to make such a claim without a careful inquiry. Manzur had categorically denied to General Moin his involvement in any coup attempt against Zia during several phone calls from Chittagong on May 30th and May 31st. Nevertheless, the DGFI was determined to get their carefully scripted narrative of the Chittagong events on the airwaves.

Organizationally, the DGFI appears to have been directing all stages of the "special operation". Subedar #2's testimony indicates that he was rather surprised the next morning [June 2nd] hearing that "a group of reckless soldiers" had killed General Manzur. According to his testimony he hadn't seen any "reckless" soldiers when Manzur was murdered. Where did the radio get that news? On June 2, 1981 this story was all over the radio, television and print media.

The "False Flag" was fluttering in the wind. Yet according to the testimonies of the soldiers who claimed to have watched Manzur as he was murdered, there were no "reckless soldiers" present at the firing range that night. There were only soldiers who had followed orders. They had brought General Manzur from Hathazari and they had eliminated him at a "convenient place" under the watchful eyes of their superior officers. [For a discussion of how "False Flag" operations are created as part of many civil or military intelligence operations see Part II of "The Murder of Major General Abul Manzur - Bir Uttam" in *Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*, February 25, 2014.]

On this chessboard the Knights [Brigadiers & Lt. Colonels] and the Bishops [Majors & Captains] were moving their pawns [Subedars & Nayeks]. But the Knights and the Bishops were themselves being moved about on an even grander chessboard by the Army's "top brass" [Major Generals] and according to the CID charge sheet a "Lt. General" named Ershad. The "High Command" from the first day began propagating an implausible story blaming "angry soldiers" who allegedly had become enraged and killed Manzur.

As indicated, this account would allow the senior ranks to conveniently deny any possible responsibility as long as they could convincingly implicate a group of ordinary soldiers. The Attorney General in 1995, Aminul Haque, like Air Vice Marshal Sadruddin and the Inspector General of Police, ABMG Kibria, saw through this false narrative. On the morning of June 2, 1981, Sadruddin called Ershad and told him, "You have all killed General Manzur. What you have done is wrong."

Ershad replied to Sadruddin that "troops . . .

had killed" Manzur. In 1995 Sadruddin told CID investigators that on the morning of that fateful day he answered Ershad with the following words: "I replied [to Ershad]: Tell this to others. Don't ask me to believe it".

Thirty-two years later, one of General Ershad's co-accused, Lt. Colonel Mostafa Kamaluddin Bhuiyan [aka Major Kamal in 1981] is quoted in *The Dhaka Tribune* of November 21, 2013 as saying: "Some enraged people tried to snatch Manzur on the way that triggered shooting between them and the guards. At one stage Manzur was hit by bullets and died on his way to hospital." Yet, curiously the soldiers (i.e. "the guards") give a different testimony and three of the soldiers in their testimonies identify the very same Mostafa Kamaluddin Bhuiyan (then Major Kamal) as walking over to Manzur's body with Lt. Colonel Shams and Captain Emdad to verify that General Manzur was dead.

If what the soldiers said in their testimonies to the CID was true, then General Manzur did not die on the way to the hospital but was taken to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) after a Nayek Malek allegedly killed him. Perhaps, Lt. Colonel Kamaluddin [aka Major Kamal] will have an opportunity to resolve this intriguing contradiction in a Court of Law.

