



## What was behind the brutal killing?



▲ An overwhelmingly emotional environment is created when Bangabandhu meets his family members. Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib embraces her husband and his nephew Sheikh Fazlul Hoque Moni adoringly pats his head (January 10, 1972). Courtesy: MUJIB100.GOV.BD

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The assassinations of 15 August 1975, unprecedented in history in terms of the number of people killed including the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, are shrouded in uncanny mystery. The mystery remains unresolved even after justice has been meted out to the killers (although the verdict remains partially implemented as at least two of the killers are absconding abroad). The killers simply implemented a long hatched conspiracy (they were also parties to the conspiracy), the kingpins of the conspiracy have so far remained unknown to the common public;

although rumours abound as to most of them. Indeed, the assassinations and the consequences that followed as a sequel, remain as the darkest hour in the history of Bangalis. A saying that goes around is that Bangalis killed the Father of the Nation (although it is rumoured that Risalder Moslem Uddin, one of the killers, was a non-Bangali); and hence the appellation, self-destroying Bangali (*atmaghati Bangali*) (Nirad C. Chowdhury).

A public opinion that has gained ground over the years is that a commission of enquiry be formed to investigate the 'whys' and 'hows' of the 15 August tragedy. It is further opined that the facts arising out of

such a commission be published as a White Paper; and both are necessary for ensuring democratic governance. In one sense, democracy is transparency of state and public affairs.

Back in December 1973, I was reading in Edinburgh University Library (I was a graduate student of this university in the Department of History) the *New Statesman* (of 21 December issue); I came across a detailed report on Bangladesh, based as it was, on the first-hand experience of Michael Burns. In those days without the modern gadgets of communication, I had to make do, insofar as information on Bangladesh was concerned, with whatever that appeared in the British print media (plus BBC World Service). The reason why I mention this report is the last sentence wherein Michael Burns wrote, "With a dangerous and difficult few years ahead, Bangladesh is going to need Mujib's brand of leadership more than ever." But the prophesy of Michael Burns did not really tally with that of the killers; they wanted an immediate end to the life of 'Mujib', and they ensured that in something resembling a professional blitzkrieg. In total, 19 people lay dead, including Bangabandhu and Bangamata. Such a killing spree is unprecedented in world history. The instances galore as to the killing of target political personality; but the instance of so many killings in such a short time is conspicuous by its absence. The nearest such an example was the killing of four princes of Bahadur Shah together in September 1857 by Colonel Hodson. A few years onward, the English historian Malleson wrote in his book on India that the incident was "unnecessary as well as a crime."

Why was the 15 August necessary? Was it not a crime of huge proportion? The first question may be answered by the

perpetrators of the crime; to us, it was unnecessary. We believe in political dissonance being thrashed out through political dialogue. We are at one with Voltaire, as he wrote, "I detest what you say, but will defend to death your right to say it." Indeed, Voltaire's was a prescription for civility in society; the killers were uncivil. They were free from remorse, as they confessed to killing in a TV interview (ITV, London) in 1976. In fact, Colonel Rashid had the audacity to be on record saying, "I have killed Sheikh Mujib. Dare you put me on trial?" Thanks to the sagacity of prime minister Sheikh Hasina, the killers have been put on trial but the verdict remains partially implemented, as some killers are absconding abroad. As to the second question, our unequivocal answer is that it was certainly a crime. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that a blind cleric popularly known as *andha huzur*, residing in Hali Shohor of Chattogram, aided and abetted this crime by teaching Rashid and his wife Zubaida Rashid the Quranic verses to facilitate the killing of Sheikh Mujib. (Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh: Legacy of Blood*). This cleric cannot escape his role in perpetrating the crime.

On 16 August 1975, *The London Times*, editorially commented, "If Sheikh Mujib is killed so tragically, there was no need to emerge Bangladesh as a free country." On the other hand, *The Bangladesh Observer* of the same date, wrote as the first sentence of its editorial, "The killing of Sheikh Mujib was a historic necessity." The editorial of *The London Times* represented the conscience of the world; that of *The Bangladesh Observer* the mind of the killers.

The killing of Bangabandhu was a tragedy, which followed the

phenomenal triumph of the emergence of Bangladesh under the perceptive and far sighted leadership of this man. With hindsight, it may be said that, although an unparalleled leader, he was not fault free; no human can be. As his own succinct self-assessment was, "I am not an angel, nor a devil. I am a human – being, and to err is human. My responsibility is to correct myself." To differ with him was also human; but that does not mean that this difference was to be resolved through the killing of the initiator of the opinion causing difference. Such a killing was neither human nor political. The killers, linked as they were with a deep – seated conspiracy of home origin with nexus of foreign links; had thus motives different from those commonly ascribed to any killer. Indeed, the killers had the far-fetched motives including those of wiping out the Bangabandhu family and the upper echelon of the Awami League leadership. As subsequent happenings bear out, the conspirators and the killers had the overriding goal of turning the clock back -- to nullify the spirit of the Liberation War and retrieving the Pakistani ethos. As it was, the sole aim was to replace the Liberation War and turn Bangladesh into a mini-Pakistan (in terms of the territorial size; not in population, in which, we had always been the majority).

Whatever we speak and write of the 15 August is either assumptive or based on evidence, the credibility of which is flawed. In the circumstances, we have been demanding formation of a high-powered commission to look into the conspiracy, conspirators, (both home and foreign) and the killing and killers.

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১৬১০৩৫, ০৮০০০১০২০০০ (টেল ফ্রি)  
০১৭৮৪৩৭৭৭৭৭, ০১৭৯৪৩৭৭৭৭৭  
বিদেশ থেকে - ০৯৬১০১০২০০০

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