

REMEMBERING BANGABANDHU

Our best tribute is to implement his ideals

THE people of Bangladesh mourn today, as they have mourned all these long years since August 15, 1975, the absence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in national life. The tragic, sudden end to the life of the Father of the Nation was an ugly blow to the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh for a secular, democratic and heritage-driven society based on the noble principles of the 1971 War of Liberation.

Today, thirty nine years after that darkly vicious day, the best way for us to remember Bangabandhu will be to recall the high ideals he brought into politics through his long struggle for the rights of his fellow Bangalees. His political consistency, his clear enumeration of national goals and his long spells in prison owing to his uncompromising stand on popular rights are the ideals we in these fraught times, when forceful national leadership is called for, need to remember and revive in our individual and collective life. The dreams he fashioned through the 1960s and in post-liberation times of a Bangladesh free of corruption and ready and willing to emerge as a nation of hard-working people are ideas we need to implement in reality if our loyalty and love for him truly matter for us.

There is little question that Bangabandhu led a remarkable life, in the sense that he gave every bit of it, till the last measure, to the struggle for democratic rights. He spoke of creating the conditions where smiles would light up the faces of all citizens of Bangladesh. He envisioned the possibility of Bangladesh becoming the Switzerland of the east. He foresaw a time when the people of South Asia would leave the past behind them and stride confidently into the future. In the Third World, he could conceive of a future that would bring nations and societies together. He belonged, as Bangladesh's leader, to a new generation of statesmen in whose hands such necessary alliances as the Non-Aligned Movement would be secure.

At home, Bangabandhu's commitment to democracy, Baksal notwithstanding, was total. He was a leader who rose to the heights through his unrelenting struggle for political pluralism. The courage with which he took up the responsibility of administering Bangladesh barely weeks after the emergence of the country through a tortuous struggle for liberty would have led any other politician into despair. Bangabandhu persevered, informing the nation along the way that he needed three years to turn things around. His enemies murdered him before he could redeem his pledge to the nation.

It is these ideals we must go back to if a happy future is our goal. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave us the structure of an inclusive society resting on the principles of nationalism, secularism, socialism and democracy. It was his conviction that these principles were the fulcrum on which the overriding goal of national development would be achieved.

The Father of the Nation died too young for him to preside over a full, satisfying transition to the high goals we set for ourselves in the days of the War of Liberation. He was only fifty five when the murderers shot the life out of him. It is for us, the inheritors of his rich legacy, to pick up where he left off and go meaningfully into the task of giving his dreams the shape of substantive reality. That will be our true tribute to him. That is our pledge to ourselves today.

SERAJUL ISLAM CHOWDHURY

WHAT happened in August 1975 was a great tragedy perpetrated by an anti-people clique who did not want Bangladesh to move in the direction its people had desired it to take. The desire embodied a dream and an ideology; and for its fulfillment the people had struggled not only in 1971 but even before. The long struggle did not begin all of a sudden. It had a glorious history of its own. In December 1971 it reached a point where it was impossible for the old state not to yield to the emergence of an independent Bangladesh. What the assassins were bent upon doing was the bringing down not only of a great man but also, and not less importantly, of the ideology of secular Bengali nationalism together with the dream of a long-awaited and urgently needed social revolution. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had promoted that collective desire among, and with, the people. In mourning his death we bemoan the loss of a leader as well as of an opportunity. Sheikh Mujib died a martyr, heading the long list of those who laid down their lives to liberate the people of Bangladesh.

The assassins were a motley group comprising disgruntled army men and a section of the reactionary elements within the ruling party itself. And they acted with the silent support of the capitalist world, of which the USA was the leader. The capitalist countries had, we recall, opposed -- both morally and materially -- the formation of Bangladesh, being apprehensive of its turning to the left.

Not that the leftists at home were satisfied. Some of them were disheartened to see the new state not taking the line of non-capitalist development; others had gone underground fearing repression on account of their failure to join the War of Liberation due to their inability to see that a resolution of the class question demanded a settlement of the national question, and that the principal contradiction at that moment of history was between the people of East Bengal and the Punjabi military-bureaucratic combine that ruled Pakistan. None of the leftist groups was against a social revolution; indeed, they were fighting for it. But they did not know how to achieve that objective, which is the primary reason why they were divided among themselves, and, despite their sacrifices, were unable to take on the leadership of the Liberation War. The leftists had nothing to do with the tragedy of 1975, although the Awami League leadership thought them, quite mistakenly, to be their real enemy, ignoring the reactionaries within their own camp.

