

# The conspiracy behind the assassination of Bangabandhu

**ABDUL MANNAN**

**P**OLITICAL assassinations and military coups need long preparation, careful planning and execution. The involvement of a few insiders and the support of foreign powers make things easier. In cases where the victim is someone like the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the task is more challenging. The killers of Bangabandhu planned meticulously and acted professionally. Unfortunately, to make things easier for the killers, Bangabandhu himself never believed any harm could be caused to him or his family. On a few occasions, some well-wishers of Bangabandhu tried to warn him, but he brushed their warnings aside, saying that his own people could never cause him any harm. Khandaker Moshtaque, who was the Foreign Minister in Tajuddin's cabinet in 1971 and the person who became the President after the killing of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975, was a mole within Bangabandhu's cabinet. Ironically, Moshtaque was one of Mujib's most trusted lieutenants. At the height of the Liberation War, Moshtaque conspired against the war. In September, he tried to contact the US Consul General George Griffin in Calcutta through one Zahurul Qyum, an Awami League MP-elect from Comilla. According to Henry Kissinger (*The White House Years*), Moshtaque sent a message that if the US could arrange for the release of Sheikh Mujib from Pakistani prison, he would try to convince the Mujibnagar government to call off the Liberation War and forge a federation with Pakistan. Griffin doubted Moshtaque's credibility. Moshtaque, however, was kept in the good books of the US and later on was used very successfully by the conspirators to unseat and kill Sheikh Mujib. Griffin was declared *persona non grata* in India after this incident.



ILLUSTRATION: AMITY DHARA HALDER

Shariful Hoque Dalim and others. All of them reported to the Mujibnagar government towards the end of the war, from October to November, claiming that they have defected from the Pakistani army. It is, however, clear now that they were actually the fifth columnists working in disguise for Pakistan. With them they found a few senior repatriates who were unhappy as their colleagues who participated in the Liberation War were given two years of seniority. General Zia, Deputy Chief of Army Staff, whose role during the war was always under scrutiny, was in the loop of the conspirators though Bangabandhu loved him as his own son. Zia was unhappy as he was not made the Army Chief immediately after liberation. In March, Abdur Rashid and Farookh Rahman discussed their plan to overthrow Bangabandhu with Zia. He gave the green signal and said that as

a senior officer he could not directly get involved with their plan, but if they wished, they could go ahead. Zia's duty was to report this incident to his superiors but he never did that, as he wanted to be one of the beneficiaries of Mujib's overthrow. Bangabandhu and a few senior Awami League leaders considered Zia to be very ambitious. A few months before the assassination of Bangabandhu, Zia was given a diplomatic posting either in East Germany or Belgium. Zia, however, managed to persuade Bangabandhu through some senior Awami League leaders to have the new assignment cancelled. He told Bangabandhu that his loyalty to him and the government was absolute and that he wanted to retire as a professional soldier. Bangabandhu trusted Zia and cancelled his new assignment. The coup planners also had a covert

connection with the US embassy in Dhaka. They established contact in the guise of purchasing arms. Christopher Hitchens, a British-American journalist and commentator, in his much publicised book *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* writes, "In November 1974, on a brief face-saving tour of the region, Kissinger made an eight-hour stop in Bangladesh and had a three-minute press conference... Within few weeks of his departure... a faction at the US embassy in Dhaka began covertly meeting a group of Bangladeshi officers who were planning a coup against Mujib." Among those the coup plotters contacted was Philip Cherry, the CIA Station Chief in Dhaka. Quite a few responsible army officers tried to inform Mujib that a coup plot was being hatched to overthrow him which he never took seriously. He trusted his people but

