

GORY ASSASSINATIONS

and a daunting investigation

Jail Killing Day

We deeply mourn

WE join the nation in mourning the death of Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Captain (Rtd.) Mansur Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman, the four national leaders who were brutally murdered in the Dhaka Central Jail, 40 years ago. They were the trusted lieutenants of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and who steered the tumultuous phase of the liberation struggle and the nine months of liberation war that culminated in the ultimate victory of the nation on December 16, 1971. We also recall with gratitude the yeoman service they had rendered to the fledgling nation in the aftermath of the country's independence.

It was on this day of 1975 that these four valiant sons of the soil were killed by a band of mutineers who had usurped power after assassinating Bangabandhu and 19 members of his family. We are still bearing the brunt of the politics of violence and murder that these incidents had fawned. The ploy of the murderers was to throw the country in an abyss of darkness which they had temporarily succeeded in doing. It is indeed a blot on our conscience that it was not until the first Sheikh Hasina-led government was formed in 1996 that the perpetrators of one of the most dastardly murders in our history were brought to book. We thank her for giving us the closure that we, as a nation, badly needed. We would want to see the case concluded by bringing back the killers who are abroad and implementing the verdict of the court. Only then can the souls of the four slain national leaders rest at peace.

Hanif's insensate remarks

This is as low as politics can get

WE are somewhat assuaged by Mahbubul Alam Hanif's apology for the remarks he had made on the comments of Professor Fazlul Huq, father of late Dipan. However, the apology came after millions of people had heard the humiliating remarks for a good ten hours. Regrettably, apologies cannot heal the wounds such comments inflict.

The Professor had said after the brutal killing of his son that he did not want the trial of his killers but only that good sense should prevail. But Hanif associated this comment with the professor harbouring the same political ideology as of those involved in the killing. Such remarks are not only absurd but also unbecoming of a person holding a high post in a party like that of the Awami League.

To convolute the comments of a grieving father and ascribe a meaning to it, that he is in sync with the ideology of the killers, is not only the most brutal blow to a person who is still to come to grips with an irreparable loss but also a stark exposition of the level politics has been brought down to by insensitive politicians whose tongues seem to have gotten better of their heads when, for people like Hanif, the opposite should be the case.

We wonder whether our politicians have been divested of all human attributes so much so that they do not hesitate even to make a man's grief part of political rhetoric. Did he give a thought for a moment as to what compelled Professor Huq to say what he had said in respect of the killers and the politicians?

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD
NURUL HUDA

THE gory killings of four national leaders by misguided soldiers inside Dhaka Central Jail in the early hours of November 3, 1975, remain an indelible shame on the national psyche.

The compounding tragedy in the whole transaction is that the brutality and shame did not stir the national conscience until a favourable political scenario emerged in 1996.

The four slain leaders, namely, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, AHM Kamruzzaman and Captain Mansur Ali were no ordinary men because for them public service was more important than life itself. They had immense concern for public welfare and demonstrated their will to fight valiantly for justice.

When it was a question of displaying unflinching devotion to Bangabandhu and his ideals, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, AHM Kamruzzaman and Captain Mansur Ali were second to none. They did not compromise with the murderous cabal to earn freedom or a cozy position in the establishment while others capitulated in the most shameful manner.

Records show that they could have bargained with the assassins and their patrons but they did not wilt. This was a rare instance of displaying inner strength; a necessity for establishing truth under adversity.

The tragedy in Bangladesh is that we, as a nation, have not been able to come out of our self-centeredness and it was, thus, no surprise that it took 21 years to officially recognise the culpability of a heinous offence committed in the most blatant manner.

Cynics say that we have in our midst far too many "boneless wonders." With such men, expediency is all. The four slain leaders, however, were men who had the courage not to submit or yield and were like rocks in the wilderness of shifting sands.

The historical significance of the sacrifice of the four national leaders

cannot be lost sight of. We have to admit that by lingering for a painfully long time in taking legal action we have made ourselves small. Must we not admit that vigorous societies have to harbour a certain extravagance of objectives, so that men wander beyond the safe provision of personal gratifications?

As mentioned, the State sprang into

action to investigate the ghastly misdeeds only when a favourable scenario emerged. However, the task was not easy by any account. The First Information Report (FIR) had mentioned the name of only one person as accused and four accomplices were mentioned as unknown.

Significantly, the original FIR could not

be located despite the best efforts given in tracing them from the concerned Court, police station and CID office. Finally, a hand-written copy of the original FIR was located at Police Headquarters.

The investigator of the gruesome crime thus had to commence his work with a handicap. Curiously, though the FIR was lodged on November 4, 1975, at Lalbagh

and consequently many relevant supportive papers and direct evidence just disappeared much to the prejudice of the prosecution.

Some of the jail employees of the relevant period had been located from different places around the country after prolonged efforts and the complainant of the incident, the very old former DIG Prison, was traced from Sandwip Island to prove the FIR.

Some old files had been retrieved from the prison records but copy of the inquest and the post mortem reports of the slain leaders could not be traced.

The then establishment instituted a Judicial Commission after the incident but the said Commission could not complete their inquiry. The relevant file regarding this Commission could not be traced at the ministry as some interested quarters were suspected to have caused its disappearance.

Admittedly, the investigator's job was made very difficult.

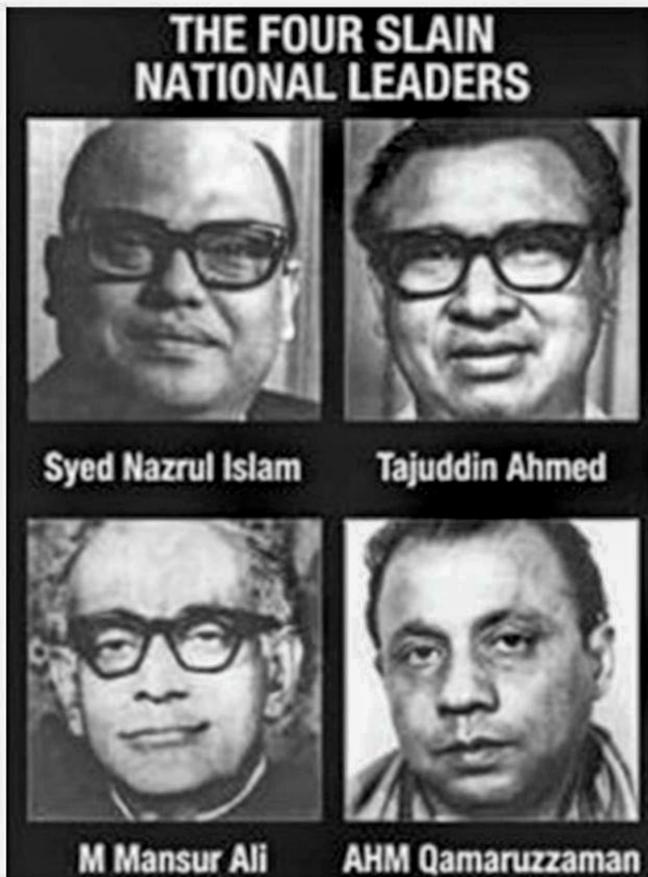
The misguided soldiers who committed the atrocities were rewarded with diplomatic postings. The job of tracing them and bringing them under the law was a challenging task. These accused persons were staying in Bangabhaban, the seat of power, and from there they proceeded to Dhaka Central Jail to commit the massacre.

After a lapse of so many years it was extremely difficult to trace the relevant files in these sensitive places. Equally difficult was locating important exhibits from Radio Bangladesh.

Despite all the odds, encumbrances and limiting factors, the case ended in charge sheet against 21 accused persons, including 14 absconders. The trial Court awarded death sentence to 3 accused persons and sentenced 12 to life imprisonment, thanks to the exacting and gritty investigation of Mr. Abdul Kahhar Akand, the then Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police. The trial was held in the ordinary Court of law where defence enjoyed all the statutory privileges.

Of significant consequence is the fact that our socio-political situation turned for the worse with the tragic murder of the Father of the Nation and four national leaders in 1975.

The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.



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Skilled manpower shortage



SYED MANSUR
HASHIM

THE government has set a target to earn US\$50 billion from readymade garments (RMG) by the year 2021. While that sounds very nice, little has been done to address the great shortage in skilled manpower that is already plaguing the sector. Indeed, going by a report prepared by the Directorate of Textile (DoT), Bangladesh had a shortage of about 110,000 people in RMG in 2014 and this gap is set to increase to about 180,000 by the year 2021. Reportedly, the RMG sector employs some 20,000 foreign nationals in various positions in the sector and they are mostly from India and Sri Lanka. As the shortage increases in the coming years, it is expected that the bulk of the shortage will be addressed by employing more foreign nationals. Needless to say, this is hardly a satisfactory state of affairs.

With Bangladesh emerging as the second largest apparels producer in the world, expansion of the manufacturing base has not been matched by a growth in human resources. This is all too evident in the slow pace of implementing a government plan to set up around two dozen textile engineering colleges and vocational institutes, which once operational, would go a long way to producing the requisite number of textile engineers and technologists the textile industry requires. Given that a dearth of

25 percent exists in the skilled category, the RMG sector has had to resort to employing foreign workers. This in itself is a stop gap measure and ends up costing the industry much more than it would, had there been local talent available.