The August mayhem was a rightist affair. The whole business of conspiracy, consolidation and execution was done by the ultra rightists. The more easily identifiable anti-liberation elements, including the al-Badrs and the Razakars, were not directly involved in the operation, but their ideological kinsmen had taken upon themselves a task which those known and condemned for their activities were incapable of performing.

The Liberation War, let us remind ourselves, was not fought for the limited political aim of independence. We have had the experience of independence in 1947 enormously paid for in terms of miseries and tears, and found it to be no more than a transfer of power to the Punjabis to rule over the Bengalis. That is why, since 1952, we

had been struggling for liberation, which, we had realised, must be based on the twin recognition that the Bengalis were a nation and that national independence would never be meaningful without an accompanying social revolution. Revolutions have come and gone, but society, which is where people live and expect to thrive, has not changed; it has remained as class-ridden and exploitative as it has since the 1793 Permanent Settlement enforced by the British. We needed and wanted a real revolution, ensuring a democratic transformation of the state and society, guaranteeing equality of rights and opportunities to every citizen. The four state principles adumbrated in the original constitution of Bangladesh indicated the goal of a social revolution, for which the first step to be taken was secularism and socialism had to be the ultimate goal.

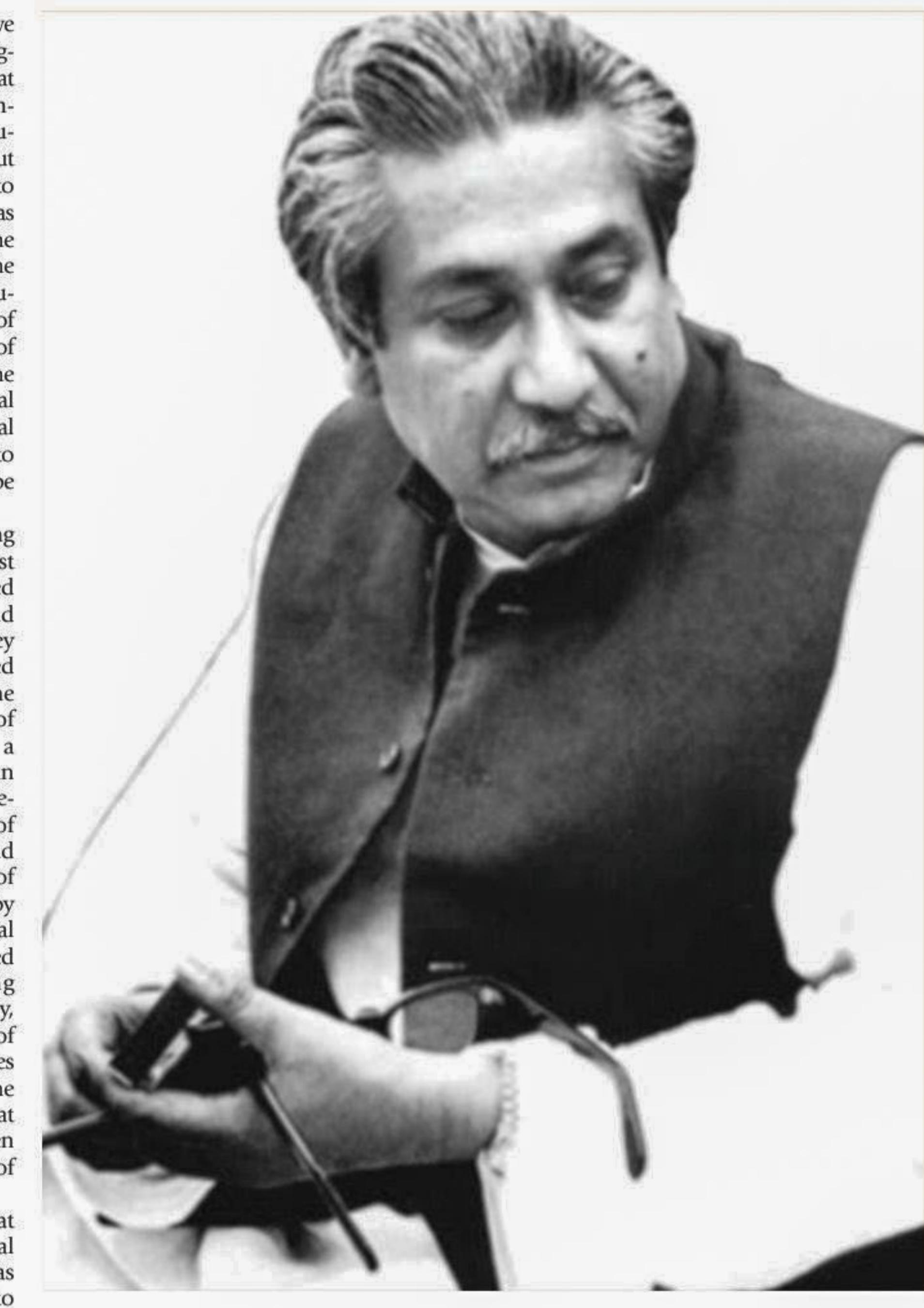
And it is this possibility of a liberating revolution which the assassins of August wanted to destroy. Those who succeeded them in the running of the state did not find it necessary to make apologies. Briskly they went about achieving their self-appointed task of altering the whole character of the constitution, eliminating the principles of secularism and socialism. Promulgating a martial law order, General Ziaur Rahman removed secularism and put above the preambles words which read: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful," and inserted within it a pledge "in the name of almighty Allah." Socialism was replaced by the innocuous idea of 'economic and social justice.' The amended constitution negated Bengali nationalism by introducing Bangladeshi nationalism in its place. Clearly, the purpose was not to widen the definition of nationalism to include the small nationalities to which recognition has been denied in the constitution, but to do away with the idea that the Bengalis are a nation. Not satisfied even with that, General Ershad went to the extent of introducing Islam as the state religion.