trusted them too much. Besides the confidants of Bangabandhu, others were also concerned about the possible coup in Bangladesh. RK Yadav, a former R&AW Officer of India, writes in his book *Mission R&AW*, "R&AW was closely keeping tabs on all these developments in Bangladesh through its sources in various departments. R&AW received advance information of the conspiracy against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which was hatched by some disgruntled junior officers in the units of artillery and cavalry. R.N. Kao (top R&AW Boss) personally informed the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi... Kao personally went to Dhaka in December 1974. He met Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Bangabhavan and requested him to come out for a little stroll in the garden. When they were out of ear-shot, Kao conveyed to him the information which R&AW had received about the danger to his life. Sheikh Mujib was euphoric at that time and waving his arms said, 'These are my own children, they will not harm me.' In March 1975, Kao sent one of his trusted officers to Dhaka who gave exact details of the coup plot to Mujib and as usual, he ignored the warning. By any definition, Bangabandhu was totally indifferent about his security and he along with the nation had to pay a heavy price on the fateful night of August 1975. Soon after Major Dalim broadcasted the news of the coup on August 15, 1975, several former military officers rushed to the radio station to pledge their support and services to the new regime, including Colonel Abu Taher, Colonel Akbar Hossain, Major Shahjahan Omar, Major Ziauddin, Major Rahmatullah and Captain Majed, writes the US based journalist B.Z. Khasru in his latest book *The Bangladesh Military Coup and the CIA Link*. Colonel Taher was later sentenced to death by Zia through a sham trial. Others tasted state power in some form or the other. Our tributes to the Father of the Nation and to his family members who were martyred on 15 August 1975.

The writer is Chairman of the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh.

## My Friend Shaheed Sheikh Kamal

BRIG R P SINGH, VSM (RETIRED)

**D**URING the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, training of two courses of officers of the Mukti Bahini was conducted in Murtee Camp Officers Training Wing (OTW). The First War Course commenced in July 1971. There were 61 officer trainees, addressed as Gentleman Cadet (GCs), in the course. Sheikh Kamal was one of them. I was associated with him for 16 weeks during the darkest and yet, the most challengingly valorous period of Bangladesh's history. I have lasting memories of my association with Shaheed Kamal, which I will cherish throughout my life. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested in the early hours of March 26, 1971, and his family was put under house arrest. But Sheikh Kamal and his younger brother Sheikh Jamal had managed to escape to India. Jamal was trained with the Special Forces, which also came to be known as the Mujib Bahini, in the Himalayan Hills near Dehradun in the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh (now in Uttarakhand). Sheikh Kamal received his training in Murtee Camp, located in the Himalayan foothills of the northern corner of West Bengal. Kamal was a tall, handsome young man who carried himself with dignity and possessed remarkable leadership traits. The facilities provided to the GCs in Murtee Camp were sparse. Bamboo 'tarza' barracks with tin roofs, bamboo cots with no electricity, plenty of mosquitoes and leeches, and the sultry heat of North Bengal made the living conditions unbearable. The training was tough and prolonged, spanning over days and nights. And to top it all, Kamal

was burdened by the thought of his family being under house arrest and his father being in Pakistani jail. The Indian Army instructors were advised to engage him in conversation during the off hours, so that he could be distracted from these worries. I used to meet Sheikh Kamal after training hours. During our conversations, he told me how since Kamal's childhood, his father had spent most of his time in jail. He narrated the harrowing experience of the Agartala Conspiracy Case trial when it appeared that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would be sentenced to death. He narrated how his mother, in the absence of his father, had looked after him and his brothers and sisters, and also ran the party amid grave worries and tensions. She faced all the hardships with tremendous courage and great composure. She also indirectly provided the leadership and necessary directives to Awami League cadres in the absence of Sheikh Mujib. She even motivated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman before he made his historic speech at the then Race Course ground in the city on March 7 in 1971. Sheikh Kamal recalled the important role played by his mother in the country's politics by offering constructive advice to Bangabandhu throughout his political life, especially during his 14 years of imprisonment. Almost all the GCs listened to radio broadcasts of BBC, All India Radio and Swadhin Bangladesh Betar Kendra regularly on their transistors. On August 4, 1971 the news of Yahya Khan's interview (of August 3) with Pakistan Television Corporation, announcing the trial of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was broadcasted by various radio stations. On August 5, this made headlines in all the Indian newspapers. Yahya Khan in his interview had said

that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had committed "acts of treason, and acts of open war." Sheikh Kamal understood the meaning of "acts of treason and acts of open war," because his father had faced similar charges in 1968 as well. The memories of the Agartala Conspiracy Case trial were still fresh in his mind. Such chilling news would have sent shivers down the spine of any human being, but Kamal displayed great composure after getting this news.

