

47TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN

Cry, o beloved country

Annadashankar Roy
was a famous Bangla poet and essayist.

ANNADASHANKAR ROY

I once wrote about the unforgettable day when I met Sheikh Mujib in an article I named, "At the juncture of history." It did not contain the full details of my interview with Bangabandhu, for he himself forbade us at the time.

But he is not here anymore. I am also 71 years of age. Who knows how long I will be here. I obeyed his prohibition during his lifetime. Now, he is beyond our reach. There is also no fear of posthumous defamation. He is immortal.

This description is not verbatim. What was said later comes first, what was said earlier comes last – what the mind recalls is what comes out of the pen. If there is a mistake, it is because of my memory.

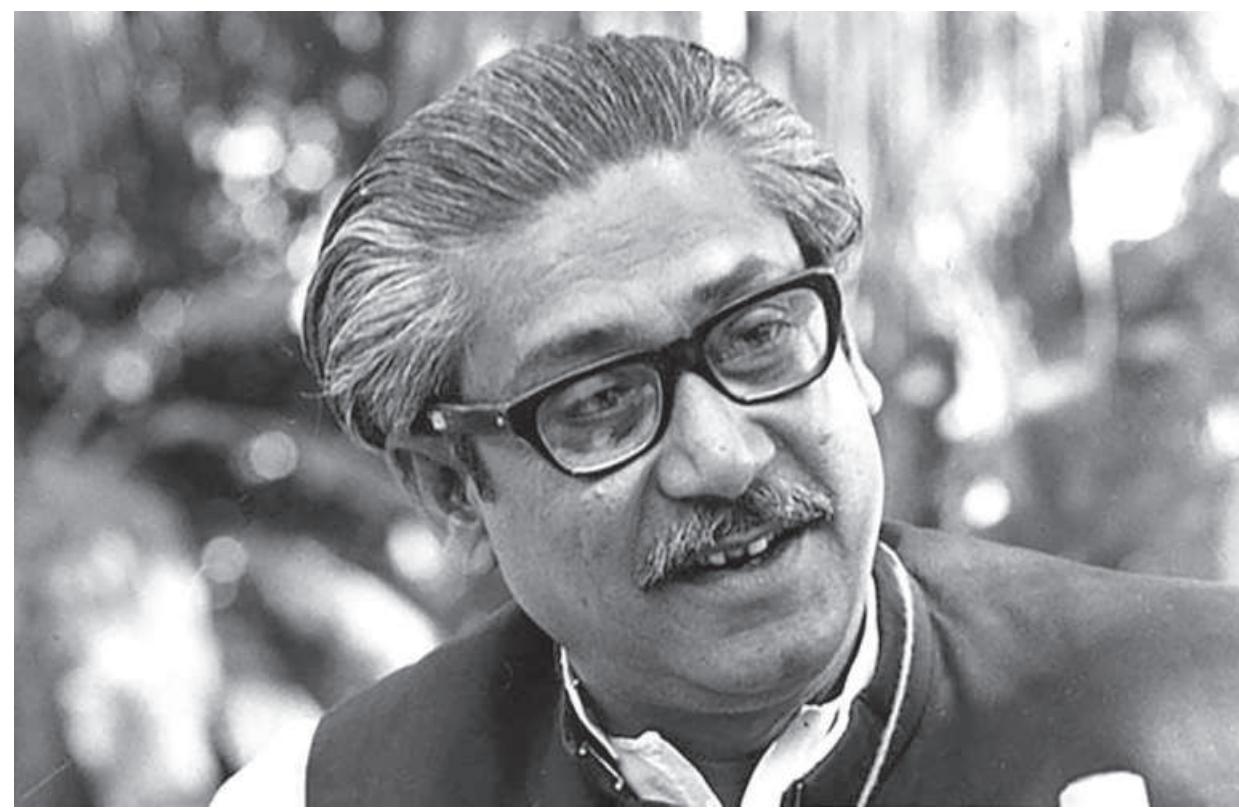
"Look, I have survived death a couple of times. The first time was in Ayub Khan's prison. In the conspiracy case. A friend of mine had warned me that going out of the cell in the evening regularly was dangerous, and that they would shoot me from behind and say that I was shot because I was running away. Such shootings had happened.