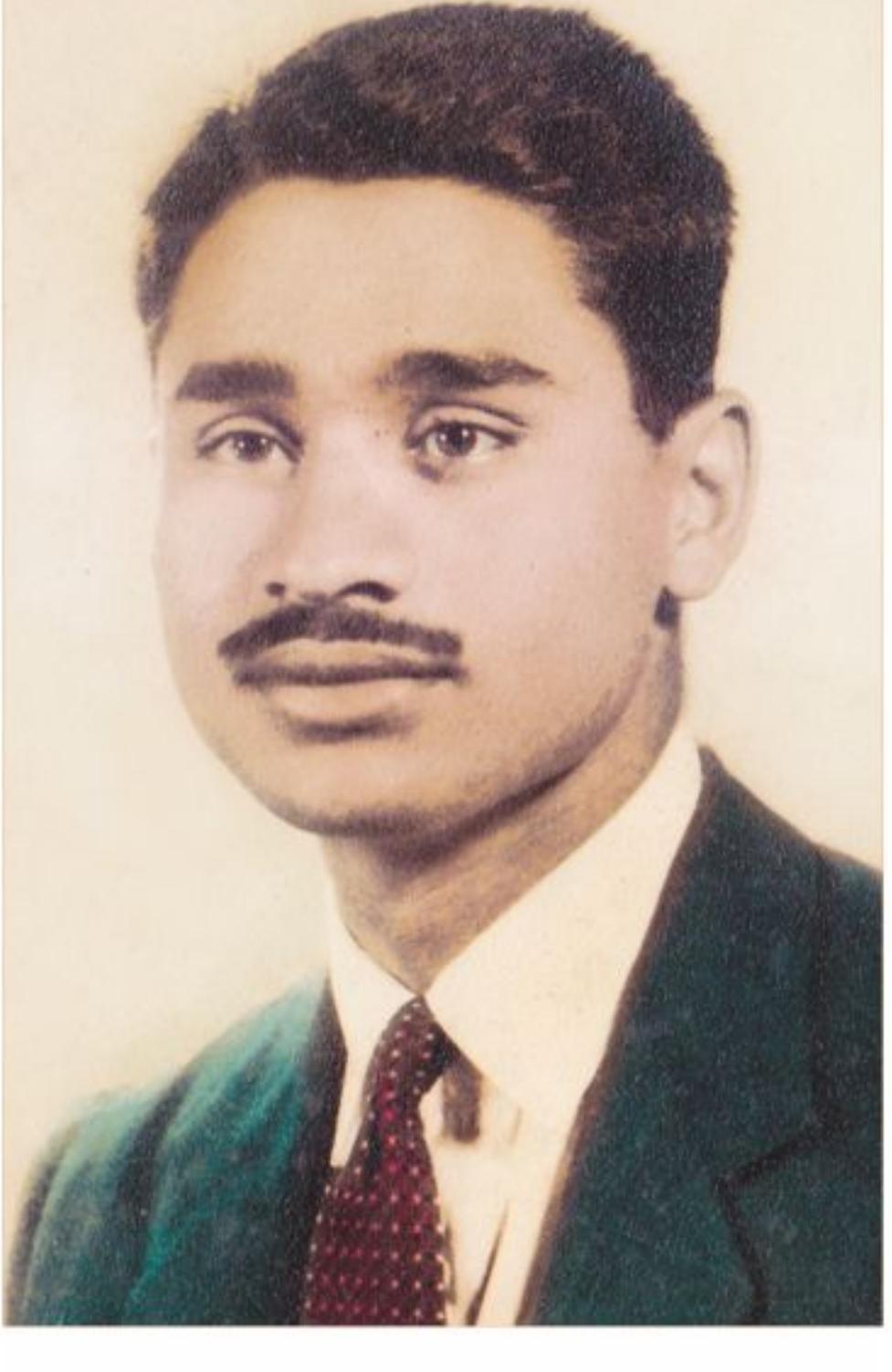
In fact, according to the testimony of the Army doctor, Colonel A.Z. Tofael, who prepared the post mortem report, it was Lt. Colonel Shams who identified General Manzur's body at the CMH. Dr. Tofael stated: "When I asked about the identification of the dead body of General Manzur, I was told that Lt. Colonel Shams had identified the dead body and handed it over to the Duty Officer Colonel Kamal." If the testimony of Nayek #2 is true, this is the same Lt. Colonel Shams who took General Manzur's pulse at the Firing Range in order to verify his death after he inquired from Captain Emdad if they had done their "job".

Colonel Tofael's testimony is interesting in another way. He categorically states that General Manzur died from having been shot by a single bullet to his head, not by "bullets" from "some enraged people" or from Manzur's "guards" shooting wildly at each other, as Lt. Colonel Mostafa Kamaluddin Bhuiyan, so colorfully claimed to *The Dhaka Tribune* in 2013.

Lt. Colonel Kamaluddin's account does not stand up to forensic scrutiny. Nor does it fit with the testimonies of the soldiers in the military unit that brought General Manzur back to the Chittagong Cantonment on the night of June 1, 1981. None of the soldiers described encountering "enraged people" who tried to "snatch" General Manzur or having to defend Manzur by firing their own weapons. By their accounts it was a quiet evening when they met up with Lt. Colonel Kamaluddin (aka Major Kamal) and his fellow officers inside the Cantonment on the night they murdered Manzur.

The writer was South Asia Correspondent of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong). He has written for *The Guardian*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *The Nation* (New York) and the BBC. He is the author and editor of several books including *Hiroshima's Shadow*, *Why Bosnia?*, and *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution*. He can be reached by email at—OpenDoor.Lifschultz@gmail.com

(To be continued)



soldier carry out the shooting?

It appears that an integral part of "the plan" involved pinning the murder on a group of ordinary soldiers. No fingerprints of any officers should be found, so to speak, at the scene of the crime. If things became complicated then identifying and blaming a group of ordinary soldiers would emerge as a plausible narrative.

If the situation required, then senior officers could blame a group of "irate" or "reckless" soldiers for killing Manzur. Who would ever believe a few lowly Subedars, Habilders and Nayeks over the word of a Captain, a Major, and a Lt. Colonel? If necessary, an "express" Field Court Martial could be organized and a few confessions could be extracted by severe torture, followed rapidly by a group hanging of all the accused. An impossible idea? A month later, thirteen young Army officers were convicted and subsequently executed in precisely

QUOTEABLE Quote

Remember, if you're headed in the wrong direction, God allows U-turns!

Allison Gappa Bottke



"Pollution and climate change are the major challenges of the 21st century. A substantial number of qualified environmental professionals are needed at home and abroad to address those challenges of the planet Earth". The Masters Programme at the Department of Environmental Science, IUB, is meant for producing competent environmental professionals.

Independent University, Bangladesh

First private university in Bangladesh, providing quality environmental education and research

Department of Environmental Science MSc in Environment Management

ADMISSION SUMMER 2014

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

- A four-year Bachelor degree in any discipline with a minimum CGPA of 2.5 in a scale of 4 or equivalent.
- Exemption from the admission test/viva for the candidates having environmental job or research experiences/IUB environmental graduates/ overseas environmental graduates

SPECIAL FEATURES

- 20-100% tuition fee waiver for the deserving candidates depending on their performance in the test/viva.
- 50% waiver on tuition fees for concurrently admitted siblings/spouse
- Payment of tuition fees on installment basis
- Evening class time (Sunday to Wednesday) from 6.30 pm- 9.30 pm

DURATION

- Fulltime students : 12 months
- Part time students : 24 months

For further information, contact:
Department of Environmental Science, IUB, Dhaka.
Room No - 9006 (9th floor), Plot 16, Block B, Bashundhara R/A, Dhaka-1222
Phone: 02-8401645-53, 02-8402065-76, Ext: 2311, Cell: 01727325552

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CRYPTOQUOTE

FSO D Q H W V W O W Q G
B V R V O F O V Q H . O T P R Q W O
K P F I O V G I B N F S O Q G P Z P S C
N V D O I S P V W O T P G S F R P .

-- E. Y D T P W O P S O Q H

3-11

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THERE WAS NEVER A CHILD SO LOVELY BUT HIS MOTHER WAS GLAD TO GET HIM TO SLEEP.

-- RALPH WALDO EMERSON



NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY

The first private university in Bangladesh

The only Bangladeshi university where all teachers have foreign Masters or Ph.D. degrees primarily from USA, Canada, UK and Australia

EMPH Admission: Summer 2014

13th Batch

For Medical & Non-Medical Graduates

Friday Program

Application Deadline

April 24, 2014

Admission Test

April 25, 2014

Majors in

- * Epidemiology * Reproductive, Maternal & Child Health
- * Health Service & Hospital Management * Disaster Management

Special Features

- All Public Health Faculty members are highly educated & trained in North American accredited internationally reputed universities
- Internship in International Organizations USAID, ICDDR, Save the Children, FHI, UNAIDS, UNFPA & WHO for career development opportunities
- USAID Competitive Fellowship opportunity for EMPH fellows of NSU
- Dissertation grants opportunity from John's Hopkins University, Water Aid & Cares
- Financial assistance up to 75% for deserving EMPH students
- Part time job opportunity for EMPH students
- Course Waiver & Credit Transfer based on academic background and experience

Special Scholarship

Provision of scholarship from Canadian IDRC & other International Organization for the deserving NSU EMPH students

Office of the Dept. of Public Health, Room # SAC 829

North South University, Bashundhara R/A, Dhaka-1229

Cell: 01911566293, 01819022642, 01715622850, 01718141182, 01927302805, 017