since the Agartala conspiracy case. In the 1968 trial, Sheikh Mujib was implicated in a false case, but this time, a war for liberation was in full swing. From this moment onwards until October 9, 1971, when the First War Course graduated, newspapers and radio broadcasts carried news on Sheikh Mujib's trial almost every day. These either concerned the proceedings of the trial or appeals by various world leaders, governments or organisations

graduating parade of the First War Course on October 9, 1971. Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad and his entire cabinet ministers, C-in-C of Bangladesh Forces, Col MAG Osmani and other Bangladeshi dignitaries were also present. The Indian Army instructors of the Mukti Bahini Officers' Wing were introduced to the President, the Prime Minister and the C-in-C after the parade. Prime Minister Tajuddin spoke to each instructor, and thanked him for training the GCs. Sheikh Kamal was posted as an ADC to C-in-C, Colonel Osmani. We parted ways, wishing well to each other, as the clouds of war were visible on the horizon. He invited me to visit Dhaka after liberation to meet Bangabandhu and his family members. Somehow, I did not get the chance to meet him. On August 16, 1975, I heard the news of the assassination of Bangabandhu and most of his family members, including Sheikh Kamal, the previous day. I was astonished to hear of the death of a budding future leader. During my interaction with Kamal, he would often fondly mention his elder sister Sheikh Hasina. I met her on December 15, 2011, at her office in Dhaka, when I presented some rare photographs of Sheikh Kamal taken at Murtee camp. I narrated to her my memories of Kamal and how he had coped with the trying circumstances. She betrayed her emotions the same way as Kamal used to do in 1971. I noticed that the siblings shared the rare leadership trait of sharing their joy with others and keeping their sorrows to themselves. Kamal's martyrdom was a great loss to us all. The writer is a retired Brigadier General of the Indian Army. He participated in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.



Sheikh Kamal with his father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

On August 9, 1971, Yahya Khan announced that Bangabandhu would be tried by a 'Special Military Court' for "waging war against Pakistan." The trial was to commence on August 11. I met Sheikh Kamal that evening to express my sympathy and to encourage him to face the crisis. He appeared to be quite normal and composed, but was very apprehensive. The reason was that there was a sea change in the political scenario of Pakistani politics

to Yahya Khan to release Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, or rejection of such appeals by the Pakistan Government. It was a trying time for Sheikh Kamal. He was also worried that this time around, the Pakistani military junta may cause harm to his mother and other family members who were under house arrest. However, he displayed tremendous courage and equanimity. The Acting President of Bangladesh, Nazrul Islam, took the salute of the

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**QUOTABLE Quote**

**FIDEL CASTRO**  
I have not seen the Himalayas. But I have seen Sheikh Mujib. In personality and in courage, this man is the Himalayas.

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Stately	1 Catch some z's
6 Egypt's Anwar	2 Bonanza stuff
11 Lineup	3 "Alias" actor
12 Solitary	4 Like corsets
13 Treaty goal	5 Peepers
14 Bourne's portrayer	6 Blue
15 Cubicle fixture	7 Mobile setting
17 Tough spot	8 "Preacher" actor
18 Lacking locks	9 Shortly
20 Infamous czar	10 Watch over
22 Stunned wonder	16 Model buy
23 Endurance	18 Mexican peninsula
26 "Ulysses" author	19 MP's quarry
28 Indy entrant	21 Differ
29 Goldmaking study	23 Look for
31 Jazz lover	24 Orderly
32 Stately trees	25 Liberal study
33 A bunch	27 Home along the Loire
34 Novel idea	30 Rockies hrs.
36 Singing group	33 Put a cap on
38 Indian coin	34 Debate group
40 Really stocked	35 "Clair de --"
43 Ryan of "Paper Moon"	37 Emulates Jay-Z
44 Michelangelo work	39 Avenue tree
45 Blood fluid	41 Creek vowel
46 Wander off	42 Vampire's rest time

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

S	P	A	R	S	T	A	R	E	D				
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**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott