

The man whom his arch-enemies in Pakistan did not dare to kill was killed by people whom he trusted. As we mourn the deaths of Bangabandhu and his family members, we try to make sense of the life that he lived to carry the torch of freedom for his people.

FROM PAGE J1

He blamed the Muslim League leaders, particularly Khawaza Nazimuddin, the then Governor General of Pakistan, for their myopia (Oshapmapto Atmojiboni, 79-80). He recalled how the Muslim League activists beat his student colleagues when they started demanding Bangla as a state language; their stance on Bangla was seen as a threat to Pakistan's stability. He recalled how his boatman in Gopalganj taunted him for being forced to contribute to the "Jinnah Fund" in a newly established Pakistan. Instances of injustice made him realise that his country had put on yet another colonial yoke. He formulated the historic Six-Point Movement in the 1960s, demanding greater autonomy for East Pakistan within a federal system. He shaped people's aspirations and made them dream of a country free from the shackles of oppression and injustice. His charismatic presence, inspiring eloquence, unwavering determination, and profound love for his people sculpted the destiny of a nation. Bangabandhu loved his people. His people loved him.

The events surrounding his assassination are complex and involve various internal political and military factors within Bangladesh. There are some unsubstantiated conspiracy theories implicating some foreign intelligence agencies or governments in orchestrating the assassination. Such theories highlight revenge for the Liberation War, internal power struggles, economic interests such as control over industries and resources, regional and ethnic tensions, the secular vs. Islamist divide, and the creation of a centralised party structure in BAKSAL as potential motives.

Bangabandhu was aware of the troubles plaguing the newly established country against the backdrop of the Cold War. He reached out across the aisles to pursue a foreign policy of "friendship to all, malice to none," as shared in his speech at the UNGA on September 25, 1974. His dictum for external policy is something that he practised as his personal philosophy.

Sayyid A. Karim, the first foreign secretary of Bangladesh, in his authoritative account, Sheikh Mujib: Triumph and Tragedy, holds this gesture of generosity and loyalty to his friends as a tragic flaw. His love for his people was a flaw that he unwittingly espoused to bring his life to an untimely end. On the eve of the crackdown of March 25, 1971, Mujib allowed himself to be captured, knowing the Pakistanis "would not hesitate to turn Dhaka into a slaughterhouse to find him" (Karim 386). He stayed back to spare his people. He was proved wrong. The Pakistanis unleashed terror, irrespective of the 'big bird' they had in their cage.

Bangabandhu made similar mistakes by staying in a residential area instead of moving into a protected official residence at Gonobhaban or Bangabhaban. The last picture that we have of Bangabandhu is of him talking to his close confidant, Captain Mansur Ali, sitting on the steps of Dhanmondi Lake. Bangabandhu, in his homely attire of lungi and a playful stick in his hand, is relaxed in what appears to be a chitchat. Sheikh Moni, the head of the Jubo League, visited Bangabandhu that evening on August 14. Bangabandhu was supposed to pay a visit to the Dhaka University campus the next day, and the two of them probably ran through some last-minute details. There were some security concerns as the left-leaning JSD activists exploded four crude bombs on the campus

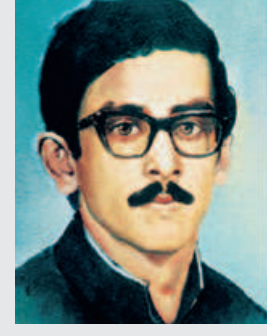
VICTIMS OF AUGUST 15 TRAGEDY



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman



Fazilatunnesa Mujib



Sheikh Kamal



Sheikh Jamal



Sultana Kamal



Sheikh Russell



Sheikh Naser



Abdur Rab Serniabat



Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni



Rosy Jamal



Colonel Jamil Uddin Ahmed



Shaheed Serniabat



Baby



Arzu Moni



Arif



Sukanta



Rintu

NIPRO



তোমার হাত ধরে এসেছে স্বাধীনতা,
পেয়েছি স্বদেশ।
কৃতঘ্ন খুনিরা কেড়ে নিয়েছে তোমায়,
তবু আজও তুমিই বাংলাদেশ!



জাতীয় শোক দিবসে
১৫ আগস্টের সকল শহীদের প্রতি
গভীর শোক ও বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধা

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that he was scheduled to visit.

We don't know how he responded to such threats. He was an extremely spiritual man who truly believed that, as a Muslim, his death was at the hand of the divine. He survived two trials, the Agartala conspiracy case and a camera trial for sedition in Lyallpur Central Jail in West Pakistan. The Pakistanis even dug a grave for him. And his response was as nonchalant as ever: You can die only once. His courage became stronger in his own country. Even when Indian intelligence warned him of a plot to assassinate him, he brushed it away in a euphoric mood, saying, "Nothing can happen to me. These are my people" (368). Even when prime minister Indira Gandhi told Mujib during the Commonwealth Conference in Jamaica in April 1975 to be careful as "something terrible is going to happen" (370), his response was, "No, no... they're all my children" (370).

Bangabandhu's denial, construed as love for his own people, cost him his life. People who were very close to him betrayed him. Once you read the events surrounding the coup d'etat, there are so many coincidences that it is hard to believe that you are hearing about presidential security. The security staff at the Dhanmondi residence included some personal bodyguards, a few policemen, and a group of army personnel. The last group was the only one who could have offered some resistance against the army incursion, but they too were craftily disarmed with the promise of new ammunition just hours before the attack. One assailant, Major Farooq, neutralised a troop of 3500 Rakkhi Bahinis, bluffing them with tanks without ammunition. The attackers raided three houses: Bangabandhu's brother-in-law Abdur Rab Serniabat's house in Kalabagan, his nephew Sheikh Moni's house, and finally his house on Rd. 32. Before being killed, Serniabat phoned Mujib to alert him. He tried calling the Police Chief, SP Mahboob, who failed to pick up the phone as he was busy with a family programme. His call to the army chief, Shafiullah, was no good either. To his utter disbelief, Bangabandhu saw his eldest son, Kamal, being shot by the raiders. He faced his killers



Bangabandhu's lifeless body lies on the stairs of his residence in Dhanmondi 32.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

at the landing of the staircase in his house. "What do you want?" was his last roar as bullets blasted through his body.

The man whom his arch-enemies in Pakistan did not dare to kill was killed by people whom he trusted. As we mourn the deaths of Bangabandhu and his family members, we try to make sense of the life that he lived to carry the torch of freedom for his people. His death momentarily ended his belief in the people. But as we turn back the clock, we realise his death

was his ultimate sacrifice. The forced deviation from the course of Bengali nationalism only resolved us to take stock of our expectations from our nation. We want to realise the dream of Golden Bengal for a friend who emboldened us to shed blood for the country. The legacy of his blood now binds us in a promise to change the fate of its people and deliver them a Bengal with a golden future.

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