It is not without significance that what was called 'a historical struggle for national liberation' in the original document has been changed by Ziaur Rahman's decree into 'historical war for national independence,' suggesting that we fought for political independence and not for social liberation. There is absolutely no reason to doubt that those who made the alteration were unaware of the difference between independence and liberation. They wanted to make us forget that we had fought not for another independence of the 1947 type, but for emancipation of the people through a total transformation of society. What these anti-people elements wanted was not a secular state and a democratic society but a smaller edition of what was once known as Pakistan.

Even bourgeois democracy, not to speak of the one of socialist dispensation, demands as its first requisite secularism, meaning, as it does, complete separation between state and religion; and that exactly is what has been denied to us by the rulers who commanded the state after August 1975. What surprises us is that the Awami League, which had provided leadership in the War of Liberation, has found it convenient to remain silent on the question, giving us the impression that it does not consider the restoration of secularism to be an important issue. Even in a land where corruption and crime are being committed everywhere and every day, a more grievous crime than the removal of secularism from the constitution would be difficult to find. The action has not harmed any particular

person, group or institution but has struck at the very foundations of the state which had been founded on the rejection of the non-secular two-nation theory on which Pakistan had based itself. That Pakistan was a curse and a nightmare has been made obvious to those who are now living in that broken political state. We have all sympathy for them in their suffering. We ourselves came to the knowledge about the monstrous character of that state as early as 1952, having paid much too much in terms of blood and tears for allowing ourselves to be led into voting for it in 1946 by our leaders. M.A. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, had himself realised the mistake he had made even before the state was set up and had discarded the two-nation theory at the first opportunity that came to him, namely, the occasion to speak before the constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947.

Looking at the happenings in Bangladesh since August 1975 from a slightly different perspective, one could say that the progress we are supposed to have made amounted really to a widening of the road for capitalism to flourish. The collective dream of liberation



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was for the establishment of democracy in the country, and it has to be admitted that there is not much of a difference between proper democracy and socialism. That collective dream has been shattered, to be replaced by one of personal aggrandisement. This change has been hastened by the despicably heinous act of the assassins of August 15. Today, the people at large are paying for the prosperity of a few. And, very naturally, mainstream politics has become a shameless game of plunder in which the ruling class, the members of which are related to one another by social and even family ties, has engaged in cut-throat competition for the acquisition of money and power.

But mere mourning would not do. It may prove to be counterproductive, creating despair. What we have to undertake is the continuation of the struggle to achieve the realisation of the collective dream of a social revolution. To give up the struggle would be to degrade ourselves further than we have already done.

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Conspirators and Bangladesh

ZAHID HOSSAIN

the history of our independence, which started with the language movement in 1952. The conspirators knew how popular Bangabandhu Sk. Mujib was and that was why they were afraid of even his dead body, so they sent it to Tungipara.

Bangabandhu was undoubtedly a hundred percent Bengalee. He was also a true Muslim. His beloved Sonar Bangla had no room for exploitation in the name of religion, caste or creed. Democratic principles were the basis of governance and secularism was one of the state principles. But those ideals were not acceptable to those who opposed our War of Independence and could not accept the birth of a secular nation called Bangladesh.

And thus the conspiracy started -- the conspiracy not only to physically eliminate Bangladesh but to have a new Bangladesh with some fundamental principles and concepts of their choice and not the Bangladesh Bangabandhu founded in 1971. The first phase of the conspiracy was the physical elimination of Bangabandhu. The conspirators took it for granted that once they were successful in physically eliminating him, the major obstacle on their way to establishing a new Bangladesh would be removed. They were able to execute their sinister plan on August 15, 1975.

But for the general people of Bangladesh who, under the dynamic leadership of Bangabandhu, made supreme sacrifices for achieving independence and a homeland of their own, it was a day of mourning, a day of expressing heartfelt gratitude and acknowledgement to the great leader who is our real national pride who gave

us an identity as a nation.

After August 15, 1975, the conspirators immediately changed the name of Bangladesh Betar to Radio Bangladesh and tried their best to make maximum use of it in propagating their anti-people designs to negate the ideals for which Bangladesh was founded. They gradually started re-opening some of the issues which the seventy five million people of this country had settled finally in 1971 through their supreme sacrifices. Use of religion for political purposes was a dirty trick and those who used it during the Pakistan days were once again found active in pursuing their old game in the national politics of Bangladesh.

Since the spirit of our independence was the main target and all their conspiracies mainly centred around this, the conspirators who captured power after the killing of Bangabandhu engaged all the agencies to find out the officials who were pro-Pakistani and belonged to anti-Bangladesh lobby for posting in the key positions like home secretary, foreign secretary, cabinet secretary etc. Pakistani collaborators and members of al-Badar and al-Shams were identified and invited to Bangabhaban and other government offices, and their support and cooperation were sought to form a new political party. The aim was very simple -- to change the ideals for which Bangladesh was created by using the services and support of this known section of our people. A section of our social elites who became well-known for their anti-people roles during the period of Pakistan and who actively collaborated with the military junta in 1971 were

given key positions, both political and administrative. Shah Azizur Rahman, who was sent to UN for opposing the cause of Bengalees, was made prime minister of the country and Razakars like Abdul Alim and Maulana Mannan were made ministers.

As their target and the evil design were fixed and the strategy was also chalked out in a planned way, the conspirators consolidated their position before starting their operation to change the spirit of independence. They organised the so called "yes" or "no" referendum which actually made the country a laughing stock in the world media.

And the real game of the ugly design started after that. The conspirators hired people like Khandakar Abdul Hamid, Taslim Hossain, Salauddin Ahmed and few others who were known for their anti-Bengali role during the War of Independence in 1971, to introduce Bangladeshi nationalism in place of Bengali nationalism only to confuse the people about their cultural identity. The ugly motive behind this heinous step was clearly to distort the history and culture of the Bengalees.

Thus the conspirators who played their dirty games during the Independence War in 1971 and tried to make some underhand dealings with a foreign agency nullifying the efforts of the freedom fighters, continued their anti-state activities after 1972 as well. Bangabandhu had all the information. But it was the goodness of his heart and the magnanimity of his character that prevented him from taking actions against those who had been with him for long.

The sky of Bangladesh is now apparently free from the dark cloud of conspiracies, especially after the annulment of Indemnity Act and subsequent trial of the killers of the Father of the Nation and the four national leaders in jail. Many of the known collaborators and conspirators were brought to political limelight by the martial law administrators. Fortunately, the promulgation of martial law has been declared illegal and unconstitutional by the higher courts.

More importantly, the trial processes for the war crimes and acts against humanity during the War of Independence in 1971 have also been started on the basis of the unanimous decision by the present parliament. As a result, many of the known politicians who opposed the Independence War and acted as collaborators of Pakistan army in killing, arson and looting will soon be put under trial.

Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina is now the prime minister of Bangladesh and those conspirators and their associates are once again active to create obstacles on our way to economic development, political stability and welfare of the people.

Therefore, it is high time for taking effective deterrent steps against those known conspirators and their associates. On National Mourning Day, let us take a pledge to do our best to complete the unfinished task of Bangabandhu in building a Sonar Bangla. And this is the only way we can express our heartfelt gratitude to the greatest son of the soil.

The brutal assassins killed the Father of the Nation not only to capture power. They had a long-drawn plan to reverse the history of our independence, which started with the language movement in 1952.

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