

My brother Badsha Alam Sikder

SHAMIM SIKDER

A book is going to be published about the engineers who sacrificed their lives in our Liberation War. It is so unfortunate that no genuine steps have yet been taken from the Bangladesh government to remember their contributions to the country. The current government as well as the previous ones have not even felt the need to know how the families of the freedom fighters are living their lives – where they are and in what condition.

Bangladesh has been born after a nine-month long War of Independence. I fear that the names of hundreds of our brave martyred freedom fighters have been lost completely. Politics is in play here. Those who assume power write the history of our Liberation War according to their own will. Only the members of their parties get recognition in that history. It seems as if they are competing among themselves over establishing their supremacy in history. Often, they engage in fights like the people who fight to grab *char* lands. By this time, those who were against our Liberation War -- the killers -- have gained status in society and reaped the benefit of our liberation. And we are just standing on the stage as spectators. The play will begin shortly. Everyone is taking mental preparation to do something. How long will the people be fooled? I am saying this because it's time we talked about these issues. I am Sculptor Shamim Sikder. Martyred Engineer Badsha Alam Sikder was the elder brother of martyred revolutionary Engineer Siraj Sikder of Purba Banglar Sharbohara Party. In many TV programmes, they bring the families of the martyred intellectuals and army personnel. But never did they call the proud par-

ents of Shaheed Badsha Alam Sikder. They never talked about him or even mentioned his name in any such programme because he was the brother of Siraj Shikder. This just reflects the narrow mindedness of our politics.

Badsha Alam Sikder was born in Lakarta village of Shariyatpur zilla in 1941. He passed matriculation from Jubilee School of Patuakhali with first division. After passing ISC from BM College in Barisal, he got enrolled in BUET. He passed civil engineering with excellent academic results. As a person, he was very innocent, polite and honest. His father, with his limited income, from a government job had educated all his children well (*Shot shikhhka*). To get Badsha admitted to BUET, our father Abdur Razzak Sikder had to mortgage the piece of land he had in the village. As it became harder for him to bear the educational expenses of all his children, he arranged for Badsha's marriage to someone from a well-off family, thinking that the family would bear his educational cost. Badsha Alam told his father that he didn't want to get married because he didn't want to stay away from his family, that he would bear his own educational expenses by becoming a private tutor and urged his father to take care of his siblings' education instead. He assured his father that after finishing his study he would pay for his siblings' education and also get back the land that his father had mortgaged. He wanted to give his father some relief and his mother some peace in life.

After obtaining the engineering degree, he joined the then C&B. When the Liberation War started, he was working in Gaibandha as a divisional engineer. During that time, his daughter was born. In his

diary he used to write about the war and the joy of becoming a father. He wrote, "the girl who was born in *juddher rokto gaye mekhe jar jonmo, juddher gondho jar shorire*, that war would end, Bangladesh would be liberated." He dreamt that his daughter would see a free country and wave the red-green flag against the open sky, she would say, "Baba (father), I am free." But before his little daughter could call him "baba," on April 25, the Pakistan army picked him up from his home blindfolded. They killed him and his cook brutally along with many other intellectuals under the Rangpur bridge. His dead body was never found.

Badsha Alam was put under surveillance since the time he used to help the freedom fighters. He used to help freedom fighters secretly -- with money, arms and other important things. And when he was taking preparation to actively join the Liberation War, the then civil SDO got the Pakistan army to raid his house. They confiscated some written documents and firearms, among other things, from his house. At that time, he wrote to my father, "Siraj Sikder is directly involved in the war. Please look after Shamim as she is very youthful and restless."

During the war, the Pakistan army had harassed my father several times. They declared rewards for catching Shamim Sikder dead or alive. During that time Shiraj bhai hoisted Bangladeshi flag in Barisal's Piyara Bagan and Mymensingh's Louhajong thana. Because of this, the Pakistan army barricaded our house at Khilgaon, Dhaka, several times and picked up my father for interrogation. The Pakistan army said to my father, "Bangalis are all Hindus. Why have you joined the Hindus being Muslims yourselves? Why do you eat with your hands, can't you use forks?" My

father had to suffer brutal torture at the hand of the Pakistan army because of his sons' involvement in the war.

At present, there is an unhealthy competition going on among different groups to dominate in the history of our Liberation War (*Itihash dokhol*). Thousands of mothers are wailing. Has this country been liberated for only a handful of people? Where are our sisters now who had been tortured by the Pakistan army? Those who were confined by the military have no home now. Those who lost their dear ones and home only know the pain of loss. It is 1991. The ten crore people of this country have been waiting for a hero to come to the stage and rescue them from the curse of silent tears. I, Shamim Shikder, am saying this on behalf of these mothers. You will get the answer from my mother who cries every night silently, and she will also get her answers. True history will win. The mothers who lost their children will win. The more blood is being shed, the more people are getting ready to revolt. We can hear the cries of thousands of mothers of Badsha -- down with the razakars, al-Shams and al-Badr. Let Bangladesh be free again.

In this civilised world, democratic-minded and well-organised student leaders had to give their lives under the wheels of a truck during the autocratic military rule in 1983. Has anyone even cared to know how these mothers are doing? That's why I say -- do not miscalculate. Do not shoot the people. Do not let any more mothers weep.

Shamim Sikder is a sculptor and sister of martyred intellectual Badsha Alam Sikder. This article was first published in Smriti: 1971, Vol. IV, Bangla Academy, 1991, and translated by Naznin Tithi, a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

.... of Henry Kissinger

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have had access to the secret cables exchanged between the Pakistan GHQ and Eastern Command. He informed Huang Hua, "The Pakistan Army in the East has been destroyed. We are afraid that if nothing is done to stop it, East Pakistan will become a Bhutan and West Pakistan a Nepal."

Kissinger also informed the Chinese envoy about the steps taken by the US administration, its mobilisation of the Seventh Fleet in the Pacific and their journey towards the Bay of Bengal. He pleaded China to take similar military action. He assured China that in case of any emergency US will come forward to assist them. He stated, "If the People's Republic were to consider the situation on the Indian Subcontinent a threat to its security and if it took measures to protect its security the US would oppose efforts of others to interfere with the People's Republic."

Kissinger was not only provoking the Chinese, at times he was almost begging as he said, "When I asked for this meeting I did so to suggest Chinese military help to be quite honest. Let us be practical by tomorrow the Pakistan Army in the East will have

surrendered." Interestingly all through the discussion the Chinese envoy proved to be a seasoned diplomat and Kissinger a desperate person. Huang Hua was non-committal, he simply answered that I will convey the message to my Prime Minister.

After this meeting Kissinger must have briefed his President to send urgent message to the Pakistani High Command. We do not know the content of that message but one can understand Henry Kissinger was not ready to accept defeat of his policy and that of Pakistan, so he somehow managed to send a wrong message to Pakistani High Command that dramatic and coordinated actions were going to be taken which rejuvenated the morale and spirit of Pakistani forces. That must be the reason for President Yahya Khan to withdraw his earlier consent to surrender of Pak Forces in Eastern Theatre. His CGS Lt. Gen. Gul Hasan Khan told Gen. A.A.K. Niazi to hold his position as "the yellows are coming from the north and the whites from the South."

Such message delayed the capitulation of Pakistan Army and gave them respite to execute their heinous plan of destruction of Bangali nation with the killing of leading intellectuals of the country. There was no



Huang Hua (© Lisl Steiner / Keystone Press)

maneuver of Chinese forces on the border with India; the US Seventh Fleet followed by another Fleet from the Soviet Union could not reach the coast of Bengal on time. The collapse of Pakistan Army was delayed but defeat could not be averted. They surrendered unconditionally to the Joint Forces of India and Bangladesh on December 16. But the interregnum, five days of futile battle, gave them opportunity to carry out the barbarous act of killing of

the intellectuals.

The nation is still waiting for the public judgment of this heinous crime. Now we know there were many players who paved the way to this brutality. We hope that history will not absolve anyone however even powerful they may be.

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