The second time was in Yahya Khan's prison. My grave was dug in front of me. Realising that my last moments were approaching, I prepared myself and my mind: if I had to die, why die in fear? I awaited death with a calm mind," Sheikh Mujib said.

He was in a good mood that day. First the recognition from Seven Arab nations, and then an invitation to join the (OIC) conference. Within a few hours of the interview with us, Pakistan gave recognition to Bangladesh, and Sheikh Mujib flew to Lahore by nightfall. There he received a jubilant welcome.

We asked Sheikh Mujib, "When did the idea of Bangladesh first occur to you?" "Will you listen?" He smiled and asked. "It was in 1947. At that time, I was in Mr Suhrawardy's team. He and Sarat Chandra Bose want a united Bengal. I also want one country for all Bangalees. What Bangalees could achieve if they were united. They could conquer the world!"

He became excited as he spoke.



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman dreamt of an egalitarian Bangalee society.

PHOTO: ARCHIVES

"Suhrawardy and Sarat Chandra Bose returned empty-handed from Delhi. Neither Congress nor the Muslim League agreed to their proposal, and they gave up. I also saw that there was no other way, so I came back to Dhaka to start anew. Accepted Pakistan as it was then. But my dream is *Sonar Bangla*. I wonder how that dream could be fulfilled. There was no possibility. People were so communal! They would have a suspicion if you said you wanted Bangladesh. Suddenly, one day there was a rally cry: We want Bangla language. I also joined the Language Movement. The language-based movement gradually transformed into a country-based movement. Later came a day when I asked my team what the name of our country would be. Some said Pak-Bangla. Some said East Bengal. I said, no, Bangladesh. Then I chanted 'Joy Bangla.' Then they mockingly said, 'Joy Bangla na joy Maa Kali!' What an insult! I was insulted that day. I digested it, though. Actually, they didn't understand me. With 'Joy Bangla,' I meant the victory

of the Bangla language, Bangladesh and the Bangalee nation, which is above communalism."

'Joy Bangla' is actually a mantra. Like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's 'Vande Mataram' or Dadabhai Naoroji's 'Swaraj' or Gandhiji's 'Quit India' or Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's 'Chalo Delhi.' This is *Shabda Brahma*. There is infinite power in a single word or combination of words. That power is immeasurable.

Transforming a communal party into a national party is not an easy task. After going to jail, again and again, and facing death, again and again, he got his dream Bangladesh one day. That Bangladesh is not undivided, but sovereign and independent. He received Pakistan's recognition on the day of his interview with us. Later, a seat at the United Nations. Can a person expect more success at the age of 55? Could anyone else achieve what he did?

With his faith in us, Sheikh Mujib said one more thing on that day. He immediately said that we could not

publish it. I am now at a loss for words at the request of history. If I don't publish, no one ever will.

"You know what I had planned? Suddenly one day we will seize power. Capture all the bases in Dhaka city. We had people in the army, navy, air force, police, and civil service. But

for one man's treachery, all is lost. A navy officer believed it and informed a subordinate, exposing us. Then we all got caught," he lamented.

I asked, "On what date did the event take place?" He smiled softly and replied, "I won't tell you that." I was silent, realising that I had crossed a level of indecency.

As a result of many penances, a man of faith becomes the Indra of heaven. If the power is depleted or Asura becomes strong, then one day Indra also falls. He escaped death twice only to fall into its clutches the third time. His compatriots and natives seized power – the irony.

Was it necessary? On the day of the interview, Sheikh Mujib told us that he no longer wanted to be in power. What was he to do? His party people were not letting him go. He made it clear that his work was done. He got everything that he wanted.

If he moved at the right time, he would have split the party. That break would not only be for selfish reasons, but also for ideological and political reasons. All Bangalees can never be one, all Bangladeshis can never be one; can all Muslims be one? Pakistan was a disaster for all Muslims. One part of it is thousands of miles away from the other. In the middle was not the sea, but another country. It had no natural centre. The central government never accepted the majority of votes. There was a voting majority of East Pakistan, but the strength of the armed forces belonged to the Punjabi and Pathan minorities of the western region. One

day or another, there would be a test of mettle.

Under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib, the inevitable historical change was successfully completed. He was a revolutionary man. A working man dedicated to his vow. His journey started with a dream. The journey ended with the realisation of that dream. Had he resigned on time, he would have survived for some time. But live with what? United Bengal did not have the slightest chance.

He had given up hope too. He relinquished the hope in such a way that it was evident that his business was with Delhi and not Calcutta – with the government of India, not with the government of West Bengal. If we go to Bangladesh, we will not be identified as Bangalees, we will be called Indian. Even in Bangla literature conferences, we are welcomed as foreign guests, such as representatives of Soviet Russia or East Germany. The Bangladeshi government was very careful, so that no one would ever think there is an attempt to unite the Bangalees. So that's why there was this sense of divide.

On the other hand, another group was active in trying to unite Muslims. They did not trust Sheikh Mujib. And his murder stemmed from this lack of trust.

This article is an excerpt from Annadashankar Roy's book *Kado, Prio Desh* (Published in 1976). Translated from Bangla by Tanvir Ahmed Chowdhury.

The Sri Lankan crisis spiked intense RTI activity

Dr Shamsul Bari and Ruhi Naz are chairman and assistant director (RTI), respectively, at Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB).

SHAMSUL BARI and RUHI NAZ

SRI Lanka has been shaken by a socioeconomic and political crisis that has drawn international attention. We wanted to find out if the public outcry against Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government that led to its eventual overthrow was translated into increased RTI activity. It appears to be the case.

Unlike most other countries in the region, the 2016 Right to Information (RTI) Act of Sri Lanka attracted different strata of society, including its vigilant civil society organisations, from the very beginning. From early on, they put it to use to probe government activities of suspicious or dubious nature.

One illustrative example that we have covered previously was the landmark decision of the Sri Lankan Information Commission on a high-level corruption case that had rattled the nation. On appeal from the Sri Lanka Pilots Guild, the commission issued orders for the release of some extremely sensitive documents relating to the purchase/lease order of five Airbus 350 aircrafts from Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) by Sri Lankan Airlines. The revelation exposed the extent and level of corruption that led to an international money-laundering investigation. A crucial aspect of the order was the release of the minutes of a meeting presided over by the then speaker of the Sri Lankan parliament, who happened to be the brother of the Sri Lankan president, at his residence, where the deal was approved.

With such a precedent, it was not surprising to find the ordinary Sri Lankan citizens, civil society organisations and the Information Commission itself resorting to the RTI Act to unearth corruption, mismanagement and poor policy decisions by the government behind the recent crisis. Here are some examples.

Cost incurred by the Sri Lankan

prime minister's trip to Italy: At the height of public agitations against the government, the Office of the Prime Minister – who took office upon resignation of his predecessor in the face of public wrath – was obliged to release last month the details of former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's visit to Italy in 2021, in response to an RTI request. The disclosure that 26 million rupees were spent further revealed a most telltale picture of abuse of public funds by government officials at a time when there were clear indications of an acute fund crisis.

Cost of celebrating independence anniversary of Sri Lanka: While Sri Lanka was going through its worst economic crisis, the celebrations surrounding the 74th anniversary of the country's independence on February 4 struck many citizens as a callous and irresponsible move. An RTI request to find out its cost to the national exchequer revealed that nearly 95 million rupees had been spent on the occasion, the highest amount spent for this purpose in the last five years. The item-wise expenditure demonstrated the yawning gap between the citizens' perceptions about the economic situation in the country and those of public authorities.

There are many lessons to be learnt from the Sri Lankan crisis. The foremost must be the importance of keeping citizens in a democracy properly informed on all matters of public interest at all times and in particular during crises. The RTI law provides an opportunity to governments to disclose critical information to the public through the proactive disclosure mechanism so that they appreciate the gravity of the situation and are ready to cooperate with them. Another lesson is for the citizens to use the law to keep themselves abreast of matters that concern them and intervene with the authorities as necessary. The Sri Lankan crisis has highlighted the value of regular government people interaction and RTI's role to foster it. A well-informed nation can be a shield against sudden eruption of public fury.

The turmoil in Sri Lanka led, among other things, to severe power shortages in the country. The Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) found itself unable to meet the fuel needs of the country due to the lack of sufficient forex reserves to pay for fuel stocks imported into the country. At the same time, due to fuel shortage, both transport and energy sectors came to a standstill, leaving the public and private sectors to collapse. This situation had a severe impact on

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh				
 Office of the Director Kurmitola General Hospital Kurmitola, Dhaka Invitation for Tender Memo No. KGH/Tender/2022-23/2286 Sealed tenders are hereby invited from bonafide experienced importers/agent/suppliers/distributors with necessary qualification as per PPA-2006 & PPR-2008 for supply of diet in fiscal year 2022-23 under framework contract method terms and conditions are as follows:				
KEY INFORMATION				
1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.		
2	Agency	Kurmitola General Hospital, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.		
3	Procuring entity name	Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.		
4	Procuring entity code	127020911126		
5	Procuring entity district	Dhaka.		
6	Invitation for	Supply of diet for patient under framework contract method.		
7	Tender Ref. No.	KGH/Tender/2022-23/2286		
8	Date	13/08/2022		
9	Procurement method	Open Tender (OTM) under framework contract method.		
FUNDING INFORMATION				
10	Budget and source of funds	GOB.		
11	Developments partners	N/A.		
PARTICULAR INFORMATION				
12	Project/program code	N/A.		
13	Program name	N/A.		
14	Tender Package No.	GR-01.		
15	Tender package name	Supply of Diet.		
16	Tender publication date	13/08/2022		
17	Tender last selling date	04/09/2022 during office hour up to 2.30pm		
18	Tender closing date and time	05/09/2022 at 12.00pm		
19	Tender opening date and time	05/09/2022 at 12.30pm		
20	Name and address of the office:			
a	Selling tender documents	Office of the Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
b	Receiving tenders documents	(1) Office of the Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka-1206 (2) Officer in charge, Cantonment Thana, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka-1206.		
c	Opening tender documents	Office of the Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka.		
21	Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting	Place: Office of the Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka. Date: 27/08/2022, Time: 11.00am.		
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER				
22	Eligibility of tenderer	(a) Earnest money in the form of Bank Draft/Pay-Order. (b) Trade license updated for 2022-23 fiscal year. (c) Income tax certificate & tax paid certificate for 2021-22 tax years. (d) VAT registration certificate with 13 Digit BIN. (e) Bank solvency certificate & bank statement. (f) Experience as a supplier of similar goods supply in last 3 years. (g) Manufacturer authorization is required for necessary item. (h) Successfully completion certificate of submitted work order. (i) Other detail instruction given in the tender schedule.		
23	Brief description of goods	Supply of diet for hospital admitted patient.		
24	Brief description of related services	Supply of diet related services.		
25	Price of tender documents BDT	Taka 2,000/- (two thousand) only in cash (non-refundable) with application on letterhead pad.		
26	Lot No.	Identification of lot	Location	Tender security amounts in BDT (Bank Draft or Pay Order in favour of Director, Kurmitola General Hospital)
01	Rice, Dal & Spice	Office of the Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Dhaka.	Taka 2,00,000/- (Two lakh only)	As per call/work order
02	Fish, Meat & Egg	Do	Taka 4,00,000/- (Four lakh only)	Do
03	Vegetable & Fruits	Do	Taka 1,00,000/- (One lakh only)	Do
04	Bread & Confectionary	Do	Taka 1,00,000/- (One lakh only)	Do
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS				
27	Name of official inviting tenders	Brigadier General Md Fazlul Kabir.		
28	Designation of official inviting tenders	Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.		
29	Address of official inviting tenders	Office of the Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.		
30	Contact details of official inviting tenders	Director, Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka. Phone: 55062201, Fax: 55062202, E-mail: kurmitola500bed@ospid.ghs.gov.bd		
31	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject in part or whole of any or all tenders.			
Note: (a) The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject in part or whole or all tender without explanation. (b) In schedule the purchase quantity may vary to the requirement of the purchaser. (c) Bidder must enclose original schedule which is duly filled in unit rates or prices for all items of the works both in figures & words. Any overwriting, correction and scratch or ineligibility will be rejected. (d) This tender advertisement cannot ensure the supply/purchase of goods. (e) If the date of selling, receiving & opening of tender is hindered under any unavoidable circumstances, the next working day will be applicable for the same respectively. (f) Tender schedule or any item/specification cannot be modified/alterated by the bidder. (g) Tenderer will have to supply the requisite goods on priority and need basis of the procurement authority.				
Director Kurmitola General Hospital, Kurmitola, Dhaka				