Without an abundant pool of trained workers, the industry cannot evolve and it cannot upgrade. Although it has been pointed out by RMG industry leaders that it will take Vietnam (currently in 3rd place in the RMG world order) another decade to match Bangladesh in manufacturing prowess and contest our position, one cannot forget that Vietnam is party to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Bangladesh is not. If we are, for whatever reason, unable to get on board the TPP, which is coming up for renegotiation with the United States at the end of the month, we will have to contend with Vietnam in 5 to 10 years time (since that country will have duty free access to the US market and we will not). We should not, however, take comfort in that timeline and take a breather from what needs to be done today.

Unless policymakers wake up to the realities on the ground, i.e. without addressing the massive shortage of labour (both semi and skilled), the industry cannot live up to its full potential. As pointed out in the DoT report that draws data from Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exports Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (KBMEA) and the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), the shortage of workers will grow from the present 0.11 million to

0.18 million in 2021 and the \$50 billion a year export target could very well remain a pipedream. There are only so many foreign workers the sector can afford to hire. We need to develop our own human resources and not rely on expensive expatriate workers to maintain our edge in the export market. The current policy of hiring foreign workers

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will become more and more financially unviable as time goes by.

The low level of education of our workers is directly correlated to the low level of productivity. Without better education and technical training, we lose our edge. What is there not to understand? Yet, as always, it appears to take policymakers ages to come to terms with ground realities and get a move on, on the obvious course of action. We need to stop making plans and start

implementing. Setting up a technical institute requires not only budgetary allocation but the sourcing of technical instructors. If we are lacking in that field, perhaps we should start thinking sincerely about foreign technical assistance, say from countries like Japan or Korea or even mainland China. Given proper prioritisation, setting up these schools and institutes is possible within a stated timeframe. It is not rocket science.

Although it has been pointed out that the country is sorely lacking in infrastructure, raw materials political stability, etc., this is one sector that has surmounted seemingly insurmountable odds to put Bangladesh on the world map. It employs 4 million or so workers (mostly women) and indirectly supports 10 million people. Despite all the negative media attention it has received on workers' rights and safety issues, we simply cannot allow for the RMG sector to go down as it is also the largest foreign exchange earner in the economy.

Addressing the major bottlenecks like infrastructure is a mid to long-term affair. The industry has responded fairly well on the issue of compliance, but at the end of the day, without a trained and efficient workforce to power industry, RMG doesn't have much of a bright future. It is only in our own interests that we invest in education so that one day the RMG sector can move out up from producing basic low-cost garments to the high-end market niches which entail higher value addition. When that happens, the \$50 billion per annum target will no longer be a pipedream.

The writer is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

COMMENTS

"Father's fear came true" (November 1, 2015)

Saleh Chowdury

Shakespeare once said, "A rose called by any name still smells the same". Whoever killed the bloggers and publisher deserves our condemnation; they may be called by different names but they are terrorists.

"Mobin's resignation won't affect BNP: Fakhru" (October 31, 2015)

Rakibul Hasan

BNP needs to be more democratic. BNP's problem is that it's incompetent and incapable.

"YES, A BETTER DHAKA IS POSSIBLE!" (October 31, 2015)

Ataur Rahman Ranju

Possible, if there is no corruption.

Zareef Hossain

The only way Dhaka can change is if its people change themselves first.

Mustaqeem Asad

As long as corruption exists, it's impossible to make Dhaka a better city.

Shad Islam

Change will be possible only when politicians are not motivated by greed and power.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Despicable condition of DMCH

A few days ago, I went to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) to visit a friend. I have to say that in terms of hygiene, DMCH is in a very poor state. Almost all the beds had urine stains on them and the bed sheets were dirty. The floor was filthy and what was most disgusting was the sheer number of cockroaches, which were roaming around on the beds, walls, cabinets etc. At that time, my only thought was: how can people possibly survive in this place, let alone recover from illness? Even a healthy person would fall ill if s/he were to spend more than a few hours there. The hospital, being the largest medical college

hospital in Dhaka, is clearly under-staffed and poorly managed. There is also a serious shortage of beds and a lack of other facilities. Many patients who are unable to get a bed are forced to sleep on the hospital floor. A majority of the people of this country do not have the financial means to get private medical service, even if our politicians can. I fear that as long as our politicians can afford the luxury of travelling to Singapore, Thailand or US for their medical requirements, the medical facilities of Bangladesh would never improve.

Ashfaqur Amin
Dhaka

Investigation must be thorough

On February 11, 2012 the journalist couple Sagar-Rumi were brutally murdered in their flat. Four years on, the police still have no clue about the killers. But suddenly they have become very efficient. On September 28, 2015, an Italian national was murdered at the Diplomatic area of Gulshan and within a month the police was able to nab the criminals. We expect the police to solve all murder cases with the same efficiency and urgency.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong