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SPECIAL ISSUE: NATIONAL MOURNING DAY





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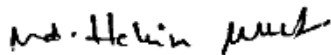
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

On the occasion of the 51st anniversary of the martyrdom of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, I welcome the publication of this special issue of Spotlight Quarterly, the official publication of the Global Center for Democratic Governance (GCDG). I extend my sincere appreciation to the Editorial Board and all contributors for this timely initiative.

On 15 August 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the architect of independent Bangladesh, was assassinated along with members of his family. On this solemn occasion, I pay profound tribute to his memory and remember with deep respect his lifelong struggle for the rights, dignity, and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh.

I also respectfully remember the martyrs of the Language Movement of 1952, the Liberation War of 1971, and all those who sacrificed their lives in the pursuit of democracy, justice, and the fundamental rights of our people.

May this special issue of Spotlight Quarterly encourage thoughtful reflection on our history and inspire future generations to uphold the enduring values of democracy, good governance, justice, and human dignity.



Prof. Dr. Md. Habibe Millat, MBBS, FRCS (Edin)

President,

Global Center for Democratic Governance (GCDG)

15 August 2026

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S NOTE

In the early hours of the tragic day of August 15, 1975, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib—along with most members of their family—were brutally assassinated. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the architect of the Bengali nation-state, a towering figure in history, and a man who has a place in the hearts of millions. He struggled for twenty-three years for the liberation of the nation, spent fourteen of his fifty-five years in prison, and led the struggle for independence and the Liberation War. He gifted the Bengali nation an independent country, a red-and-green flag, and a national anthem. Under his leadership, and amid the challenges of rebuilding a war-ravaged nation, Bangladesh's GDP increased from \$6.29 billion in 1972 to \$19.5 billion in 1975, while per capita GDP rose from \$94 to \$277, representing an increase of approximately 194.7%.

Just as he succeeded in elevating the nation, he was assassinated through a domestic and foreign conspiracy, leading the country astray and plunging it into darkness. That darkness persisted for twenty-one years. Subsequently, forces supporting the Liberation War and independence united to bring the truth of history to light. Just as the patriotic forces—inspired by the ideals of Bangabandhu and the spirit of the Liberation War—were advancing to transform Bangladesh into a developed, prosperous, non-communal, humane, just, egalitarian, and democratic state during the periods of 1996–2001 and 2009–2024, the events of August 5th 2024 unfolded. This marked the resurgence of the sinister politics of anti-liberation and militant forces—lurking behind a seemingly minor quota movement—who sought to gain political capital through the shedding of blood. Once again, those dark times engulfed the country and the nation.

Today, Bangladesh is being ravaged by anti-independence militant conspirators. They seek to erase the history of the long struggle waged by us and our forebears, the Great Liberation War, the supreme sacrifice of three million martyrs, the red-and-green flag won at the cost of the honour and dignity of two hundred thousand mothers and sisters, as well as Bangabandhu and the historic residence at 32 Dhanmondi, the national anthem, and the Constitution. They seek to erase the greatest achievement of the Bengali people—spanning a thousand years—namely, independence and the

saga of its victory. Why, and in whose interest? It is only natural that this sinister plot by a handful of individuals to obliterate history will deeply distress the 180 million people of Bangladesh as well as human rights-conscious, justice- and freedom-loving people across the world.

Bangabandhu's residence—the home that embodied the dreams of the Bengali nation and stood as a testament to Bangladesh's history, a hallowed place enshrined in the hearts of 180 million Bengalis—was razed to the ground. Across Bangladesh, all memories of the Liberation War and the glorious saga of independence were demolished. That dark force revealed in the frenzy of destroying and erasing every symbol and monument commemorating the glorious Liberation War and the independence of the Bengali people. A call has gone out to plunge into a battle against this sinister force—engaged in vile conspiracies—using whatever means at one's disposal. Patriotic citizens, both within the country and abroad, must confront this misguided, malevolent force. The country is not safe in their hands; it faces ruin. All our unprecedented achievements will be reduced to dust. Today, we are all deeply concerned. Let us stand united on this day of mourning. Through unity, struggle, and a mass uprising, let us oust these

malevolent forces and reclaim Bangabandhu's '*Sonar Bangla*' (Golden Bengal) by following the path of democracy. Even in these critical and trying times, we believe that light will surely prevail; we will regain the Bengal we have lost, and victory will undoubtedly be ours—for we stand on the side of justice.

We offer our heartfelt tribute to the memory of all those—including the Father of the Nation and Bangamata—who were martyred at the hands of hyenas on the fateful night of August 15, 1975.

We extend our congratulations, best wishes, and gratitude to the editorial team, the editorial board, writers, well-wishers, and everyone else involved in the publication of this special issue of the Spotlight Quarterly.

**Dr. Mohammad Abdur Rashid, M.Sc. Engr.,
PhD, SMIEEE**

Editor-in-Chief

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Bangabandhu and the Foreign Policy He Pursued

*Syed Badrul Ahsan**

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was unequivocal about the foreign policy Bangladesh would pursue under his leadership. He defined it in simple terms. The new country would base its ties with the world outside its frontiers on the principle of friendship for all and malice toward none. It was this axiomatic thought, with its roots in the politics of the Civil War-era American President Abraham Lincoln, which Bangladesh adopted as core policy in the early years of its independent nationhood. In the years in which Bangabandhu was in office, till his assassination in August 1975, a sense of dynamism coupled with a huge dose of idealism was what constituted Bengali diplomacy soon after liberation in December 1971.

The foreign policy adopted by Bangabandhu's administration necessarily took into account the support, in moral as well as material terms, provided by those nations which clearly looked upon the genocide committed by the Pakistan occupation army in the country with dismay and derision. In early April 1971, Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny left hardly anything to the imagination when he wrote to Pakistani junta leader Yahya Khan that the crisis in Bangladesh, which at that point in time was yet being referred to as East Pakistan in the outside world, called for a political settlement.

Yahya Khan, of course, spurned the suggestion and indeed looked upon the Soviet advice as interference in Pakistan's internal affairs. Islamabad's negative feedback was thus instrumental in a hardening of Moscow's stance toward Pakistan and the subsequent role it played in the creation of Bangladesh. The new government in Dhaka, conscious of the decisive Soviet role at the United Nations Security Council, where Moscow vetoed all resolutions that looked about to prevent the fall of Pakistan in Bangladesh, certainly understood the need for close ties with the Soviet Union.

It was against such a background of Soviet support to the Bangladesh cause in 1971 that Bangabandhu paid an official visit to Moscow in March 1972. This was one occasion where the Bengali political leadership, for the very first time, came in touch with the leaders of the communist state, a move

which led to a strengthening of economic as well as educational ties. A constructive result of such close Dhaka-Moscow links was the facilitating of higher academic programs for Bengali students at Soviet universities, a reality that was to add enormously to the promotion of excellence in education. And, of course, Soviet assistance in clearing Chittagong port of the remnants of the 1971 war and helping to rebuild it was hugely to the advantage of a country which had had its economy battered and its infrastructure absolutely destroyed by the conflict.

Equally important in the Bangladesh foreign policy scheme of things were relations with India. The generosity of spirit with which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her government came to the support of Bangladesh's people in 1971, especially in accommodating ten million Bengali refugees, providing space for the Mujibnagar government to operate in and waging a diplomatic campaign in Bangladesh's support, were naturally acknowledged with gratitude by the people and government of Bangladesh. More importantly, the entry of Indian forces in the war in December 1971, following the attack on Indian territory by Pakistan, and the eventual surrender of the Pakistani forces before the joint command of the Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini were a strong reassertion of the growing links between the two countries. Obviously, therefore, a strong, constructive bonding with India was in order.

And Bangabandhu believed that in order for the two countries to reinforce the links forged during the war, it was important that Indian troops go back home and let the new country get on with its work. A singular contribution of Bangabandhu's government was thus the return home of India's soldiers from Bangladesh. Dhaka was in little mood to be seen as being under the influence of Delhi. Indian soldiers trooped back to their country a few days before Mrs Gandhi paid an official visit to Dhaka in March 1972. And then came a defining moment in relations between the two neighbors when Bangladesh and India initiated a 25-year treaty of friendship that would have the two countries coming to mutual support and friendship in the event of hostilities imposed by other nations on either of them.

The times between 1972 and 1974 can justifiably be regarded as a bright era in Bangladesh's diplomacy. Bangabandhu's government earned, in these critical two years, the rare honour of seeing most nations in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas accord it diplomatic recognition. That Bangladesh was committed to pursuing a secular democratic structure was a powerful factor in persuading other nations of the need to give the new nation its rightful place in the councils of the world. It was a policy which led to the Bangladesh cause in the times after liberation being looked upon with a huge degree of support and empathy.

It can be argued, therefore, that Bengali secular democracy, having been acknowledged by the world as Bangladesh's defining diplomatic principle, led to a swift opening of doors everywhere. The country made its entry into various global organizations, particularly those linked to the United Nations. Again, though Bangladesh had little political reason to be part of the Commonwealth, it nevertheless made it known that it was ready and willing to play its full part in the organization. Dhaka's membership of the organization certainly riled Pakistan, which immediately took itself out of the Commonwealth (only to go back to it a few decades later).

Bangladesh's efforts to obtain a place in the United Nations were decisively blocked through an exercise of the veto by China in 1972. Indeed, through 1972 and 1973, the Chinese leadership refused to have Dhaka take its place in the world body, clearly out of an unwillingness to disappoint their friend Pakistan. The Chinese action surely dismayed Bangabandhu. Yet he was unwilling to be critical or condemnatory of Beijing's position on Bangladesh.

It was political pragmatism which came into play, for Bangabandhu, together with Foreign Minister Kamal Hossain, was in little doubt that until Bangladesh and Pakistan reached a deal on the issues that put up roadblocks to a normalization of ties between Dhaka and Islamabad, Beijing would go on playing the veto card and so keep Pakistan in good humour. Such an assessment entailed, of course, a powerful requirement for a change of perceptions where links with Pakistan were concerned. The change came in February 1974, when Bangladesh's entry into the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) threw up a new dimension to its diplomacy. Indeed, the OIC summit, held in the

Pakistani city of Lahore, was instrumental in burnishing Bangladesh's image on the global scene.

And that was for two reasons. The first related to Pakistan, which had been in a state of denial regarding Bangladesh's emergence as an independent state but which now was forced to accord official recognition to the new country if it wished to make a success of the Islamic summit. Bangladesh's secularism notwithstanding, the country was home to a majority population comprising Muslims, which reality could not be ignored. The second was Bangladesh's diplomatic opening out, at virtually one go, to the Islamic world. The perception at the time was that through joining the OIC, Bangladesh had filled a major gap in its diplomacy and was therefore now equipped to forge ahead with exploring trade and other possibilities with the Islamic world.

Bangladesh's foreign policy regarding the United States, in the initial stages, was informed by a couple of positions. First, Bangabandhu and his government were grateful to the American people for their unqualified support to the Bangladesh cause in 1971. Second, the government was critical of the Nixon-Kissinger tilt toward Pakistan during the war, a position which clearly militated against the Bengali war of liberation. It was not easily forgotten that where American politicians like Senator Edward Kennedy were loudly rooting for Bangladesh in 1971, the Nixon administration consistently explored the chances of a negotiated settlement between the Yahya Khan regime and the Bengali political leadership even when the opportunity for such a settlement did not exist after 25 March 1971.

The lengths to which the US administration was prepared to go toward promoting a settlement within the Pakistani federal structure were soon revealed through reports of Khondokar Moshtaque, the Mujibnagar government's foreign minister, being ready to make a departure from the position of the government and lend his support to the American plan during his projected trip to New York. The conspiracy, for so it was, was neutralized through the government's preventing Moshtaque from traveling to New York. His place was taken by Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, the self-exiled vice chancellor of Dhaka University then serving as a special envoy of the Mujibnagar government.

The Bangabandhu government's diplomatic successes were surely capped by Washington's recognition of Bangladesh in April 1972. Though

ties between the two countries were somewhat soured by the American position regarding Bangladesh's trade deals with Cuba, the government in Dhaka was careful not to let slip the opportunity of building on its new-found links with Washington. Bangladesh made a significant move through making contact with the World Bank, a step that demonstrated the government's determination to pursue an independent foreign policy through an exercise of pragmatism in its dealings with foreign nations in an era yet constricted by the Cold War.

In much the same manner, Bangabandhu and his government were convinced that nothing short of non-alignment would enable the global community to steer away from the hard choices it would have to make between leaning toward the Soviet bloc and aligning itself with American policy. Bangabandhu was keenly aware of the damage done to Pakistan through its membership of such anti-communist blocs as SEATO and CENTO; and because he was, it was his observation that the path traversed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ahmed Sukarno and Josip Broz Tito in the 1950s was one his country needed to take if its goal was to carve a distinctive niche for itself in the world.

Fifty-five years after 1971, the principles on which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman shaped Bangladesh's foreign policy are in absolute need of reassertion. The Father of the Nation believed, out of conviction and moral belief, that Bangladesh could be the Switzerland of the East. Given the

trauma the Bengali nation has faced in the years since his assassination, the relevance of that belief rises out of the mists of time. The message is patent and unmistakable: Bangladesh is in sore need of reclaiming the goodwill and respect of the international community, sentiments which once came its way through the nobility of its cause and the sagacity of its leadership. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman personified that cause and that sagacity.

On a personal note, this writer came across former British prime minister Edward Heath at a reception in London in the late 1990s. On being informed by the writer that he was from Bangladesh, Heath stopped for a while; there was a twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips. "Ah", said he, "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's country."

And that said volumes about the era of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

*** Syed Badrul Ahsan**, an analyst of South Asian history, has authored biographies of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Tajuddin Ahmad. He contributes columns to media outlets in Bangladesh and India and is currently engaged in research on the partition of 1947 and its ramifications. His upcoming work is a comparative study of the politics of Deshbandhu, Netaji and Bangabandhu.

The July Coup in Bangladesh: Unmasking the Four-Party Axis and the Assault on Sovereignty and the Spirit of 1971

*Prof. Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah**

For the past two years, a carefully curated fairytale has dominated the domestic and global media landscape. We have been told that the chaotic events of July and August 2024 were entirely a spontaneous, pure, student-led "Monsoon Revolution." We were instructed to believe that an unscripted, organic awakening of Gen-Z miraculously brought down a long-standing government overnight.

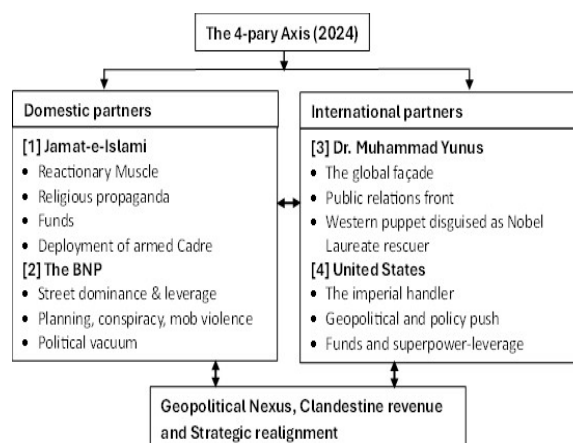
But history cannot be permanently rewritten by its victors when the ink they use is stained with systemic deception. Today, the dust of that upheaval has settled, the interim experiments have concluded, and the masks have finally slipped. It is time to look past the romance of the street graffiti and face a cold, calculated, and deeply unsettling reality: The July agitation was an expertly engineered regime-change operation. It was a geopolitical maneuver executed by a highly synchronized 4-Party Axis, bridging native anti-liberation elements with powerful international handlers (Shahidullah, 2025).

The Architecture of the Plot: A 4-Party Engineered Nexus

No student movement, regardless of how passionate, can topple a deeply entrenched state apparatus in a matter of weeks without institutional, financial, and foreign strategic orchestration. The quota reform protests began with genuine student grievances, but they were quickly and systematically hijacked (Government of Bangladesh, 2024).

The plot operated through two distinct layers: **Domestic Partners** who weaponized the streets, and **International Partners** who engineered the geopolitics and absolute narrative control.

The Axis Architecture



The Domestic Blueprint

In the political landscape of Bangladesh, **Jamaat-e-Islami** remains a deeply reviled entity. The party's unpatriotic stance during the 1971 Liberation War, combined with the horrific atrocities its members committed, has left a permanent scar on the national psyche—a legacy of animosity that will likely endure until Doomsday. Despite this dark history, the organization has managed to survive by meticulously leveraging religion and exploiting the deep-seated faith of the country's pious Islamic majority.

Parallel to Jamaat's unpopularity is that of the **Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)**. Historically, the Bangladeshi electorate has not voted for the BNP out of genuine adoration, but rather due to a total lack of viable alternatives. Over the country's 55-year history, the BNP has ascended to power multiple times—not through clean democratic mandates, but through cycles of political violence, deception, and calculated conspiracies.

Both entities share a perpetual, symbiotic strategy: they rely on false propaganda, religion, at times, anti-Indian sentiment, which is also linked to religion, destabilization, and political manipulation, while waiting in the wings for the perfect opportunity to strike. The student-led mass protests of **July 2024**, and Dr Yunus's rivalry with Sheikh Hasina and her Government, provided

exactly that golden moment. By capitalizing on the anger of a section of the population created by false propaganda, street violence and sniper killings by their cadres, the Jamaat-BNP axis perfectly engineered and seized the momentum to reclaim their footing in mainstream politics.

When initial peaceful demonstrations threatened to simmer down, the reactionary muscle of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and the deep organizational networks of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) flooded the streets. They brought the financial backing, the logistics, and the targeted coordination necessary to escalate a policy protest into an existential state crisis. They weaponized the chaos, knowing that a rising casualty count would manufacture the exact moral outrage required to force the pro-liberation government of Sheikh Hasina out.

The International Conduit

Yet, domestic chaos alone cannot secure a coup; it requires international legitimacy and superpower leverage. This is where the international tier of the axis solidified. The United States Government, pursuing long-standing strategic objectives in the Bay of Bengal, found its perfect domestic vehicle (Smith, 2024). To bridge Washington's imperial ambitions with the street operators in Dhaka, the plot utilized its ultimate international face: Dr. Muhammad Yunus.

Dr. Yunus's primary objective was driven by a calculated, long-term ambition to seize state power, a strategy designed to dismantle his political adversaries, expand his vast business empire, and permanently erase his extensive legal record of tax evasion, labor law violations, and financial irregularities. It was both incidental and natural that these misdeeds were brought to light by the Hasina administration. Given the government's long tenure and Sheikh Hasina's fundamental patriotism, a crackdown on such systemic and mega-scale corruption was inevitable. This exposure triggered a high-stakes confrontation that intersected with the July 2024 unrest. Yunus seized upon this agitation as a golden opportunity, capitalizing on the chaos to neutralize his opponents and exact absolute political revenge. Ultimately, however, this was not a targeted campaign against a single administration or Sheikh Hasina; rather, Dr Yunus would have engineered a similar coup against any government that dared to challenge his irregularities and enforce the law.

Safely positioned abroad while the streets of Dhaka burned, Dr Yunus utilized his immense network of Western elites to frame a violent insurrection as a "second liberation." He was not an accidental savior called upon by desperate students; he was the pre-selected global anchor linking Washington's regime-change mechanics with the BNP-Jamaat machinery on the ground (Jones, 2024).

The London Blueprint: The Genesis of Conspiracy

The architecture of this regime change was finalized long before the first brick was thrown in Dhaka. The operational understandings of the coup, which was shadowed for a long time, finally began to be established during a critical, clandestine meeting in London between Dr Muhammad Yunus, Dr Khalilur Rahman, and BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman.

While mainstream narratives spin this meeting as a routine political consultation, investigative channels have unmasked the precise, transactional nature of the quid pro quo that took place. In this high-stakes encounter, Yunus and Khalilur Rahman formally presented their strategy to leverage impending civil unrest to securely install the BNP into state power.

To reciprocate this guarantee of state power, Tarique Rahman committed the full institutional weight of the future government to shielding Dr Yunus from his compounding legal vulnerabilities. Tarique Rahman explicitly offered a blank check of lifetime protection for Yunus following his departure from the interim administration, alongside an ironclad guarantee to safeguard his vast domestic business empire and Grameen assets from any future judicial or state oversight.

THE LONDON CORRIDOR TRANSACTION

WHAT YUNUS & KHALILUR OFFERED TO TAREQUE RAHMAN

Guaranteed installation into State Power.
Direct conduit to American backing

WHAT TAREQUE RAHMAN RECIPROCATED TO YUNUS

Lifetime judicial immunity for Dr Yunus.
Full state protection of him and his business empire.

THE SOVEREIGN CONCESSIONS MADE TO THE UNITED STATES

Unparallel U.S access to financial markets.
Sovereign territory & port for U.S. forces.

The most treacherous dimension of this agreement, however, was the currency used to purchase Washington's international validation. In exchange for absolute American support to execute the ouster, the leaders agreed to a sweeping surrender of Bangladesh's national assets. Yunus and Khalilur Rahman assured Tarique Rahman of state power, and in return, the axis offered the United States unparalleled, deregulated access to Bangladesh's domestic financial markets. Far more damaging to the nation's independence, the agreement explicitly traded away military autonomy—pledging unrestricted use of Bangladeshi sovereign territory, airfields, and deep-water maritime ports for deployment and logistical operations by American military forces. This hidden transactional core in London laid the exact groundwork for the subsequent rapid signing of the ART, ACSA, and GSOMIA treaties, proving that the nation's core sovereignty was signed away well before the interim regime took office.

The Clinton Global Initiative Confession: "Meticulously Designed"

For months, the architects of the transition maintained the myth of an organic, "leaderless" student awakening. However, the urge to boast before global patrons eventually overrode their operational secrecy.

The definitive proof that the July uprising was a calculated coup emerged directly from Dr. Yunus's own mouth. Speaking on stage alongside former U.S. President Bill Clinton at the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) annual meeting in New York, Dr. Yunus threw away the script of spontaneity (Clinton Global Initiative, 2024). Addressing an audience of high-level Western dignitaries and financial backers, Yunus explicitly revealed that the agitation was "not organic" but rather a "meticulously designed" operation driven by long-term planning and deliberate choreography.

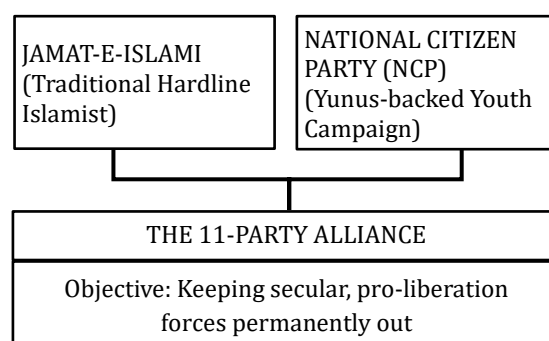
Introducing the structural handlers of the movement to the applause of global elites, Yunus detailed how the entire uprising was designed to be deliberately deceptive—structured to appear decentralized so that state security forces could not identify a singular leadership core to disrupt. This public admission at a high-profile Western fundraising venue shattered any remaining pretense: the July uprising was a long-planned regime change executed with precision.

Ideological Metamorphosis: Jamaat and the Yunus-Backed NCP Face

To sustain this regime change beyond the immediate transition, the axis required a mechanism to permanently institutionalize its ideological control while pacifying a skeptical electorate. This brought about the creation of the National Citizen Party (NCP), a political front birthed directly out of the Yunus-led interim government and formally convened by his closest student advisers, including Nahid Islam.

While the NCP presents itself under a polished, youth-led, centrist, and progressive guise, a deeper analysis reveals a far more calculated ideological alignment. The NCP functions essentially as a strategic camouflage for older, deeply entrenched anti-liberation sentiments. This reality was laid bare when the NCP formally integrated into the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-Party Alliance ahead of the February 2026 general elections (Dhaka Tribune, 2026).

This structural alignment proves that Jamaat-e-Islami and the Yunus-incubated NCP operate as two sides of the exact same ideological coin. By working in tandem and sharing organizational space, these elements utilize modern political branding to mask a shared, long-term agenda: to systematically rewrite the constitutional identity of Bangladesh and permanently block secular, patriotic, pro-liberation forces from ever regaining political authority.



The Historical Context: The Symbiotic Roots of the Axis

To truly comprehend how seamlessly the student-led NCP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and the BNP operate as an ideological monolith, one must examine the long historical perspective of this relationship. The alliance between the BNP and Jamaat is not a marriage of recent convenience; it is an organic, historical partnership rooted in a shared opposition

to the secular, pro-liberation foundational values of 1971 (Rahman, 2015).

- **The Post-1975 Rehabilitation:** Following the tragic assassination of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in 1975, the military regime of General Ziaur Rahman—the founder of the BNP—embarked on a systematic rehabilitation of anti-liberation elements. It was Ziaur Rahman who amended the constitution via martial law proclamations, dropping secularism as a core state pillar, and opened the political floodgates for Jamaat-e-Islami leaders who had actively opposed the birth of Bangladesh (Lifschultz, 1979).
- **The Four-Party Alliance (2001–2006):** This ideological symbiosis reached its zenith under the Khaleda Zia administration. The formal BNP-Jamaat coalition government institutionalized a dark era of state-sponsored militancy, minority persecution, and violent purges of the secular Awami League (Ali, 2010). By giving cabinet ministries to notorious war criminals, the BNP permanently legitimized a communal, anti-pro-liberation narrative within the state apparatus.

HISTORICAL PIPELINE OF REHABILITATION		
1975-1981	2001-2006	2024-2026
Ziaur Rahman (BNP) practically repeals secularism, rehabilitates Jamaat-e-Islami war criminals in the name of multiparty democracy.	Khaleda Zia (BNP) forms formal government with Jamaat-e-Islami war criminals.	Yunus Interim bans Awami League with support from Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP, NCP joins Jamaat block to cement new regime.

The 2024 July Uprising was simply the latest evolution of this historical pipeline. By employing the Yunus-backed NCP as a modern public relations vanguard to capture the youth vote, and using the BNP and Jamaat as the electoral juggernauts, the axis successfully executed their oldest shared goal: completely eradicating the secular, patriotic, pro-liberation vanguard of the Awami League from the political landscape.

The Pre-Revolution Ledger of Yunus: Tax Evasion and Labor Exploitation

To understand why Dr Yunus willingly lent his international stature to this foreign-backed plot, one must look at the severe legal realities he faced immediately prior to the coup. Behind his carefully managed global PR veil lay a compounding mountain of domestic legal liabilities that threatened to dismantle his corporate empire.

- **The Labor Violations:** In January 2024, Dr. Yunus was convicted and sentenced to six months in prison by a Third Labor Court of Dhaka. The charges were filed on behalf of impoverished workers at Grameen Telecom who had been systematically denied their lawful welfare funds, transforming a pioneer of social business into a convicted violator of basic labor rights (Daily Star, 2024a).
- **The Embezzlement Charges:** By June 2024, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) had formally indicted Yunus and 13 others for allegedly embezzling over \$2 million (₳25 crore) from the Grameen Telecom Workers' and Employees' Welfare Fund and laundering the proceeds (Independent Bangladesh, 2024).
- **The Tax Evasion Verdicts:** Bangladesh's Supreme Court had already ordered Yunus to pay millions of dollars in back taxes. He had attempted to bypass the national exchequer by routing over \$7 million through personal charitable trusts—including the Professor Muhammad Yunus Trust and the Yunus Family Trust—a maneuver the apex court flatly ruled was an illegal attempt to evade his civic tax obligations (Supreme Court of Bangladesh, 2023).

State Capture: Erasing Liabilities and Maximizing Personal Gain

The true motive of any coup is revealed by what the conspirators do the moment they seize the levers of power. For Dr Yunus, his 18-month tenure as Chief Adviser was less about democratic transition and more about institutionalizing total legal immunity and enriching his private network.

1. The Executive Tax Absolution

In an unprecedented abuse of executive authority, the Yunus-led interim administration

quietly withdrew over **TK 666 crore** (hundreds of millions of dollars) in outstanding tax liabilities owed by various Grameen entities. While everyday citizens faced soaring inflation, the head of state granted his own corporate empire a massive tax holiday behind closed doors.

2. Dismantling Public Oversight at Grameen Bank

Under the guise of ensuring "independence," the interim regime drafted an ordinance to slash the government's historic share in Grameen Bank from 25% down to just 5%, while reducing state-appointed directors from three to one. This structural rollback effectively removed public oversight, converting a national microfinance institution into a private fiefdom controlled entirely by Yunus loyalists.

3. The Expansion of Private Interests

The conflicts of interest extended far beyond microfinance. During his tenure, policies were swiftly enacted to favor his sprawling network of private interests, including fast-tracked approvals for his vanity Private University project and highly lucrative manpower and recruitment licenses granted to entities within his circle. Furthermore, hundreds of crores from the Ministry of Social Welfare were directly funneled into the Grameen Trust under an opaque, non-competitive funding model.

The Imperial Payback: Asymmetric Trade and the Surrender of Sovereignty

The most damning proof of the 4-party nexus between the Yunus administration, the BNP, and Washington lies in the immediate, aggressive realignment of Bangladesh's foreign and defense policies. The pro-liberation government of Sheikh Hasina had spent over a decade fiercely resisting intense pressure to sign foundational military agreements with the United States, maintaining a policy of balance and strategic autonomy. The post-coup axis tore that playbook apart.

The Economic Subjugation: The Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART)

Signed in February 2026 and enforced following high-level U.S. trade delegations to Dhaka, the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) marks the

total surrender of Bangladesh's economic sovereignty.

Under this deeply asymmetric framework:

- The U.S. imposed a rigid **19% reciprocal tariff** on Bangladeshi goods while forcing Dhaka to grant unfettered preferential access to American Big Tech, machinery, and agricultural monopolies.
- Bangladesh was stripped of its data sovereignty, explicitly prohibiting it from requiring American tech giants to store local user data on domestic servers.
- Most critically, the treaty effectively binds Bangladesh's hands geopolitically, explicitly forbidding Dhaka from entering into any new trade arrangements with non-market economies like China or Russia—effectively isolating the country from its largest regional development partners under the threat of total textile tariff enforcement.

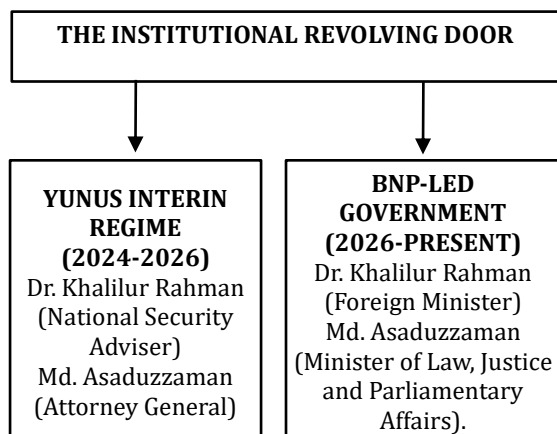
The Military Capitulation: ACSA and GSOMIA

What the Hasina government long recognized as an existential threat to sovereignty has now been fast-tracked by the new regime. Washington systematically leveraged the country's engineered economic vulnerability to force the finalization of two foundational defense pacts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025):

- **ACSA (Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement):** This agreement effectively turns Bangladesh's strategic ports and airfields into "soft bases" or military "lily pads" for the U.S. Armed Forces, allowing American naval vessels and aircraft unrestricted access for refueling, maintenance, and logistics.
- **GSOMIA (General Security of Military Information Agreement):** The software to ACSA's hardware. This military intelligence-sharing pact forces Bangladesh to synchronize its national signals and intelligence data with Washington's broader Indo-Pacific military objectives, stripping the nation of its strategic neutrality and importing Western conflicts directly onto sovereign soil.

The Revolving Door: The Unholy Alliance of Native and Foreign Anti-Liberation Forces

If further evidence were required of the seamless continuity between the Yunus interim apparatus and the newly established BNP-led administration, one needs only to look at the personnel driving the state.



Dr. Khalilur Rahman, who served directly under the Yunus interim government as the High Representative and National Security/Defense Adviser—orchestrating the delicate transition and laying the groundwork for the ACSA, GSOMIA, and ART treaties—was seamlessly sworn in as the Foreign Minister in the new BNP government under Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

This shameless transition exposes the "interim neutral" facade for what it always was: an architectural bridge designed to systematically dismantle the pro-liberation, sovereign foundations of the Awami League government and hand the keys of the state back to native anti-liberation forces and their foreign handlers.

On the other hand, during his tenure as Attorney General under the Yunus-led interim government, Md. Asaduzzaman's actions were heavily criticized by human rights groups and legal experts. His deep political ties to the BNP compromised the constitutional neutrality of his office, leading to numerous controversial and legally questionable decisions:

- **Mass Blanket Arrests:** He oversaw a massive legal crackdown resulting in the detention of over 10,000 people. His office faced international backlash for validating generic "group complaints" that allowed individuals to be arrested without specific personal evidence.

- **Judicial Partisanship:** Critics pointed to a clear conflict of interest, alleging that state legal machinery was used to aggressively fast-track the dismissal of corruption cases against BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders while heavily targeting political opponents, specifically Bangladesh Awami League.

- **Overstepping Constitutional Authority:** He used his state position to advocate for rewriting core pillars of the Bangladesh Constitution—such as secularism and the status of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—actions that legal experts argued an unelected official had no democratic mandate to pursue.

- **Banning Groups by Executive Decree:** He supported using executive orders rather than standard judicial trials to ban political organizations, bypassing due process and raising serious concerns about the suppression of freedom of association.

The Ultimate Entrenchment: Managed Elections and Absolute Sovereign Protection

The final phase of this grand design was executed in the highly managed general elections of February 2026. Under the pretext of a democratic reset, the Yunus interim administration systematically engineered the electoral playing field to ensure a predetermined victory for the BNP.

To guarantee this outcome, the regime used severe administrative and legal measures to eliminate any viable opposition:

- **The Banning of the Bangladesh Awami League:** By completely revoking the registration and banning the Awami League—the historic, pro-liberation party that had guided the nation for decades—the interim regime structurally disenfranchised millions of citizens and wiped out the primary challenger to the axis (Ministry of Law, 2025).

- **The Suppression of the Jatiya Party:** To prevent any alternative opposition block from forming, the regime systematically blocked and barred the Jatiya Party from effectively organizing or participating in the election, transforming the electoral exercise into an orchestrated, bipolar contest.

The results matched the blueprint precisely: the BNP secured a heavily engineered two-thirds

landslide majority, returning Tarique Rahman to executive power. With the political transition complete, Dr Yunus formally stepped down from his executive role, yet he was immediately insulated by an unprecedented, extra-constitutional permanent VIP status. Shielded by state-funded elite security, traveling on diplomatic privileges, and completely insulated from judicial scrutiny, he functions as an untouchable shadow statesman. The thoroughly purged judiciary remains permanently paralyzed, ensuring that the tax embezzlement and labor exploitation cases that once loomed over him are forever buried.

Conclusion: A Nation Deceived

The July Uprising was a textbook regime-change operation executed under the cover of student idealism. The genuine frustrations of Bangladesh's youth were co-opted by an elite corporate-political axis to clear the board, erase the severe legal vulnerabilities of a billionaire, and pivot the nation's sovereign assets toward Western military hegemony.

The consequences are now painfully clear: an historic political party completely disenfranchised, religious extremism mainstreamed into state governance, national intelligence and ports traded away for political survival, and a national exchequer manipulated to absolve a singular individual of his crimes. Bangladesh did not achieve a new dawn of freedom; it fell victim to a highly sophisticated foreign and domestic capture. It is the duty of every civic-minded citizen to reject the manufactured narrative, look at the ledger of the past two years, and hold this 4-party unholy alliance accountable for the engineered collapse of our constitutional order.

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The Unfinished Revolution: BAKSAL Still Matters to Reclaim the Bangladesh of 1971

*Engr. Manirul Islam**

Introduction: The Imperative of Post-War State Building

Bangladesh emerged in December 1971 at immense human and material cost. During the nine-month Liberation War, three million ethnic Bangalis were killed in a genocide; between 200,000 and 400,000 Bangali women were subjected to systematic sexual violence; approximately ten million refugees fled to India, and an estimated 90% of physical infrastructure was destroyed or damaged, severely disrupting agricultural cycle. All these crimes were perpetrated by the Pakistan Armed Forces and their local political and militia collaborators; Peace Committee Razakar, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams (Biswas, 2023; Gerlach, 2010; Murshid, 2022).

The new government inherited an empty treasury, negligible foreign exchange reserves, devastated infrastructure, and depleted administrative capacity. Nevertheless, the 1972 Constitution established **nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism** as the foundation of the republic. Yet the Westminster parliamentary system operated within a society that had emerged from war without comparable institutional consolidation or political reconciliation (Faaland & Parkinson, 1976; Murshid, 2022; Riaz, 2020).

These tensions intensified as wartime unity fractured. Divisions within the Awami League contributed to the emergence of the radical Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), while underground Maoist armed groups proliferated. By late 1974, political violence, economic crisis, famine, and Cold War pressures had converged into a severe state crisis. In this context, the BAKSAL framework introduced through the Fourth Constitutional Amendment on 25 January 1975 represented not simply an authoritarian turn, but an attempt at emergency political and institutional repair and consolidation (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020).

The Post-Liberation Crisis (1972–1974)

Post-war Bangladesh grappled with severe sociopolitical disorder fueled by the proliferation of illicit arms, economic disruption, and black-market activity. After March 1973, electoral dominance was

challenged by radical ultra-left groups seeking armed revolution, while the swift rehabilitation of anti-liberation factions reignited wartime ideological rifts which still linger, making democracy chronically sick. The political conflict of 1972–1975 involved substantial confrontation between the Awami League government and ultra-left opposition forces, including the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and other radical groups (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020).

The Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini (JRB)

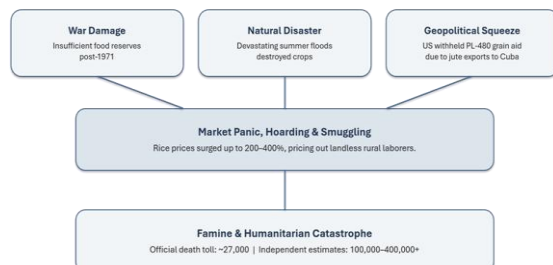
Promulgated under Presidential Order No. 21 in March 1972, the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini (JRB) was established to stabilize the fledgling state. Comprising former Bangladesh Liberation Force and Mujib Bahini fighters, the force actively combated insurgencies, economic sabotage, and counter-revolutionary activities, incurring and inflicting casualties. Merged into the national army in October 1975, the JRB lacked statutory extrajudicial authority, yet became a primary target of political stigmatization by anti-liberation forces at home and abroad. Such defamation campaigns frequently target post-revolutionary state security bodies, similar to the Soviet Cheka or historic People's Armies (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020). The Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini was formally constituted through President's Order No. 21 of 1972, and contemporary legal records document the statutory framework under which it operated.

The 1973 Election

The first parliamentary election was held in March 1973, with the Awami League winning 293 of 300 seats, while political opposition and radical left-wing forces remained active. Analysts contend that rushing to a Westminster-style election in March 1973 was premature. Instead of fostering unity, it facilitated the political rehabilitation of anti-liberation adversaries. This decision exacerbated ideological polarization, creating structural instability that undermined long-term state-building (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020).

The 1974 famine (74-er Durbhikkho) intensified this crisis. Severe flooding along the Brahmaputra damaged the principal monsoon crop, while Cold War geopolitics compounded domestic vulnerability. The United States withheld PL-480 wheat shipments following Bangladesh's export of jute to Cuba in violation of the U.S. embargo. By the time the Cuban trade arrangements were canceled and food aid resumed, critical months had passed. Rice prices increased by 200–400%, and, as Amartya Sen demonstrated, agricultural wage laborers experienced an “entitlement failure” as their purchasing power collapsed. Official estimates recorded approximately 27,000 deaths, while independent assessments placed the toll between 100,000 and 400,000 (Sen, 1977, 1981; Faaland & Parkinson, 1976; Dowlah, 2006; Hossain, 1999; Hossain, 2017; Hossain, 2026; Shabnam, 2022). The literature confirms that the 1974 famine was associated with severe flooding, rising food prices, disrupted livelihoods, food-import constraints, and problems in food distribution; the role of U.S. food aid policy has also been extensively debated (Dowlah, 2006; Faaland, 1981; Hossain, 1999; Hossain, 2017; Hossain, 2026; Shabnam, 2022).

Dr. Just Faaland, who served as the World Bank's Factors Behind the 1974 Crisis



Resident Representative in Dhaka from 1972 to 1975 and subsequently as Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute, introduced a fresh perspective on the origins of the 1974 famine. In a 1992 interview, he asserted that the crisis was artificial and man-made, pointing to direct intervention by a hostile United States alongside extreme mismanagement in domestic food distribution. This failure in distribution, despite an existing reserve of 600,000 tons of food grains, was purposefully created as part of a deep anti-state conspiracy. It is widely believed that the primary architect was the then-Food Secretary Momen Khan, a former Pakistani officer and staunch Muslim League loyalist, who was later rewarded with a cabinet portfolio by Ziaur Rahman (Faaland, 1981; Faaland & Parkinson, 1976).

The humanitarian crisis coincided with an expanding security vacuum. JSD/Gonobahini, Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party and other Maoist armed insurgency groups pursued guerrilla warfare, assassinations, attacks on police facilities, and sabotage in pursuit of revolutionary transformation. Former members of Razakar, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams also re-emerged underground, established tactical relationships with these groups and other armed anti-state elements. Amid political assassinations, food insecurity, and economic disruption, the government declared a State of Emergency in December 1974, setting the stage for constitutional restructuring (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020).

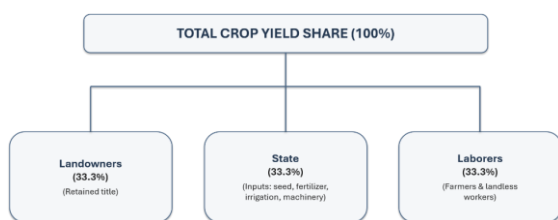
Opposing Faction	Primary Composition	Operating Tactics & Objectives
Ultra-Left & Socialist Renegades	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD / Gonobahini), Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party (Siraj Sikder), CPEP-ML (Haque)	Guerrilla warfare, assassination of local officials, sabotage of police outposts, and targeting infrastructure to force a Marxist transformation.
Defeated Anti-Liberation Forces	Former members of Razakar, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams militias	Formed tactical underground alliances with ultra-left elements to destabilize state institutions and reverse the outcomes of 1971.

From Wartime Alliance to BAKSAL: The “Second Revolution”

BAKSAL was conceived not simply as a conventional one-party organization but as a unified national platform incorporating pro-liberation forces, including the Awami League, National Awami Party (Muzaffar), Communist Party of Bangladesh, trade unions, professional associations, and civil society organizations. Its political logic drew partly on the cross-ideological cooperation of 1971, when a multi-party Consultative Committee worked with the Mujibnagar Government to coordinate the Liberation War and international diplomacy. BAKSAL therefore sought to institutionalize elements of wartime political unity in response to

the economic, political, and security crises of 1975. The January 1975 constitutional restructuring established a one-party political system under BAKSAL and represented a major shift from the parliamentary framework established by the 1972 Constitution (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020). However, it is important to understand the intention of lawmakers in making this major constitutional shift.

Its proposed restructuring centred on the **Multipurpose Village Cooperative (Bahumukhi Gram Samabay)**, intended for more than 65,000 villages. The compulsory model sought to modernize agriculture, bypass middlemen, and limit hoarding without abolishing private property. Landowners retained legal title while cultivation was organized through pooled operational units. Agricultural yields were to be divided equally: one-third to landowners, one-third to farmers and labourers including landless peasants and one-third to the state to finance fertilizer, high-yield seeds, irrigation, machinery, and national food reserves (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Faaland & Parkinson, 1976).



Administrative reform similarly sought to dismantle the inherited colonial “Bureaucracy/ DC culture.” Nineteen districts were reorganized into 60 smaller units governed by councils headed by appointed District Governors and incorporating the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, Judge, Surgeons, local Armed Forces commanders, and representatives of BAKSAL’s five mass wings; farmers, workers, youth, students, and women. Planned upazila-level tribunals aimed to improve rural access to justice and administrative efficiency. These reforms were accompanied by anti-corruption and anti-smuggling measures, population planning, and state supervision of nationalized industries to strengthen economic self-reliance and reduce dependence on foreign aid (Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020).

Comparative Revolutionary Context

BAKSAL can also be situated within a broader history of post-revolutionary state consolidation.

Following civil war and foreign intervention, Bolshevik Russia centralized political authority and suppressed counter-revolutionary forces; China established centralized one-party rule after 1949 amid war, poverty, and fragmentation; Cuba progressively unified revolutionary organizations while confronting embargo and armed opposition between 1959 and 1965; and post-war Vietnam employed unified administrative and mass organizations after reunification in 1975. Although these cases differed substantially, each reflected the use of political centralization under one party to consolidate states emerging from revolutionary conflict. While distinct in context, BAKSAL, formed by political forces forged unity in the 1971 War of Liberation, similarly executed an emergency consolidation aimed at stabilizing the nascent state, facilitating socio-economic reconstruction, and eventually transitioning toward democracy (Maniruzzaman, 1980).

Historical Assessment: Counterfactuals and Legacy

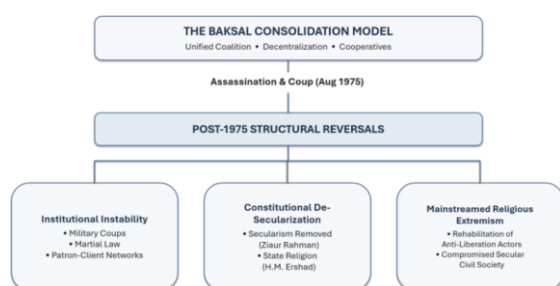
BAKSAL was never fully implemented. Six months after its launch, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family were assassinated on 15 August 1975 in a military coup executed by mid-ranking officers and political conspirators. Consequently, its potential outcomes remain strictly counterfactual (Maniruzzaman, 1980). The BAKSAL experiment was therefore extremely short-lived, being terminated following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975 and the subsequent political and military upheaval.

From an institutional perspective, implementation faced formidable constraints: the state lacked the administrative, technical, and logistical capacity to manage over 65,000 cooperatives; rural big Landowners/ jotedars threatened to resist compulsory pooling; integrating civilian and military officials under a unified political hierarchy risked institutional resistance; and state-directed economic policies threatened to strain ties with Western donors (Faaland & Parkinson, 1976; Maniruzzaman, 1980).

Conversely, a developmental-nationalist perspective views BAKSAL as Bangabandhu’s transformative strategy to restructure state administration and the economy, aiming to forge national unity, security, and development for a stable democratic transition (Maniruzzaman, 1980).

Post-1975 Reversal and Contemporary Implications

The termination of BAKSAL ended this experiment in post-war consolidation, triggering a sustained campaign by successive governments to demonize the reform. Consequently, Bangladesh entered an era marked by military coups, martial law, institutional instability, and entrenched patron-client politics. Major General Ziaur Rahman replaced secularism as a core constitutional principle with "absolute faith and trust in Almighty Allah," while repealing the 1972 Collaborators Act to rehabilitate anti-liberation actors. Lieutenant General H.M. Ershad consolidated this ideological shift through the Eighth Amendment (1988), which established Islam as the state religion (Riaz, 2020).



Conclusion

BAKSAL must be evaluated through the crucible of Bangladesh's post-war state crisis rather than dismissed simply as an authoritarian departure from parliamentary democracy. Beset by institutional fragility, famine, economic collapse, political violence, and Cold War pressures, the framework attempted political consolidation alongside administrative decentralization, agrarian restructuring, and economic self-reliance, even as its ambitious scope risked severe constraints in state capacity and institutional resistance (Faaland & Parkinson, 1976; Maniruzzaman, 1980; Riaz, 2020).

Its abrupt termination in August 1975 left BAKSAL's success unresolved and its trajectory permanently counterfactual. Ultimately, BAKSAL still remains pivotal not because its success was guaranteed, but because its ambitions, limitations, and premature end illuminate the fundamental struggle to construct a homogenized society, a stable, secular, sovereign, and socially equitable post-liberation state.

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From "15 August to 36 July": The Politics of Memory and Rewriting of Bangladesh's Political Calendar

*Dr. J. M. Chowdhury**

Introduction

On 5 August 2024, Bangladesh experienced a pivotal moment in its political history as the anti-government uprising culminated in the departure of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from the country, paving the way for the formation of an interim government headed by Professor Muhammad Yunus. Many participants, however, did not refer to the day simply as "5 August." Instead, they symbolically called it "36 July." At first glance, the phrase may appear to be merely a rhetorical innovation or protest slogan. Its significance, however, extends far beyond an unconventional date. By refusing to acknowledge the transition from July to August, participants constructed an alternative commemorative calendar that redefined the temporal boundaries of the uprising, symbolically extending July rather than allowing the movement to enter August. In doing so, they preserved the memory of the July uprising as a continuous political struggle, rather than allowing it to be subsumed into the historical associations of August with political crises involving the Bangladesh Awami League. The slogan thus transformed chronological time into political time, demonstrating how calendars themselves can become sites of political contestation.

Political theorists have long argued that struggles over power are simultaneously struggles over memory. Rather than passively preserving the past, societies actively construct historical narratives through commemorations, monuments, textbooks, museums, and anniversaries (Erll, 2011; Macdonald, 2013; Olick, 2021). These commemorative practices determine not only which events are remembered but also how those events are interpreted and transmitted across generations. In this sense, collective memory constitutes an important dimension of political legitimacy. Recent scholarship has further emphasized that political memory is increasingly contested in societies experiencing democratic transitions, regime change, or intense political polarization (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; De Cesari & Rigney, 2014; Reading, 2020). Competing political

actors frequently seek to reshape national memory by promoting alternative commemorations, historical narratives, and symbolic vocabularies. Rather than standing in opposition to history, collective memory influences which pasts become publicly recognized, how they are narrated, and how they are institutionalized through commemorative practices and state institutions (Halbwachs, 1992; Olick, 2007).

Bangladesh offers a particularly illuminating example of this broader phenomenon. Since independence in 1971, political parties have advanced competing interpretations of the Liberation War, constitutional development, secular democracy, and national identity (Jahan, 2005; Riaz, 2016; van Schendel, 2020). These competing narratives have been expressed not only through electoral politics and public discourse but also through symbolic dates that function as recurring markers of political identity. For the Bangladesh Awami League, 15 August occupies a unique place within their political calendar. The assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most members of his family on 15 August 1975 fundamentally altered Bangladesh's political trajectory. Nearly three decades later, the 21 August 2004 grenade attack on an Awami League rally reinforced August as a month associated with political violence directed against the party's leadership. Through annual commemorations, National Mourning Day observances, educational programs, public speeches, and state ceremonies, 15 August gradually became institutionalized as a recurring day of mourning, remembrance, and democratic reflection (Riaz, 2016; van Schendel, 2020).

The political upheaval of 2024 introduced a markedly different commemorative vocabulary. Among the movement's most distinctive innovations was the phrase "36 July." Rather than accepting the conventional transition from 31 July to 1 August, many participants symbolically continued counting the days of July until 5 August, referring to the intervening days as "32 July," "33 July," and ultimately "36 July." Emerging scholarship

suggests that this symbolic extension of July represented more than a linguistic curiosity. It reflected an effort to construct a distinctive mnemonic framework through which participants interpreted the uprising as an uninterrupted historical moment rather than a sequence of ordinary calendar dates (see, for example, recent discussions in Geopolitics and studies of the digital memory of the July uprising).

This paper does not seek to determine which political narrative is historically stronger. Instead, it asks a different question: How do symbolic calendars shape political memory in Bangladesh? Three related questions guide the discussion. First, how did 15 August become institutionalized as the principal commemorative day within the Awami League's political memory? Second, why was "36 July" constructed as a symbolic calendar during the 2024 uprising? Third, what does the coexistence of these two commemorative frameworks reveal about the politics of memory and political time in contemporary Bangladesh?

The paper argues that political conflict in Bangladesh increasingly extends beyond electoral competition into the symbolic organization of historical time itself. Calendars are no longer merely chronological devices; they have become political institutions through which competing communities construct legitimacy, transmit collective memory, and define national identity. The emergence of "36 July" alongside the long-established commemorative politics of 15 August therefore provides a valuable opportunity to examine how political actors compete not only over the interpretation of history but also over the temporal frameworks through which history is remembered.

August: A Month of Memory, Mourning, and Political Reflection

Political memory rarely emerges spontaneously. Rather, it is produced through an interaction between historical events, institutional practices, and repeated acts of commemoration that gradually transform individual experiences into collectively shared narratives (Erll, 2011; Olick, 2021). In democratic and post-conflict societies alike, commemorative practices help political communities define who they are, identify moments of collective trauma, and establish historical continuity across generations (Macdonald, 2013; Reading, 2020). Consequently, political calendars become more than chronological instruments; they

function as repositories of collective identity and political legitimacy.

Within Bangladesh, August has gradually evolved into one such commemorative framework. Its contemporary political significance derives primarily from two traumatic episodes separated by nearly three decades: the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 15 August 1975 and the grenade attack on an Awami League rally on 21 August 2004. Together, these events have transformed August from an ordinary month into what may be described as a politically institutionalized period of remembrance. The assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most members of his family during the military coup of 15 August 1975 marked one of the most consequential turning points in Bangladesh's political history (Riaz, 2016; van Schendel, 2020). Beyond the tragic loss of the country's founding leader, the coup fundamentally altered the post-independence political settlement. It initiated a prolonged period of military intervention in politics, constitutional restructuring, and ideological contestation concerning the identity of the new state (Ahmed, 2014; Lewis, 2011).

For supporters of the Bangladesh Awami League, however, the significance of 15 August extends beyond constitutional history. The event has been interpreted as a direct assault on the political leadership that guided Bangladesh's struggle for independence and on the ideals associated with Bengali nationalism, secularism, and parliamentary democracy. Whether or not these interpretations are universally shared, they have become central components of the Awami League's institutional memory and political identity (Riaz, 2016). The political consequences of August 1975 were reinforced by subsequent developments. The imprisonment and killing of four national leaders inside Dhaka Central Jail on 3 November 1975 further disrupted the organisational continuity of the Awami League and deepened the perception among party members that a systematic attempt had been made to dismantle the political leadership of the Liberation War (Ahmed, 2014). Although these events occurred outside August itself, they contributed to a broader narrative in which the series of violence in late 1975 came to symbolise a decisive rupture in the democratic development of Bangladesh.

Importantly, August did not immediately become institutionalised as a national commemorative

month. Public remembrance of the assassination was itself shaped by changing political circumstances. During different periods of military and civilian rule, official recognition of 15 August varied considerably, illustrating a broader principle emphasised in memory studies: collective memory is never static but is continually reconstructed through contemporary political institutions (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; Erll, 2011). What societies choose to commemorate often reflects present political priorities as much as historical events themselves (Halbwachs, 1992; Connerton, 1989; Olick, 2007).

After August 1975, the Awami League's return to government in 1996 marked an important stage in the institutionalization of 15 August. National Mourning Day was restored as an official state observance, accompanied by annual commemorative ceremonies, educational programs, public discussions, documentary productions, and cultural events (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1996; Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, 2021, 2022). These practices transformed historical remembrance into a form of institutionalized memory politics, through which the state organized narratives of sacrifice, legitimacy, and national identity in public life. Through repeated observance, 15 August gradually became embedded within Bangladesh's official commemorative calendar. As Olick (2021) argues, political memory is sustained not simply through historical knowledge but through recurring public rituals that transform remembrance into a routine element of political life.

This institutionalization was further strengthened following the 21 August 2004 grenade attack. During an Awami League rally on Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka, grenades were thrown into a gathering addressed by Sheikh Hasina. The attack killed twenty-four people, including Ivy Rahman, and injured several hundred others. Sheikh Hasina survived despite sustaining injuries, while many senior party leaders and activists were seriously wounded (The Daily Star, 2004; The Daily Star, 2018). Subsequent investigations, judicial proceedings, and public inquiries ensured that the attack remained a central reference point in the political discourse of Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Government of Bangladesh, 2018). Unlike the military coup of 1975, the grenade attack occurred within a formally democratic political environment. Consequently, it acquired broader symbolic significance concerning political violence,

democratic competition, and the security of opposition politics. The event reinforced the perception among Awami League supporters that August represented a recurring period of political vulnerability and sacrifice. Annual commemorations increasingly linked the events of 1975 and 2004 into a single narrative of democratic resilience and political victimization.

Recent scholarship on memory politics suggests that such commemorative linkages are neither accidental nor unique to Bangladesh. Political communities frequently organize separate historical events into coherent narrative sequences that reinforce collective identity and political legitimacy (Macdonald, 2013; Reading, 2020). Rather than remembering isolated incidents, societies construct what Erll (2011) describes as "mnemonic narratives"—interpretive frameworks that connect multiple events into a shared historical storyline. Within the Awami League's commemorative tradition, August has become precisely such a mnemonic framework. The symbolic power of August also reflects broader developments in what scholars describe as mnemonic governance—how states and political actors shape public remembrance through official institutions, education, memorialization, and public rituals (De Cesari & Rigney, 2014). National Mourning Day observances, public exhibitions, speeches, museum programmes, television broadcasts, and school activities all contribute to reproducing a particular interpretation of August across successive generations (Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). Such practices do not merely preserve historical knowledge; they actively construct political identity by defining which events deserve collective remembrance and why.

At the same time, memory scholars caution against viewing commemorative narratives as fixed or uncontested. Political memory remains inherently dynamic because different political communities often interpret the same historical events in different ways (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; Olick, 2021). Consequently, the significance of August cannot be understood solely through the events of 1975 and 2004 themselves. Its political meaning derives equally from decades of repeated commemorative practices through which those events have been institutionalised within one influential narrative of the national history of Bangladesh. Viewed from this perspective, August represents considerably more than a month of

mourning. It constitutes a symbolic political calendar through which the Awami League interprets its historical experience, transmits collective memory, and defines its contemporary political mission. In memory studies terminology, August functions as a recurring temporal institution that links historical trauma with political identity. This transformation from chronological time to commemorative time provides the essential context for understanding the emergence of an alternative symbolic calendar during the events of 2024. The appearance of "36 July" therefore did not occur within an empty mnemonic landscape; it emerged alongside an already well-established politics of time in Bangladesh.

"36 July": Reinventing Political Time in Bangladesh

If August represents an institutionalized calendar of political memory, "36 July" represents an attempt to create an alternative political calendar. Unlike August, whose symbolic significance emerged gradually through repeated commemorative practices over several decades, "36 July" was born almost instantaneously during a period of extraordinary political upheaval. Its emergence illustrates how political movements can generate new temporal symbols that redefine how historical events are remembered and narrated. The student-led uprising of July–August 2024 constituted one of the most significant episodes of political mobilization in Bangladesh since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991. What began as protests against the reinstatement of the public-sector job quota system rapidly expanded into a broader movement challenging the government's legitimacy following escalating confrontations between protesters and state security forces (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024). As violence intensified during late July and early August, the movement increasingly portrayed itself not merely as a protest campaign but as a transformative national struggle. Recent scholarship has described the uprising as a critical episode of democratic contention in which digital communication, decentralized mobilization, and symbolic politics played unusually prominent roles (Riaz, 2025; Geopolitics, 2026).

One of the movement's most distinctive symbolic innovations was the expression "36 July." Rather than recognizing the transition from 31 July to 1 August, many participants symbolically continued counting the days of July. Consequently, 5 August

came to be remembered as "36 July." What appeared to be a simple alteration of the calendar was, in fact, a significant symbolic act. By refusing to acknowledge the beginning of August, participants constructed an alternative temporal framework through which the uprising could be understood as a single, continuous historical moment rather than a sequence of ordinary calendar dates. Political theorists have increasingly argued that social movements construct not only new political identities but also new understandings of time. Contemporary studies of political temporality emphasize that revolutionary movements frequently suspend ordinary chronology by distinguishing between "historical time" and "calendar time" (Hartog, 2015; Koselleck, 2004). Moments perceived as transformative are often represented as existing outside ordinary temporal boundaries because participants understand them as inaugurating a new political era. The symbolic extension of July fits within this broader pattern. Rather than accepting the calendar as a neutral system of measurement, participants redefined time according to the perceived continuity of political struggle.

Recent scholarship on memory politics similarly suggests that collective memory increasingly develops through symbolic practices that emerge during contentious political events rather than solely through state institutions (Reading, 2020; Olick, 2021). Digital platforms accelerate this process by enabling slogans, hashtags, visual symbols, and commemorative narratives to circulate almost instantaneously across large political communities. During the 2024 uprising, the phrase "36 July" rapidly appeared in social media posts, protest art, graffiti, documentaries, digital archives, and commemorative exhibitions. The slogan therefore functioned not merely as a rhetorical device but as what Astrid Erll (2011) describes as a mnemonic medium—a symbolic form through which collective memory is produced, transmitted, and stabilised.

Importantly, the available evidence suggests that "36 July" was never associated with a single authoritative interpretation. Participants attributed different meanings to the phrase. For some, it commemorated those who lost their lives during the protests. Others described it as symbolising the continuity of resistance beyond the conventional limits of July. Still others interpreted it as expressing the idea that the movement had entered a historical moment in which ordinary chronology no longer

adequately represented political reality. Recent analyses of digital discourse surrounding the uprising similarly demonstrate that the slogan functioned as an open symbolic framework whose meaning was negotiated collectively rather than imposed from above (Rahman & Islam, 2025; Geopolitics, 2026). This multiplicity of meanings is consistent with broader theories of symbolic politics. Political symbols rarely derive their influence from precise definitions. Instead, their power lies in their capacity to accommodate multiple interpretations while simultaneously reinforcing a shared sense of collective identity (Edelman, 1985; Olick, 2021).

In this respect, "36 July" resembles other revolutionary temporal symbols such as the "Year One" calendar introduced during the French Revolution or the symbolic anniversaries associated with anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa such as the Juche Calendar in North Korea (Armstrong, 2003) or the Minguo Calendar in Taiwan (Kim, 2015) that formally replaced existing systems of dating. In each case, the reorganization of time signaled the perceived beginning of a new political order. Similarly, an aspiration to create a new political order, distinct from the secular political framework established in 1971, /can also be interpreted through the post-uprising responses of some pro-Islamic July protesters. Following the fall of the Awami League government, some leaders and supporters associated with Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamist organizations characterized the July uprising as the beginning of a "new Bangladesh" or "Bangladesh 2.0," presenting it as an opportunity to reshape the country's political future (The New Nation, 2024; The Daily Star, 2026). These statements have been interpreted by some observers as reflecting broader ideological aspirations that extended beyond the movement's initial demands.

From the perspective of political memory, therefore, the importance of "36 July" extends beyond the events of 2024 themselves. Whereas August had long served as an institutionalized month of remembrance for sacrifice and resilience within one influential political tradition, "36 July" introduced a different logic of commemoration. Unlike annual commemorations focused on past episodes of political violence associated with conflicts over Bangladesh's secular democratic order, "36 July" symbolically emphasized the continuity of a revolutionary struggle against social inequality and injustice. Rather than recalling a series of traumatic

events, it sought to sustain the momentum of the uprising by projecting an alternative political future based on the movement's aspirations for social justice and structural change.

This distinction raises an important analytical question. If August and "36 July" represent different ways of organizing political memory, how do these two commemorative calendars interact? Do they coexist as parallel mnemonic traditions, or does the emergence of one gradually reshape the public significance of the other? These questions provide the foundation for the next section, which examines the broader implications of competing commemorative calendars and the politics of political time in contemporary Bangladesh.

Competing "Political Calendars" in Bangladesh: Coexistence or Transformation?

The preceding discussion has shown that 15 August and "36 July" emerged from different historical moments and were institutionalised through different political processes. August acquired its symbolic significance gradually through decades of commemorative practice centred on the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and the grenade attack of 2004. By contrast, "36 July" emerged almost instantaneously during the political upheaval of 2024 as a symbolic extension of an ongoing protest movement. Although their historical origins differ substantially, both have come to function as commemorative calendars through which political communities organise collective memory and interpret the nation's recent past. Recent scholarship on memory politics suggests that societies rarely possess a single, uncontested historical narrative. Rather, competing political actors continuously construct, reinterpret, and institutionalise alternative memories that reflect their own understandings of national identity, legitimacy, and historical justice (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; Olick, 2021; Reading, 2020). Memory, therefore, should not be understood as a passive recollection of historical events but as an active political process in which different communities seek to define which events deserve remembrance and how those events should be interpreted.

Further, the political significance of a calendar lies not in chronology itself but in the meanings attached to particular dates. Viewed from this perspective, 15 August and "36 July" represent two distinct forms of political temporality. The commemorative logic of August is fundamentally

cyclical. Each year the return of August recalls a succession of traumatic historical events associated with the Awami League's political experience. Annual mourning ceremonies, public speeches, memorial programs, educational activities, and media coverage reproduce a historical narrative centred upon political violence, democratic resilience, and the legacy of the Liberation War. Time, in this framework, functions as repetition. The annual recurrence of August reinforces continuity between past sacrifice and present political identity.

The temporal logic of "36 July" is different. Rather than commemorating an annually recurring month, it symbolically suspends ordinary chronology by extending July beyond its conventional end. In doing so, it represents the 2024 uprising as an exceptional historical moment that cannot be adequately contained within the Gregorian calendar. Instead of cyclical remembrance, "36 July" embodies what might be called event-based political time—a symbolic temporality organized around a transformative episode rather than a recurring annual ritual. The emphasis is less on repetition than on rupture, marking the perceived beginning of a new political era. As "36 July" is solely associated with the events of 2024, it has opened a debate over whether Bangladesh's historical reference point should remain anchored in 1971 or whether 2024 should be regarded as a new national beginning, promoted by some as "Bangladesh 2.0." Furthermore, the designation "36 July" reduces the likelihood that its commemorative significance will compete with or be overshadowed by other nationally significant events, such as the birth or death anniversary of a national leader, that may fall on 5 August.

Last but not least, the coexistence of these two temporal frameworks raises an important analytical question. Can multiple commemorative calendars coexist within the same political community, or does the emergence of a new calendar inevitably reshape existing patterns of remembrance? Comparative scholarship suggests that the answer is rarely straightforward. In societies undergoing political transition, competing commemorative traditions often coexist for extended periods before one gradually becomes more institutionally entrenched than another (De Cesari & Rigney, 2014; Macdonald, 2013). The outcome depends not only on historical events but also on political institutions, educational systems, media practices, public rituals, and the ability of

competing actors to reproduce their preferred narratives over time.

This perspective is particularly relevant to Bangladesh after 2024. Since the political transition, public debate has increasingly extended beyond immediate political questions to broader issues concerning monuments, museums, school curricula, commemorative ceremonies, and the interpretation of national history. Such debates illustrate what scholars describe as mnemonic governance—the process through which political authorities and social actors seek to shape collective memory by institutionalizing particular historical narratives (De Cesari & Rigney, 2014). The emergence of "36 July" should therefore be understood within a wider contest over historical representation rather than as an isolated linguistic innovation.

One interpretation is that the new commemorative calendar simply supplements existing traditions by providing an additional framework through which the events of 2024 are remembered. Under this interpretation, 15 August and "36 July" commemorate different historical experiences and therefore coexist without significant conflict. Many nations sustain multiple commemorative calendars that recognise distinct episodes of national history without requiring one to displace another.

A second interpretation is that the emergence of "36 July" has broader implications because it symbolically relocates the culmination of the 2024 uprising from August back into July. Although the conventional calendar records the decisive political developments of 5 August, the symbolic calendar remembers the same day as "36 July". Therefore, the celebration of "5 August" in commemoration of any other significant event, e.g. the birth or death anniversary of any other national hero, may not be able to crack "36 July". Further, this temporal relocation may reshape the symbolic organisation of collective memory by encouraging participants to interpret the July uprising through narratives that directly or indirectly legitimise subsequent tragic events in August. Conversely, if the ousted political party were able to reframe the "36 July" narrative as the "5 August" tragedy, it could incorporate the event into its established narrative of national history, presenting it as another episode in the continuing "August tragedy" associated with its vision of a secular and democratic Bangladesh. The contest, therefore, is not simply over replacing one commemorative event with another occurring on

the same date (5 August). Rather, it is a struggle over the collective memory of the society and legitimacy of the July movement itself, and over the broader historical narrative through which recent events are remembered and interpreted.

At present, the available evidence does not permit a definitive conclusion on how the collective memory of the society may unfold over time. Nevertheless, one conclusion already appears justified. The emergence of "36 July" demonstrates that political conflict in Bangladesh increasingly involves competition over historical time itself. Rather than contesting only the interpretation of historical events, political communities also contest the symbolic calendars through which those events are remembered. The politics of memory, therefore, is no longer confined to monuments or textbooks; it extends to the organisation of time itself.

Concluding Remark

This paper has examined the emergence of two influential commemorative frameworks in contemporary Bangladesh: August, institutionalized through decades of remembrance associated with the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the grenade attack of 21 August 2004, and "36 July," a symbolic calendar that emerged from the political upheaval of 2024. Rather than treating these dates as simple chronological markers, the paper has argued that they function as competing mnemonic frameworks through which political communities organize historical memory, construct legitimacy, and define national identity. Drawing upon contemporary scholarship on collective memory, symbolic politics, and political temporality, the paper has demonstrated that calendars themselves can become political institutions. They shape not only when societies remember but also how they remember. August represents a commemorative tradition grounded in cyclical remembrance and institutional continuity. "36 July," by contrast, embodies a symbolic extension of historical time that seeks to capture the extraordinary character of a transformative political moment, not as a mere date recurring annually within the ordinary cycle of the calendar, but as an enduring point of political reference.

The paper has not argued that one commemorative framework has definitively displaced the other. Instead, it has suggested that Bangladesh may be entering a period characterized by competing political temporalities, in which different political

communities promote alternative calendars as vehicles for transmitting historical memory. Whether these calendars ultimately coexist, transform one another, or evolve into distinct traditions remains an open empirical question requiring further research.

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Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: The Final Chapter — Building a Nation against All Odds, 1972–1975

*Dr. Molla Huq**

A Leader Returns to a Broken Land

On 10 January 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman stepped onto the soil of a free Bangladesh after nearly ten months of solitary imprisonment in Pakistan, where he had been held under sentence of death for the 'crime' of demanding democracy and dignity for his people. He returned not to a hero's rest but to a nation in ashes. The Liberation War of 1971 had left an estimated three million people dead, hundreds of thousands of women survivors of wartime violence, roughly ten million refugees returning from India, bridges and railway lines destroyed, the port of Chittagong choked with sunken vessels, and an economy that had barely functioned even before the war began. It was into this devastation that Bangabandhu — 'Friend of Bengal', the **honorific his people had bestowed on him** — stepped forward to build a state from nothing. What followed, across three and a half extraordinary years, was one of the most difficult nation-building efforts of the twentieth century, carried out by a leader who never lost his fundamental faith in the Bengali people he had spent his life fighting for.

Challenge One: Rebuilding a Shattered Economy and Infrastructure

Bangladesh in 1972 had almost no functioning administrative machinery of its own. For twenty-four years, key economic and bureaucratic levers had been controlled from West Pakistan. Bangabandhu had to build a civil service, a currency, a central bank, and a foreign policy apparatus virtually overnight, while simultaneously repairing roads, railways, and river transport that were the country's lifelines for food distribution. He moved quickly: within weeks his government secured recognition from India, the Soviet Union, and dozens of other nations, opened diplomatic missions, and began negotiating the withdrawal of Indian troops, which was completed by March 1972 — a remarkable diplomatic achievement that affirmed Bangladesh's genuine sovereignty. He nationalised banks, insurance companies, and industries abandoned by fleeing West Pakistani owners, and set about resettling ten million

refugees and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced families before the year was out. He personally toured the countryside, urging farmers back to their fields, and by the end of 1972 had steered his country through its first constitution, adopted in November of that year — a document enshrining nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism as the four founding pillars of the new state. Few leaders in modern history have had to construct so much so fast from so little; that Bangladesh had a functioning government, currency, and constitution within a year of independence stands as a testament to his organizational will and his refusal to be paralyzed by the scale of the task.

The Numbers Behind the Recovery: GDP, 1971–1975

The scale of Bangabandhu's achievement is visible in the national accounts themselves. Bangladesh's real GDP collapsed by nearly 14 percent in 1972 — one of the sharpest single-year contractions recorded anywhere that decade — as the economy absorbed the full brunt of the Liberation War: destroyed infrastructure, a shattered harvest, and the abrupt loss of the administrative and trading systems that had run through West Pakistan. That was the depth from which Bangabandhu's government had to build. Under his leadership, the trend reversed almost immediately: growth turned positive in 1973 and then accelerated further in 1974, even as the country simultaneously absorbed the shock of the famine and the global oil crisis. It was only in 1975 — a year that includes the political rupture caused by his assassination in August — that growth turned negative again, undercutting the momentum his government had rebuilt over the previous two years.

Year	Real GDP (constant USD)	Annual Growth
1971	\$31.10 billion	— (baseline, pre-independence)
1972	\$26.76 billion	–13.97% (war devastation)

Year	Real GDP (constant USD)	Annual Growth
1973	\$27.65 billion	+3.33% (recovery begins)
1974	\$30.30 billion	+9.59% (growth accelerates, despite famine)
1975	\$29.06 billion	-4.09% (oil- shock pressures; year includes August crisis)

Source: World Bank national accounts data (GDP, constant-price USD terms), as compiled in international GDP historical datasets.

Read together, the figures tell a story of resilience rather than stagnation: from the trough of 1972, the economy Bangabandhu built posted two consecutive years of recovery and acceleration — a genuine improvement achieved against a backdrop of famine, insurgency, and global economic turmoil that would have derailed far more established governments. It is this recovery, as much as any single policy, that reflects the seriousness with which his government approached the task of putting a war-ravaged nation back on its feet.

Challenge Two: The Famine of 1974

Perhaps the cruellest test of Bangabandhu's leadership came in 1974, when catastrophic monsoon flooding destroyed crops across the country at precisely the moment global food and oil prices were spiralling after the 1973 oil shock. The famine that followed was driven by a combination of factors, not one alone: catastrophic flooding that wiped out the aman harvest across the north, domestic hoarding and speculation by traders that drove rice prices beyond the reach of the rural poor, a barely functioning post-war distribution system still being rebuilt from nothing, and delayed food aid from the United States, on which the fragile new nation depended. Famine conditions took hold in parts of the north. Bangabandhu responded by opening langarkhanas (relief kitchens) across the country, mobilising the Red Cross and international agencies, and appealing directly and personally to world leaders for emergency assistance. He did not hide from the crisis or deflect responsibility; he visited affected districts, ordered emergency food procurement, and pushed through the difficult

work of building a public food-distribution system in a country that had none. The famine remains, to this day, one of the most painful chapters of Bangladesh's early history — and one Bangabandhu confronted directly rather than downplaying it, treating it as an emergency demanding the full mobilisation of a government that was, in every sense, still being built from the ground up.

The delay in American food aid was not simply a matter of shipping schedules. In 1974, Bangladesh's Jute Corporation made a one-off sale of roughly four million jute bags to Cuba, worth about US \$5 million. Under the terms of US Public Law 480 (PL-480), which governed American food-aid shipments, a recipient country could not trade with countries on the US embargo list — and Cuba was on it. On 27 May 1974, the US Ambassador in Dhaka informed Bangabandhu's government that food aid would not proceed because of the Cuba transaction. Roughly 2.2 million tonnes of already-pledged wheat were held back as a result. Bangladesh cancelled the Cuba arrangement and gave written assurance in July 1974 that it would not recur, but the aid agreement was not finalised until the worst of the famine had already passed. Economists and historians who have studied the famine closely — including Rehman Sobhan and the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen — regard this delay as a genuine aggravating factor: not the sole cause of the famine, but a real one layered on top of a crisis that flooding, hoarding, and a fledgling distribution system had already set in motion. It is a sobering reminder that Bangabandhu was fighting the famine not only on the ground at home, but against currents of international politics well beyond his control.

Challenge Three: Armed Insurgency and Political Extremism

Alongside natural and economic calamities, Bangabandhu faced an internal security crisis on two fronts. On the far left, the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), founded in October 1972 by former student leaders Serajul Alam Khan, A. S. M. Abdur Rab and Shahjahan Siraj, and including Major M.A. Jalil, built an armed wing — the Gono Bahini, commanded by Colonel Abu Taher and Hasanul Haq Inu — to overthrow the elected government to install a Marxist state. Through 1973 and into 1974, JSD-led agitation repeatedly spilled into open confrontation: in February 1974 the party issued a twenty-nine-point ultimatum accusing the government of corruption and threatening to blockade state relief and food-distribution offices,

and on 17 March 1974 a JSD rally besieged the Home Minister's residence in Ramna, Dhaka, resulting in gunfire and loss of life on both sides. Separately, the Maoist Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party, led by Siraj Sikder, waged its own campaign of assassinations and attacks on police stations, food depots and jute mills, targeting Awami League officials, police officers and ordinary citizens in an attempt to destabilize the fledgling republic. Among its victims was the sitting Member of Parliament for Dhaka-22 (Belabo–Monohardi), Gazi Fazlur Rahman, who was shot dead by Sarbahara Party gunmen on 16 March 1974 — one of several Awami League parliamentarians murdered during this period of unrest. At the same time, remnants of collaborationist and anti-liberation elements sought to undermine the state from within. Bangabandhu, a man who had spent his entire political life fighting for democratic rights through peaceful mass movement, now had to defend that same democracy against those willing to destroy it by the gun. He formed the Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini as a paramilitary security force to restore order in the countryside and worked to reintegrate former guerrilla fighters into civilian life and the regular armed forces. It was a painful, often controversial struggle — the government's own security response drew serious criticism from human rights observers, and the cycle of violence and counter-violence claimed thousands of lives on all sides before it ran its course — but one born of the same instinct that had defined his whole career: a refusal to let Bangladesh's hard-won freedom be seized by force from the people who had struggled and sacrificed their lives for it.

Challenge Four: Charting an Independent Path in a Cold War World

Bangladesh's independence had been midwived in the middle of Cold War rivalry, and Bangabandhu was determined that his country would not simply trade one form of dependency for another. He pursued a foreign policy of non-alignment, cultivating relationships with India and the Soviet bloc while also reaching out to the Muslim world, securing Bangladesh's membership of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 1974 and having Bangladesh's citizens undertake the Hajj pilgrimage that same year — a journey that would also open the door to diplomatic recognition by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. He addressed the United Nations General Assembly in Bengali in September 1974, the first time the language of his

people had ever been heard from that podium, a moment of profound symbolic assertion of Bengali identity and sovereignty on the world stage. Balancing these relationships while keeping desperately needed food and development aid flowing was a constant, delicate task, carried out by a leader determined that Bangladesh's foreign policy would answer to Dhaka, not to any foreign capital.

The Battle for International Recognition

Sovereignty on paper was not the same as acceptance in the world, and Bangabandhu discovered quickly that a handful of influential states were prepared to withhold recognition regardless of the facts on the ground. By August 1972, some 85 countries had already recognized Bangladesh — but the United States held off until 4 April 1972, weighing its Cold War alignment with Pakistan; Pakistan itself refused recognition outright; Saudi Arabia warned as early as January 1972 that recognizing Bangladesh would be viewed as a hostile act against a fellow Muslim state, a warning that unsettled Western Europe and much of the Muslim world; and China — Pakistan's closest ally — went furthest of all, casting its first-ever United Nations Security Council veto in August 1972, and again in 1973, specifically to block Bangladesh's admission to the UN.

Rather than wait on events, Bangabandhu moved to answer these objections directly. He steered Bangladesh into the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and in February 1974 took the politically difficult step of personally travelling to Lahore, Pakistan — barely two years after a devastating war with that same country — to attend the OIC's Islamic Summit. Pakistan had earlier formally recognized Bangladesh that same week, on 22 February 1974, with Turkey following on the same day. Two months later, in April 1974, his government concluded the Tripartite Agreement in Delhi with India and Pakistan, resolving the repatriation of Pakistan's prisoners of war — precisely the issue China had cited to justify its veto — as well as the repatriation of Bengalis stranded in Pakistan. With the Chinese objection removed, and after sustained diplomatic pressure from Dhaka, China allowed Bangladesh's UN application to proceed unopposed, and on 17 September 1974 Bangladesh took its seat as the 136th member of the United Nations — a genuine diplomatic triumph secured within Bangabandhu's own lifetime, and

substantially the fruit of the path he had charted through Lahore and Delhi.

Not every door swung open before he could walk through it. Saudi Arabia did not extend formal recognition until 16 August 1975 — the day after his assassination — and China did not establish full diplomatic relations with Dhaka until January 1976. In fairness to Bangabandhu's record, it was his groundwork — OIC engagement, the Lahore Summit, the Tripartite Agreement, and the opening of doors to the Hajj pilgrimage by Bangladesh's citizens in 1974, which opened channels across the Gulf — that cleared the path those two states eventually walked. He did not live to receive their recognition in person, but the diplomatic case for it, and the removal of the objections that had justified withholding it, was substantially his work.

The Search for a Second Revolution: BAKSAL

By late 1974 and into January 1975, Bangabandhu concluded that the scale of the crises facing Bangladesh — famine, insurgency, smuggling, corruption, and a political culture still finding its feet — demanded a bolder national mobilization than parliamentary politics alone could deliver. In January 1975 he introduced the fourth constitutional amendment and formed the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL), envisioning a single national platform through which farmers, workers, students, and civil servants would be organized into a disciplined, development-focused movement — administrative districts were reorganized, and a second five-year plan for rural development and food self-sufficiency was put in motion. Bangabandhu framed this 'second revolution' as an emergency measure to complete the work of nation-building that multi-party politics, in a country so young and so beset by armed threats to its stability, had struggled to deliver — a leader trying, in his own words, to give Bangladesh 'bread before ballots' at a moment of genuine national peril. It remains one of the most debated decisions of his career, and historians continue to weigh its costs against the crises it was designed to answer; what is not in dispute is that Bangabandhu undertook it in the conviction that only a unified national effort could pull Bangladesh back from the brink.

Whatever I have achieved is for the welfare of the people. I have nothing of my own. Whatever I have, I have got from the people of Bangladesh.

— Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

15 August 1975: A Nation's Father Falls

Early on the morning of 15 August 1975, a group of disgruntled and rogue army officers stormed Bangabandhu's residence at 32 Dhanmondi in Dhaka and assassinated him along with almost his entire family. He was 55 years old, and had governed independent Bangladesh for just three and a half years — years in which he had built a state, shaped a constitution, and given rise to a functioning economy from the wreckage of war, fed his people through famine, and defended a fragile democracy against armed insurrection, all while still working, until his final day, on a vision for Bangladesh's future. His death was a profound tragedy not only for his family but for a nation that lost, in a single night, the man whose life's work had brought it into being. It would be more than two decades before his killers faced justice, and it was left to his daughter, Sheikh Hasina, to carry forward the unfinished work of the leader Bangladesh knows simply as Bangabandhu — the Father of the Nation.

A Legacy Forged Under Fire

It is easy, at a distance of half a century, to judge the crises of 1972 to 1975 in isolation from the circumstances that produced them. But few leaders in modern history have been asked to build a sovereign state, feed a starving population, defend a young democracy against armed rebellion, and assert a nation's place in a hostile world — all at once, all within three and a half years, with almost no institutional inheritance to draw upon. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman met each of these challenges directly, never retreating from responsibility and never abandoning his fundamental commitment to the people of Bangladesh who had placed their trust in him through decades of struggle. The constitution he gave the nation in 1972, the international recognition he secured, the relief system he built in the face of famine, and the very idea of Bangladesh as a sovereign, self-respecting nation among nations — these remain his enduring legacy, and the foundation upon which everything Bangladesh has since built continues to stand.

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The Responsibility of Shafiullah, Zia, Khaled Mosharraf and others in the Assassination of Bangabandhu

*Nuruzzaman Manik**

The most brutal massacre in the history of the Bengali nation took place in the early hours of August 15, 1975. The architect and president of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and all his family members were killed in a demonic frenzy that day. Incidentally, Bangabandhu's two close relatives, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, were saved because they were outside the country. The members of Bangabandhu's family who were killed in the historic residence on Road No. 32 in Dhanmondi include: 1) Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman 2) Bangamata Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib 3) Eldest son Sheikh Kamal 4) Middle son Sheikh Jamal 5) Youngest son Shishu Sheikh Russell 6) Bangabandhu's younger brother Sheikh Abu Naser 7) Eldest daughter-in-law Sultana Kamal Khuku 8) Middle daughter-in-law Parveen Jamal Rosy 9) Housemaid Lakshmi's mother 10) Potka 11) Sub-Inspector Siddiqur Rahman, a member of the Special Branch of the Police, and 12) Army officer Colonel Jamil Ahmed, assigned to Bangabandhu's security. Also killed that night were Bangabandhu's brother-in-law and cabinet member Abdur Rob Serniabat, Bangabandhu's nephew Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni, founding chairman of Jubo League and one of the editors of BAKSAL, and his childbearing wife Begum Arju Moni, Serniabat's younger daughter Baby Serniabat, younger son Arif Serniabat, grandson Shishu Sukanta Babu, etc. The massacre was carried out by attacking three separate residences simultaneously at almost the same time in a planned manner.

On December 8, 1998, at the end of the verdict in the Bangabandhu assassination case, Dhaka District and Sessions Judge Kazi Golam Rasul wrote, "It cannot be omitted to mention that, based on the evidence received in this case, it appears that the high-ranking officers of the Bangladesh Army, especially those stationed in Dhaka, did not discharge their duties, nor did they take any steps to discharge them, despite having had ample time. It is a matter of great regret that no steps were taken for Bangabandhu's safety even after receiving his telephone order. It is clear from the evidence that a very small number of junior army

officers/members of only two regiments were involved in this assassination. It is incomprehensible why the Bangladesh Army did not try to control/disarm these few army members. This will remain a permanent stain on the army in our national history."

Even though the killers were some misguided army officers, the line of testimony of the witnesses in the Bangabandhu assassination case reveals the institutional failure. Analyzing the issues of that failure, it is understandable why those who were supposed to ensure the security of the country's president and his family failed or pretended to fail. Let us learn about the history of the role and responsibilities of senior army officers at that time in stages.

First, we will focus on the then army chief Shafiullah. It is known that two unexpected incidents occurred on August 14. One: A bomb exploded at the place where Bangabandhu was to deliver a speech in the afternoon. There were rumors that the JSD would hold a protest march on the campus on August 15 to mark Bangabandhu's arrival. There were rumors that an attempt could be made to assassinate the president. It is assumed that the JSD carried out this incident. At that time, the police were not trained enough to deal with such incidents. On the same day, an Indian helicopter crashed in Feni in the afternoon. As a result, the responsibility of dealing with these incidents fell on the army. Shafiullah ordered the commander of the Comilla garrison to recover the bodies of the Indian pilots. And Colonel Jamil was given the responsibility of coordinating security in the university area. Rouf also joined Jamil in this task. It got quite late while reviewing and coordinating all this. Shafiullah went to bed late at night. The next day, at around 5:15 or 5:30 in the morning of August 15, his batman Havildar Haider Ali woke him up. Opening the door, he saw the Director of Military Intelligence, Lt. Col. Salahuddin, standing in uniform with a stun gun in his hand. Shafiullah wanted to know why he had come dressed like this? Salahuddin did not answer that question and asked if he had ordered the armored and artillery units to

go to the city. Shafiullah said that he had not given any such orders. Salahuddin said that the two units had moved into the city and occupied important establishments such as the Ganabhaban, the radio station, etc. Not only that, a few tanks had also moved towards Bangabandhu's house at number 32. 'What was I to do in this situation?' Shafiullah asked himself. There were two options. One was to inform the President about what was happening and the other was to instruct the Dhaka Brigade Commander, who was the commander of the two forces, to resist those who were doing this. He asked Salahuddin if Shafayat Jamil knew what had happened. Salahuddin replied that he could not tell. Because he had rushed to his house as soon as he got the news. He ordered Salahuddin to go quickly and tell Shafayat to call the 1st, 2nd and 4th Bengal Regiments to stop them. Those three regiments were deployed in Dhaka to prevent such incidents. With this order, he quickly called Bangabandhu on the red telephone. The red telephone was engaged. Then he called the normal telephone. That too was engaged. To save time, he asked his wife to ring the red telephone. He started trying to reach Shafayat on another telephone. His telephone was also engaged. Then he told his home exchange to contact Shafayat by any means. He started contacting other officers on the other telephone. In this process, he was able to contact Colonel Jamil. Jamil said that the President had called him and told him to go to his house immediately because he feared danger. Shafiullah said that he had learned about the incident from Salahuddin. He was trying to contact the President but could not. Since Jamil was going to the President's house, he should inform the President that Shafayat had been ordered to move. So, if possible, the President should be taken to a safe place from his house. Jamil said that he would try to reach Bangabandhu's house. After finishing talking to Colonel Jamil, he tried to catch Shafayat. He got her. Shafiullah wrote that his voice sounded strange or sleepy, maybe from thought. Without wasting any time, he asked if Shafayat knew about the incident? Shafayat said that he did not know. Shafiullah gave him the same order again and it seemed that Shafayat understood it. Shafayat later said that he had not received any order. Shafiullah wrote, 'But he admitted that he had received my call that morning. Why did I call him so early in the morning if I didn't give him that order? Didn't I call him to give him the order?' After giving this order to the Dhaka Brigade, he called Air Chief AK Khandaker and Navy Chief MH Khan and informed them of the incident. They also didn't know

anything. Then he called Zia, Shafiullah writes, 'Hearing Zia's voice, it seemed like he was hearing the news for the first time. Zia just said, 'Is that so!' Then he called Khaled Mosharraf. He also seemed to have heard the news from Shafiullah. Then at Rouf's house, no one picked up the phone. While Shafiullah was talking to them, his wife was desperately trying to reach Bangabandhu on the red telephone. This time Shafiullah started trying. Most likely, he got the line a few minutes before six o'clock. Bangabandhu picked up the phone. Hearing Shafiullah's voice, he said in an excited and angry voice, 'Shafiullah, your force is attacking my house - Kamal is probably getting angry - you send the force immediately. Shafiullah wrote, 'I could only say, 'I am trying to do something, can you come out of the house?' The President did not respond. I started saying hello, hello. It seemed that there was someone in front of him that he was unable to answer. I also thought that he had put the phone down on the table because after 30 or 40 seconds, I heard the sound of automatic weapons firing on the telephone. After about a minute, the telephone line was disconnected. Shafiullah wondered why Bangabandhu did not call him directly. He must have tried to communicate with others. Because his telephone was always busy or he was trying but Shafiullah's phone was busy or it could be that he had lost trust in Shafiullah after seeing the soldiers at his house. After talking to the President, Shafiullah wanted to be sure about the intercession. Did Shafayat send soldiers? His telephone was busy. He told the operator to cut off the line and give him his line when he continued talking on another line. But his telephone was engaged. Shafiullah thought that either the telephone set was not fixed or the rebel soldiers had immobilized him. 'But later it turned out that both my ideas were wrong.' Shafiullah wrote, 'His subsequent actions proved that he was not on the right track. He remained silent without giving orders for the troops to move. He did not listen to my orders.' Later, Shafiullah learned that Bangabandhu had called Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansur Ali, Brigadier Mashhurul Haque, Colonel Jamil and a few others. Shafiullah regretfully wrote that if he had contacted him a little earlier, he might have had some time to do something. Because when he got the news, the killers were on route number 32. Bangabandhu had lost trust in him after seeing the soldiers. But after receiving his call, he might have understood that Shafiullah was not involved. He wrote, 'Sooner or later we all have to die. My only consolation is that Bangabandhu at least learned before his death that

Shafiullah betrayed him. It seems that Shafiullah has placed the responsibility of his failure on Shafayat Jamil. He claims to have ordered Shafayat, which Shafayat did not carry out, although Shafayat has always denied this allegation. Shafiullah's big mistake here is that when he saw that Shafayat Jamil was not moving his troops for whatever reason, he could have rushed to Shafayat's headquarters, located just five hundred yards away, and taken measures to move Shafayat's troops. Here he wasted time on telephone calls and conversations at the critical moment. But he could not get a single soldier to move from the cantonment. Here the army chief failed to take a quick decision. However, unlike others, he cannot be called a traitor, a scheming or a conspirator. Because although many people had previous contact information with the murderers Faruk-Rashid, Shafiullah did not. He did not know anything about the cure in advance. He made two mistakes: one. Wasting time by making unnecessary calls here and there and two. Under pressure from the murderers Dalim-Rashid, he expressed loyalty to the illegal, undemocratic and unconstitutional killer Mushtaq's government.

Now let's look at the activities of Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Zia. On the morning of August 15, Shafayat Jamil rushed to Zia's house after receiving the news that Bangabandhu was killed by the murderer Rashid. Shafayat wrote, 'After banging on the door for a while, the Deputy Chief himself opened the door. He looked like he had just woken up. He was wearing pajamas and a sando shirt. One cheek was shaved, the other was clean. Seeing me so early in the morning, his eyes were filled with a mixture of surprise and questions. I gave him the terrible news. I also told him about Rashid's arrival and my conversation with the Chief. I think Zia was a little shocked. But he was not upset. He controlled himself and said, "President is dead, so what? Vice President is there. You should uphold the sanctity of the constitution. Get your troops ready immediately." This was Zia's reaction on hearing about Bangabandhu's assassination! In fact, Zia pretended to be surprised with Shafiullah or Shafayat. He had advance news of the cure. According to the killers Farooq-Rashid, they had already informed Zia about their cure plan. On March 20, 1975, when Zia went to consult with him about the change of government, Zia told the killer Farooq, "As a senior, I do not want to get involved in such things, if the juniors want to do something, they should do it themselves." The question is, did he take any action against the juniors after hearing

about the cure plan to overthrow the government or did he inform the higher authorities about it? But this concealment is a crime under military law. Or was he himself one of the conspirators? The truth will be revealed one day through proper investigation. It goes without saying that Zia is the main beneficiary of Bangabandhu's assassination. He became the army chief 9 days after the cure and on November 7, he moved to the center of power in the alleged revolution of Colonel Taher of the Jasad.

Now let's come to the case of Chief of General Staff Khaled Musharraf. Before going to Chittagong with 6 tanks for an exercise in March 1975, Farooq had planned to stage a coup, he had told Major Nasir. Major Nasir had told CGS Brigadier Khaled Musharraf. He hushed it up instead of informing the higher authorities. It must be remembered that Khaled Musharraf was then the front-runner as the candidate to become the next Army Chief of CGS. Far from reporting such extremely punishable rebellious behavior of an officer under him, he himself did not take any action, nor did he take any action to calm him down, as is evidenced by August 15, 1975. If Farooq had been punished according to the rules that day, wouldn't the chances of the brutal killings of August 15 have been reduced by 50 percent? So Khaled Musharraf knew about the events of August 15 in advance, maybe he did not know when it would happen. Furthermore, by arranging for the supply of tank ammunition for Farooq on the afternoon of August 15 without the instructions of Chief Shafiullah, Khaled Musharraf's connection with Farooq or Khaled's support for Farooq's work became as clear as daylight. In this regard, Shafiullah wrote, "When Brig. Khaled was informed that the rebel troops of the tank regiment did not have main gun ammunition in their tanks, that was the time he should have acted and hold them. He instead of taking any action to hold them, issued ammunition to them without even consulting me. Thereby Brig. Khaled earned their goodwill. Am I wrong to hold this view? These troops were still rebel soldiers and how could CGS issue ammunition to the rebel troops? Therefore, would I be wrong to say that Brig. Khaled also wanted to be on their side." Another proof of Khaled's involvement is found in his actions on the morning of August 15. Khaled went to Shafayat Jamil's 46 Brigade and took control of it, but not a single soldier moved against Faruk-Rashid. At that time, the 46 Brigade was the only hope against Faruk-Rashid! This move by Khaled can easily be considered a well-planned strategy to thwart any

attempt to use the 46 Brigade against Faruk-Rashid's units and keep the post-coup situation in their favor. Although Khaled went to the 46 Brigade to move forces on the orders of the army chief and was stuck, they (Shafayat) did not let him go or do anything! Disarming the Rakshi Bahini was also an important step to handle the situation after August 15. Farooq took 50 percent of the work forward by threatening unarmed tanks in the early morning, and Khaled Musharraf did the rest by giving a single sentence to the two leaders of the Rakshi Bahini, Anwar ul Alam and Sarwar Hossain, "I know you are patriots, but we had to do it because we do not want this country to be a kingdom!" Khaled Musharraf even forced the Rakshi Bahini to accept allegiance to the Mushtaq government.

Two incidents are cited as evidence of Colonel Shafayet Jamil's involvement in the August 15 murder. First, on the morning of August 15, Army Chief Shafiullah called Shafayet Jamil to take his 46th Brigade to repel the rebels. Although according to Jamil, Shafiullah mumbled and did not say anything clearly. Shafiullah did not call Jamil later, because Jamil had left the telephone receiver up! Second, on the early morning of August 15, Farooq's tank fleet started moving towards the city through the road behind Shafayet Jamil's residence, making a loud noise. Shafayet Jamil did not wake up or raise any questions despite all this noise. Although Shafayet Jamil could say that he knew that the 1st Bengal Lancers and the 2nd Field Artillery would be training together. So no questions were raised about this. Still, there is no doubt that Shafayet Jamil's inaction, even after receiving the call from the army chief on the morning of August 15, helped Farooq-Rashid's plan to be carried out properly. Khaled also complained to the army chief that no one in the 46th Brigade was letting him go or do anything. And Colonel Hamid's memoirs reveal that there were already whispers in the cantonment that Farooq would do something. Was there any influence of such a preconceived notion behind Jamil's inaction? Colonel Hamid describes in his book that Jamil was in a good mood all day on August 15 and told Colonel Hamid, "See, sir, the freedom fighters have done it before, and they have done it again!" It is worth noting that Shafayat had about 4,000 soldiers under him. Even if, for the sake of argument, we do not assume that the Army Chief did not give him any orders, the question still arises: Shouldn't the Independent Brigade Commander Shafayat have immediately moved troops to help the President in danger after receiving the news that the

Presidential Palace had been attacked? Did the Army Chief forbid him from going into action?

Among the senior officers, the role of outgoing DFI (now DGFI) chief Brigadier Abdur Rauf is also questionable for several reasons. First, on the night of August 15, despite receiving news of the possible coup by Farooq-Rashid, he did not take any immediate action and hid behind his house with his family to save his life or avoid responsibility, and appeared at the army building at 6.30 am wearing a lungi. If he had immediately informed Army Chief Shafiullah in the middle of the night, something might have happened. Second, even though Colonel Jamiluddin Ahmed, who was working as the president's security officer, was appointed as the new intelligence chief, Rauf, who was unhappy, was delaying the handover of responsibility, and finally the decision was made to hand over responsibility on August 15. Third, did the DFI not receive any news of the planning and preparation of such a big event? Or did it keep quiet even after receiving it? Where Farooq's behavior was questionable, it was the DFI's responsibility to investigate his activities. In fact, judging by the above incidents, there is sufficient evidence of Brigadier Rouf's involvement in the August 15 incident.

There is no motive or clue to the connection between Colonel Manzur and Ershad due to their stay in India. However, both of them returned from India after August 15, and even returned after being threatened. However, there is a strong possibility that Ershad had an understanding with Farooq-Rashid, because on August 18, 1975, after returning to the country, Ershad went to Ganabhaban despite the ban and met Farooq-Rashid. During Zia's rule, Ershad also recommended that Farooq-Rashid and the others be given jobs in the Foreign Ministry, and it was during his rule that Farooq-Rashid got the opportunity to play politics in Bangladesh.

Although no other senior officers were found to be involved in the August 15 incident, two senior army officers were clearly against the incident, neither of them were freedom fighters but returned to Pakistan. One, the then Colonel Jamiluddin Ahmed, who was the outgoing Military Secretary to the President, was killed while performing his duty on the call of the President that morning. Another, Brigadier Kazi Ghulam Dastagir, ordered the Chittagong station of Dalim's announcement on the morning of August 15 to stop the broadcast. However, their behavior was not politically motivated, but was entirely a part of professional

responsibility, who gave more importance to their professional duties than getting involved in politics. It is still a mystery, why was Colonel Faruk, a potential coup plotter who had already been holed up in the cantonment, not brought under intelligence observation, or was he being given protection on the contrary? Intelligence failure is responsible for Bangabandhu's death. Even if the army intelligence agency had been even slightly active in the cantonment, this operation could have been foiled at the beginning.

I will end this discussion with Major General Khalil's comment on the armed forces: 'A retired major armed with a Stengun can enter the army headquarters without any hindrance and do whatever he wants, whether it is to intimidate the army chief or to capture him, and the heads of the other two forces are also captured by that one major and go to the radio building about six miles away and carry out whatever they are ordered to do. It would not be right to call that force or trio of forces 'a trained, well-organized, disciplined and armed force that ensures the defense of its own country, let alone any force. The only appropriate name for this force is an undisciplined crowd'. That was the condition of the armed forces of Bangladesh that day.'

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US Aiding Bangabandhu's Killers

*Probir Kumar Sarker**

It was the evening of May 13, 1974. Major (later sacked) Syed Farooq Rahman of the first Bengal Lancers and second-in-command of the armored corps met with a senior US embassy official at the latter's home, unannounced.

Farooq said that he had been sent by the highest-ranking Bangladesh Army officer to ascertain what the attitude of the US government would be if they took over power through a coup. He also wanted to know whether the US government would be able to see to it that there was no foreign interference after the coup.

Farooq told the official that a quarter of the army was very dissatisfied with the government. He stated that they had been fuming at the recent instruction from the prime minister that the army must not arrest the Awami League leadership in the course of the ongoing operations against corrupt elements, smugglers, and extremists that began on April 25.

In response, the official said that the US would not intervene in any way in the affairs of Bangladesh.

Farooq, who rose to lieutenant colonel (and later dismissed), was hanged along with four other killers on January 28, 2010 over his role in the assassination of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and most of his family members on August 15, 1975—some 16 months after the meeting with the US embassy official.

The then US ambassador in Bangladesh, Davis Eugene Boster, sent a cable to Washington regarding the meeting two days later. Boster had known Major Farooq since 1972, he wrote, adding that the officer was not in a command position, nor did the armored corps have any armor.

Farooq had made a similar unusual approach on July 12, 1973. On that day, without an appointment and in uniform, director of the "armored corps" Farooq turned up at the embassy seeking information on prices and availability of armored personnel carriers, light tanks, and amphibious vehicles.

The previous day, it was Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid, with the same approach, who turned up without an appointment and in uniform.

On July 11, Major Rashid of the artillery branch appeared at the embassy's economic commercial section and requested information on the availability and prices of artillery pieces ranging from 105 to 155mm light anti-aircraft guns, "locating equipment" such as radar, electronic meteorological sets, "field survey equipment," mortars, and small reconnaissance aircraft.

He claimed to be a member of the "armaments procurement committee" under the chairmanship of Brigadier Ziaur Rahman, the deputy chief of army staff who later became the army chief and the president of the country as per the blueprint of the US-Pakistan nexus.

Rashid told the embassy official that his mission was to solicit price information and technical data from foreign embassies and submit them to the committee for decision. The official, in response, explained US arms policy toward the subcontinent and did not encourage.

According to the British military attaché in Dhaka, the group had approached the French, German, and Soviet embassies with similar requests at the time.

In the cable dated May 15, 1974, Ambassador Boster wrote that it had not been in his anticipation that any military move was imminent.

After the news of Bangabandhu's assassination reached Washington, Kissinger sat in a meeting with his team. He questioned them again and again, as if he could not believe his own ears, to know whether the US administration had warned Sheikh Mujib about the coup plotters in 1974. The answer was no, since, the officials claimed, they had no confirmation of the plot.

Kissinger also learned that the CIA had warned him once about a coup plot in March 1975, but "he brushed it off, scoffed at it, and said nobody would do a thing like that to him," said an official.

"He was one of the world's prize fools," Kissinger quipped, and then wanted to learn about the assassins.

"They are military officers, middle and senior officers, who are generally considered less pro-Indian than the past leadership; pro-US, anti-Soviet...and Islamic. They have changed the name to the Islamic Republic....," one officer replied.

"Absolutely inevitable," Kissinger remarked.

Despite learning about the coup plots directly from the planners and key executioners three years before the assassinations, the US embassy in Dhaka kept mum. The officials neither encouraged the plotters nor tried to restrain them when they met.

They turned a blind eye when the plotters in January 1975 told the embassy officials that they would not strike soon, because they wanted to observe developments in Sheikh Mujib's new form of governance—the one-party BAKSAL.

The embassy heard about more coup rumors in March and April. They did not warn Sheikh Mujib even on August 5, only 10 days before the brutal murders at Dhanmondi 32, when Ambassador Boster called on the president for half an hour.

Boster also did not disclose that they knew about the May 21 grenade attack on the convoy of the president when he was returning to Dhaka after a visit to the Betunia satellite earth station in Rangamati.

The US Embassy learned about the attack from the deputy superintendent of police assigned to the president's security unit and a journalist. Mujib escaped uninjured, but two unidentified persons were injured in the attack, which did not come into the media the next day due to strict instructions by the Press Information Department to suppress the story.

On the other hand, then Indian premier Indira Gandhi had warned Sheikh Mujib several times in 1974 and 1975 about an imminent coup attempt within the army, based on intelligence inputs. He apparently did not pay heed to the warnings.

Sheikh Mujib did not strengthen his security and took a tough stance against the elements of the conspiracy to overthrow his government—from JSD to the military officers. He was nonchalant and showed his resolve to implement his own philosophy as a socialist in his own way until his death.

The purpose of killing Bangabandhu was to seize power and establish an Islamic state like Pakistan and to eliminate the Awami League to get out of India's circle. To that end, Major (dismissed)

Shariful Haque Dalim confirmed the seizure of power in his radio speech that morning, including a confession of the murder. In addition, the murderer, Dalim, declared Bangladesh an Islamic republic and also spoke about imposing a state of emergency and a curfew.

From that day on, the slogan "Bangladesh Zindabad" began to be used instead of the slogan "Joy Bangla," and the name of "Bangladesh Betar" was changed to "Radio Bangladesh" in line with Pakistan.

In his first speech at 6:10 am, Dalim said: "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been killed. Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmed has become the new president."

His statements, which were made several times, were as follows: "I am Major Dalim. The military has seized power since this morning under the strong leadership of Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmed. Martial law has been imposed across the country from now on. All of you should cooperate with us. You should be at ease; you will not face any difficulties. Long live Bangladesh."

Although Dalim mentioned the martial law in his speech, the government order was issued on August 20.

On the morning of August 15, after Dalim, Mushtaq said in his radio address that he became the president due to a historical need for the sake of the greater interests of the country and its people and relied on the Most Merciful Allah and the countrymen. The patriotic military has come forward to help him like heroes.

After that, the heads of the army, navy, air force, police, and BDR gave speeches on the radio expressing their loyalty to the government. No evidence was found of the involvement of the heads of the armed forces in the seizure of power by killing Bangabandhu. However, if Major General K. M. Shafiullah had been able to resolve the ongoing unrest and chaos in the army and if Deputy Army Chief Ziaur Rahman had not joined hands with the murderers, perhaps the plan to kill the Father of the Nation and his family could have been prevented.

A few days after the arrest of the four national leaders, the assassins brought to the fore their leader, Ziaur Rahman.

On August 24, Zia replaced his rival, then chief of army staff K. M. Shafiullah, and chose as his deputy Brig. H. M. Ershad, who had been in India on training. The duo were in power until the death of Gen. Zia in 1981. The ouster of Shafiullah completed

at least one stage in the army's efforts to sort itself out in the aftermath of the August 15 coup. He was generally regarded as a weak leader, a quality that was seen by some as contributing to a slackening of discipline and, thus, to the action of the assassins. Zia also created a new position in the army, chief of defense staff, to accommodate a confidante, then chief of Bangladesh Rifles Major General Khalilur Rahman, who had been with Sheikh Mujib since his repatriation from Pakistan.

The appointment of General (Red.) M. A. G. Osmani, who headed the Bangladesh Armed Forces in 1971, as defense adviser to Mushtaq, was noteworthy. He and Zia were confidantes of Khandaker Mushtaq since the War of Liberation commenced in March 1971. Earlier, Osmani resigned from parliament in early 1975 in protest against Sheikh Mujib's constitutional changes. Missing in the spate of announcements was any reference to Brig. Khaled Mosharraf, then chief of general staff and an active participant in the struggle within the army to resist the assassins and the plotters.

Nonetheless, as per the blueprint of Pakistan, the coup plotters then killed the four national leaders in jail on October 3 and staged another massacre on November 7 to eliminate Khaled Mosharraf and install Gen. Zia at the helm.

Despite being out of the public eye for many years, in late 2024, in an interview given on YouTube, Dalim claimed that he formed the Sena Parishad for a 25-year military and political program during the Liberation War to work against Indian aggression. Its main goal was to seize power by killing Bangabandhu and implementing the Sena Parishad's plan. At that time, when Dalim told Ziaur Rahman about the plan, Zia touched the Quran in his hand and swore that they would not tell anyone about this organization until they came to power.

However, earlier, the murderer Dalim had written in his book (Aami Major Dalim Bolchhi) that they killed Bangabandhu due to his arbitrary attitude, suppression of the opposition, corruption, the formation of BAKSAL, etc.

Coup plotters consolidated themselves fast

By mid-1975, BAKSAL Chairman Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was aware of the conspiracies hatched by some pro-Pakistani mid-level officers in the army. But he had also been facing opposition from leftist leaders Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and Siraj Sikder and the JSD's A. S. M. Abdur Rob since the liberation of the country.

Yet he was not afraid of death and continued to implement the decisions he deemed necessary for his "Second Revolution"—introducing a new form of unified governance system to eradicate corruption and abuse of power in public service and by his party men and improve the economic conditions of his fellow citizens by achieving self-reliance.

BAKSAL was scheduled to officially replace the nation's other political parties and associations on September 1, 1975, and the 61 district governors were supposed to take charge on August 16.

The coup plotters formed the interim government—inducting ten ministers and five state ministers from the Mujib government—in a fashion that people would tend to believe that his own men, due to an internal feud in the government, had assassinated the Father of the Nation.

The coup leaders, including Farooq Rahman and his brother-in-law Abdur Rashid, were not ready to return to the army. Farooq's office was directly next to the president's at Bangabhaban. Even though the assassins were in favor of renaming the country as the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh by following the path of Pakistan, they later dropped the idea.

The assassins announced a curfew amid a state of emergency curbing the basic rights of the people, engaged in diplomatic correspondence, and arrested Sheikh Mujib's aides and sympathizers, including the four national leaders, MPs, civil servants and Awami League politicians on August 23.

In the next few years, thousands of wartime collaborators facing trial were released from jail, the ban on religion-based parties was lifted, and restrictions were imposed on leftist parties. Secularism was removed from the constitution.

At the same time, an ordinance was promulgated in September 1975 to prevent the trial of the killers. Gen. Zia's parliament passed it into law in 1979.

After the assassins seized power on August 15, they were desperate to gain recognition for their act and sent out letters to all missions seeking support. Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the first to recognize the Mushtaq government, followed by Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, the UK, Burma, Japan, and Jordan as of August 18. Five other countries formally expressed support for the killers—Brazil, Iran, Qatar, Malaysia, and Nepal—by August 20. Indonesia, Canada, the UAE, and Switzerland

announced a continuation of normal relations on August 20.

The Soviet charge d'affaires in Bangladesh called on President Mushtaq at Bangabhaban on August 24 and conveyed the decision of his government. The next day, the Dhaka press carried prominently placed front-page items announcing the Soviet recognition of the new government of Bangladesh. The USSR welcomed the decision of the government to promote relations of understanding and cooperation with all countries and honor all international treaties and agreements concluded by Bangladesh.

In response to Mushtaq's efforts to gain India's recognition, Indira Gandhi on August 28 said India was "unshakably committed to the pursuit of friendship and cooperation with Bangladesh and with all our neighbors," according to press reports. She also hoped that the new government would continue its commitment to goodwill and cooperation in the subcontinent and a fulfillment of the ideals on which Bangladesh was built.

On September 1, the Dhaka press reported the message by Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai recognizing the People's Republic of Bangladesh. "I am convinced that the traditional friendship between our two peoples will grow steadily," he said. The PRC recognition was a feather in President Mushtaq's cap, permitting him to assert more than ever Bangladesh's intention to follow a "balanced" foreign policy by reducing Indian influence.

The pro-China Bhashani, who had been critical of Sheikh Mujib's rule, extended his support to Mushtaq and later to Gen. Zia. After Bhashani's death, most of the leaders of NAP joined the newly formed king's party, the BNP, alongside those from the Muslim League and JaSoD.

As a sequel to the 1975 assassinations and Gen. Zia's takeover, the Bangladesh Army chief, General Waker-uz-Zaman, ousted Bangabandhu's daughter and five-time Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2024, with the help of the US administration under President Joe Biden. The US-backed deep state used its collaborators in the United Nations, the OHCHR, the European Union, the Pakistan Army's ISI, the Bangladesh Army, civil society, the media and

opposition parties to carry out the regime change operation under the guise of a student-led movement against the freedom fighters' quota in government jobs. This conspiracy was coordinated jointly by Jamaat-Shibir-Hefazat, Gen. Zia's elder son Tarique Rahman—the mafia godfather-turned-BNP chief, and Nobel Peace laureate and US Presidential Medal of Freedom Award winner Dr. Muhammad Yunus, whose father—usurer goldsmith Dula Mia Saudagor—was a Pakistan Muslim League leader and razakar.

As they established a mobocracy, many leaders of the Jamaat-Shibir-Hefazat and the BNP have already admitted to having been involved in the conspiracy while taking credit for the ouster of the Awami League government. These anti-liberation forces have also exposed their agenda by selling off the country to the US, Pakistan, Turkey, and China during the unconstitutional Yunus regime, putting the nation's future in danger.

Subsequently, by staging a farcical election on February 12, 2026, which saw widespread ballot stuffing from the night before the voting, the army has made the anti-liberation forces as a vital force in Bangladesh's politics for the first time since independence. The BNP government seems to be an extension of the Jamaat-controlled Yunus regime, in which jihadists, war criminals, looters, and police killers were indemnified. It has not taken any effective steps to arrest and prosecute the criminals who fled from jail, recover the arms and ammunition looted from over 450 police stations, prisons, and the prime minister's residence, and establish the rule of law. Rather, Tarique Rahman's administration has politicized the army, the police, the judiciary, and the administration, as well as autonomous and private institutions, to consolidate power and take the country backwards.

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Fighting the “Reset”: History, Memory, Cultural Identity, and the Fragility of Bangladesh as a Nation-State

*Niaz Rushd Al-Kazi**

In late September 2024, in an interview with the Voice of America Bengali Service, the then-Chief Advisor of the interim government of Bangladesh, Dr. Muhammad Yunus, a poster child of microfinance and Western neoliberalism, declared condescendingly that “... we have pushed a reset button. The past is gone for sure. Now we will build up in [a] new way” (Voice of America, 2024). This was uttered in response to the interviewer’s question about the history and memory of the 1971 War of Independence, and about the place of the chief architect and captain of that struggle for National Liberation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in the post-July Movement era. This comment caused schadenfreude-induced euphoria among the supporters of Yunus and the July Movement crowd, engendered indignant astonishment and venerable despair among people and groups who identify as staunchly pro-1971 and its ideals, while drawing withering criticism and rebuffs from those somewhere in the middle.

It is said that nation-states are not held together by borders or bureaucracies alone. They are held together by shared stories about who a people are, where they came from, and what they endured to become who they are. Benedict Anderson (1983) argued that nations are “imagined communities”: bound less by geography or ethnicity than by shared narratives sustained across generations through print, ritual, and public memory. When those narratives are dismantled — deliberately, systematically, and in the name of political renewal — what remains is not a purified nation but a nation losing its capacity to cohere. Bangladesh, fifty-four years after its birth in “blood, sweat, and tears,” now confronts this danger.

The Weight of 1971

The Bangladesh that emerged in December 1971 was not merely a new state carved from Pakistan. It was the culmination of a struggle whose scale is difficult to overstate. Approximately three million Bengalis perished in the nine months between March and December 1971 (Bass, 2013; Mookherjee, 2015). Approximately two hundred thousand to four hundred thousand women were

subjected to systematic sexual violence by the Pakistani army and their local collaborators — the Razakars, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams paramilitary forces drawn largely from the ranks of Jamaat-e-Islami (Mookherjee, 2015; D’Costa, 2011). Ten million refugees crossed into India. Entire villages were burned. In the war’s final days, intellectuals were rounded up and executed by Al-Badr operatives precisely because the perpetrators understood that killing a nation’s prime thinkers, scientists, writers, teachers, professionals, and journalists is the surest way to break its future (Bass, 2013). Bangladesh was founded on the ideals of resisting colonial oppression, racist discrimination, communal and religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, and genocide on one hand, and the upholding of self-determination, equal rights for all, emancipation, and secular nationalism, on the other hand. And these facts — not any political party’s later performance — are what the state’s legitimacy fundamentally rests upon.

The Father of the Nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is inseparable from that founding. His March 7, 1971 speech at the Ramna Racecourse became the pivot on which Bengali political identity turned from grievance within Pakistan to a demand for a nation of its own (Van Schendel, 2020). When Pakistani forces arrested him on the night of March 25, 1971 and launched their genocidal campaign — Operation Searchlight — they made him the symbolic center of the liberation struggle in his absence. All the reciters of the Proclamation of Independence over the radio, including the founder of the governing Bangladesh Nationalist Party, then-Major Zia, explicitly and repeatedly invoked the name of “our Great National Leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman” on the 26th and 27th of March to garner both national and international legitimacy and support. The People’s Republic of Bangladesh and its first Government in Exile, which so aptly steered the Liberation War to a triumphant conclusion, were formed with ‘Sheikh Mujib’ as the Founding Father and its first Head of State. His home at Dhanmondi Road 32 became, over the following decades, a sanctuary, a mausoleum, and a national monument — the place from which the

Bangladesh state was declared and to which its founding was traced.

A Complex Recent Past

The Awami League's fifteen years in power from 2009 to 2024 were, honestly assessed, a period of both significant achievement and accumulated controversy. Bangladesh's economy grew substantially. Infrastructure expanded. But the same period was marked by contested elections, allegations of political and military overreach, bureaucratic and economic corruption, and a governance style that many domestic and international observers criticized as increasingly "closed" and 'ego-centric' (Riaz, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2024). The July 2024 student protests that ultimately unseated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina began, at least on the surface, as a legitimate expression of civic grievance — albeit surreptitiously well-orchestrated by the religious and pan-Islamist rightists — about a possible reintroduction of a quota system in public employment. But a failure to understand the real dynamics on the ground on the part of his government, the resulting gross mismanagement of the rapidly unfolding events and the foundering response to increasingly volatile situation, and the subsequent successful use of these blunders by the aforementioned Rightists, their enablers, and neoconservatives allies to manipulation a large swath of the general public led to the expansion of the movement into wider concerns about political rights, and electoral voice. Further, the excessive and, at times, disproportionate force used at the grassroots by some trigger-happy field-level personnel of the security forces — sometimes in legitimate self-defence facing murderous mobs and angry rioters, but at other times, due to endemic unprofessionalism and indiscipline, contempt for the due process, institutional corruption and condescension, and political over-zealousness.

What followed reflected a tragic and surprising collapse of the ruling elite. The military, now tasked with maintaining order, failed — partly for self-preservation, partly being out of viable alternatives, partly malevolently, and partly out of willful cowardice — at critical moments to snuff out the most extreme and dangerous elements within the protesters, as well as to provide adequate security for police stations, critical infrastructure, high-security prisons, and the key centers and institutions of state power. The resulting deaths among all the belligerent parties, i.e., ordinary

students and civilians, political activists of all ages and backgrounds belonging to all the competing sides, and security personnel — especially the police members deployed in the frontlines — during July and August 2024 shocked the country and delegitimized what remained of the Hasina government's political standing (Human Rights Watch, 2024; OHCHR, 2025). Sheikh Hasina's forced departure for India on August 5, 2024, marked the end of the Awami League's rule. Whatever one's assessment of that government's later years, the loss of many innocent lives on both sides during the protests and the concurrent collapse of the governing and ideological consensus leading to a power vacuum was not only a national tragedy, but also a new national fault-line producing the ensuing new thread of a long-standing 'culture war' — over what 'July' does or does not mean, was or was not, and how to preserve or "re-evaluate" the ideals of 1971 in light of the 'Rightist Revolution' of 2024 — that will take a long time to heal and resolve.

From Political Transition to Historical Erasure

The distinction that must be drawn — and that has been catastrophically lost in the months since — is between the end of a specific government and the systematic erasure of a nation's founding story. These are separate acts. One is politics; the other is civilizational surgery, a cultural genocide.

On August 5, 2024, the golden statue of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bijoy Sarani was destroyed on live global telecast. In the months that followed, murals were defaced across the country. Portraits were pulled down in government buildings and universities. Nameplates bearing Bangabandhu's name were removed from residence halls at Rajshahi University. In Chittagong, murals depicting the 1971 liberation struggle were systematically defaced. On February 5, 2025, following a social media call for a "Bulldozer March," a rowdy but government-backed mob demolished the buildings and the enclosed memorial museum at Dhanmondi 32 itself — burning the historic residence, bulldozing its walls, and reducing to rubble the site where Bangladesh's independence was declared, and where the 20 or so members of the First Family and its household, including 'the Great Man' Mujib himself, women, and children, were brutally assassinated by traitorous members of the ever-ambitious, Muslim Brotherhood-curious military (Dhaka Tribune, 2025; The Business Standard, 2025).

In August 2025, the interim government prevented commemorations of Sheikh Mujib's fiftieth death anniversary; a rickshaw puller, a young couple, and a middle-aged woman who arrived at Dhanmondi 32 with bouquets of flowers were verbally harassed, physically abused, and beaten by a mob and briefly detained by the police (New Age, 2025). These belong to the same set of people who were, and still are, involved in demolishing Sufi shrines and sculptures; lynching political opponents, religious minorities and dissidents, and members of the security forces by deploying such barbaric, medieval means as clobbering, hacking, public hanging, and burning alive; heckling, obstructing, and foiling cultural and sports events, especially those participated by girls; desecration of dead bodies in the form of hanging the dead upside down from electric poles and foot-over bridges in broad daylight, exhumating remains of corpses from the grave and burning them in public, and defiling and vandalising tombs, monuments, and places of historic importance; wanton looting, arson, and destruction of public, private, and commercial properties alike if linked with undesirable persons, groups, and ideas; and public humiliation, intimidation, and violence against women. Therefore, one can easily observe that the drive for insatiable vendetta on the far-right led to a 'one-ideology' state since August 5, 2024, planned and meticulously implemented by the government machinery at the center and reinforced at the street-level by reactionary and fundamentalist thugs and goons — the concurrence of which phenomena is the pure definition and classic example of a 'fascist' system.

Simultaneously, a parallel campaign has advanced in the discursive realm. Jamaat-e-Islami — whose founders and cadres were among the Pakistan army's most effective collaborators in the 1971 genocide (D'Costa, 2011) — has grown increasingly bold in recasting 1971 as an Indian conspiracy rather than a liberation war against long-standing deprivation by West Pakistani rulers. The narrative being constructed argues that separation from Pakistan was a strategic mistake; that the Mukti Bahini (freedom fighters) were miscreants and terrorists rather than patriots; that the Pakistani army and their local collaborators were the true defenders of Muslim Bengal against Hindu-Indian encroachment; and that Sheikh Mujib and the Awami League were agents of a foreign power. History textbooks are being revised. The July 2024 movement is being elevated to the status of a

founding event, equivalent to the 1971 liberation war (Riaz, 2025). And all of these are being done in the name of popular democracy, equal rights, revolution, anti-discrimination, anti-authoritarianism, national sovereignty, and pluralistic inclusion. Especially, the words "anti-fascism", "pluralistic inclusion", and "anti-discrimination" have become coded expressions and indirect references for neo-fascistic street vigilantism, ceding more and more space to political Islam and populist right-wing extremism, and discrediting the struggle for national liberation during 1952-1971 and diminishing the stature of the main protagonists who were involved with that glorious epoch.

The intellectual dishonesty of this project is not, ultimately, the point. Whether the revisionist claims are true is subordinate to what these claims accomplish. They dissolve the story on which Bangladeshi statehood rests. If 1971 was a mistake, then the state itself is a mistake. If the freedom fighters were wayward outlaws, the state was founded by criminals. If Mujib was a traitor, the state has no legitimate founder. What appears in the doublespeak of "correcting the record" is in fact ideological groundwork for a different nation entirely — one that traces its lineage not to secular Bengali nationalism and culture but to political Islam, not to 1971 but to 2024 and to the 1947 formation of the exclusionary, sectarian state of Pakistan, not to Mujib but to the ideologies he ultimately defeated. A miniature, localized "Clash of Civilizations," as it were, between the Pan-Islamic Muslim nationalists and the secular, syncretic, progressive Bengali nationalists.

The Comparative Warning: How Founding-Narrative Collapse Precedes State Collapse

Historical scholarship on state failure and mass violence suggests that when a nation loses its shared founding narrative, political violence becomes both more likely and more devastating. Andrew Wachtel (1998), in his study of Yugoslavia's dissolution, argued that the political and economic collapse of the Yugoslav state did not cause the breakup so much as follow from a prior collapse: the destruction of the concept of a Yugoslav nation. "Had such a concept been retained," Wachtel writes, "a collapse of political authority would have been followed by the eventual reconstitution of a Yugoslav state, as happened after World War II, rather than the creation of separate nation-states." The idea died first; the state died second.

Valerie Bunce (1999) reached a related conclusion in her comparison of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. All three dissolved. Only Yugoslavia's dissolution was violent. The difference lay not in economic conditions but in whether political elites chose to weaponize competing national narratives against a shared civic identity. When Slobodan Milošević and other elites elevated Serbian ethnic mythology over federal Yugoslav identity, they created the conditions in which ordinary neighbors could kill one another. John Mueller (2000) has documented that the actual perpetrators of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and of the genocide in Rwanda were not primarily driven by primordial hatred but were opportunistic thugs recruited by political entrepreneurs who had first delegitimized the shared national frame and dehumanized the 'other.'

Indonesia offers another instructive case. Between 1965 and 1966, the Indonesian military and affiliated militias killed an estimated 500,000 to over one million alleged communists and their sympathizers in one of the twentieth century's largest mass killings (Cribb, 1990; Robinson, 2018). The Suharto regime that emerged constructed an official narrative that erased the killings from history textbooks and criminalized alternative accounts (Zurbuchen, 2002; Hearman, 2018). The suppression of memory did not create stability; it created a state whose politics remained structured by unresolved trauma for decades, with periodic outbreaks of anti-Chinese and anti-leftist violence following each moment of political and economic stress.

Rwanda's 1994 genocide followed years during which extremist Hutu political actors systematically rewrote Rwandan history to characterize the Tutsi minority as foreign invaders — the "Hamitic" thesis — and reframed the pre-1959 monarchy not as a shared national inheritance but as a minoritarian ethnic tyranny (Mamdani, 2001; Straus, 2006). This ideological project long preceded the machetes. Similarly, the Iraqi state's collapse after 2003, Syria's descent into civil war after 2011, and Libya's fragmentation after 2011 all followed periods during which competing narratives about national origin, legitimate leadership, and the identity of "the real people" replaced any shared civic frame (Fukuyama, 2014; Lynch, 2016). In each case, when the founding story became contested, the political community itself became contestable.

The pattern is clear enough to constitute a warning. Nation-states can survive many things — poverty, corruption, defeat in war, political dysfunction — but they cannot indefinitely survive the loss of a shared founding narrative, a shared history and identity, and a shared system for understanding the past, present, and future. When citizens no longer share basic agreement about who their nation is and where it came from, political disputes cease to be contests within a shared frame and become contests over the frame itself, and the zero-sum survival of all involved. This is the terrain on which civil conflicts begin.

Bangladesh's Particular Vulnerability

Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to this fracture for structural reasons. The country's minority communities — Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Ahmadiyyas, Sufies and other religious non-conformists like Bauls and mystics, secular humanists and atheists, and indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts — have historically located their belonging in the secular, pluralistic promise of 1971. To erase that founding is to erase their claim to belong. The wave of anti-Hindu, anti-Sufi, and anti-Baul violence in the months following August 2024, documented by international human rights bodies, was not incidental; it was expressive of a nation losing the story that included them (OHCHR, 2025; U.S. State Department, 2025). Similarly, the estimated two hundred thousand women who survived rape in 1971 and their descendants have found their place in the national story only through the recognition of what they endured (Mookherjee, 2015). To relegate 1971 to contested memory is to un-recognize them.

The alleged failures of the Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina do not justify what is now being done to memory. If the political conduct of the last decade of Awami League rule was undesirably aggressive and calculating, then the destruction of Bangladesh's founding narrative and the desecration of that singularly sacred memory under the Jamaat & NCP-backed interim and the succeeding BNP governments' watch — all ideological associates — is a repugnant catastrophe of national scale. Political change, in the form of a government's fall, and civilizational erasure are not the same act. What has happened and is going on, i.e., trying to equate the right-wing insurrection of July 2024 with the birth pangs of an independent nation founded on the esteemed ideals of the American and French Revolutions of the 18th

century, is but a grotesque and ill-fated effort to parody the grandeur of the National Revolution of 1971.

The Trajectory Ahead

If the current trajectory continues, Bangladesh faces escalating risks. In the near term: further breakdown of political norms as each faction claims a founding story incompatible with the others; increased violence against religious minorities as majoritarian narratives fill the space vacated by the secular liberation frame; suppression of Awami League supporters, freedom fighters, and their descendants who are increasingly cast as traitors within the new narrative order; and the flight of intellectuals, writers, journalists, and cultural workers who cannot practice their vocations freely and has to self-censure in an environment of rewritten memory, lest they committed some kind of “thought crime” such as believing Sheikh Mujib to be the father of the nation, or ‘speech crime’ like uttering or writing the national slogan of sovereignty and liberation, “Joy Bangla.”

In the medium term, if these dynamics deepen: dysfunction of civilian institutions as they lose the shared frame within which to operate; increasing reliance on the military as a de facto arbiter, with the corresponding risk that the military itself splits along ideological lines; political violence that shifts from crowd-based to regimentally organized, with paramilitary formations reappearing under new names but with old ideological lineages; and the emergence of a security-state model in which memory and identity itself becomes a state monopoly enforced by law.

In the worst case, and this is the case the comparative record demands we take seriously: state fragmentation, mass violence against political opponents and religious minorities, and civil conflict. The Rwandan, Bosnian, Syrian, and Iraqi trajectories all began with narrative rupture that seemed, at the time, like political rebalancing. None of those societies believed, in advance, that they were on the road to cataclysm. What made the utter ruin possible in each case was that citizens had already stopped agreeing on who they were as a people (Straus, 2006; Fukuyama, 2014) and what shared standards and means they should apply to resolve that dispute.

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Exogenous Involvement in Bangabandhu's Assassination

*Engr. Mirza Rakib**

Introduction

On December 16, 1971, following a nine-month bloody struggle, independent and sovereign Bangladesh emerged on the world map. However, merely three and a half years after independence, on the dawn of August 15, 1975, a brutal coup d'état unfolded, driven by an illegal and secretive power grab orchestrated at its core by anti-liberation forces and foreign actors, resulting in the assassination of President Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman alongside his family (Hossain, Z., 2023).

For decades, domestic political discourse sought to frame this assassination as a matter of "personal grievance" or a "ladies' club incident" involving a few junior army officers. However, international documents and investigations by world-renowned journalists have revealed that it was a meticulously planned political and geopolitical conspiracy (Bhattacharya, 2021). As Sir Mark Tully, the distinguished former BBC journalist, appropriately noted, executing a coup of such magnitude and global reverberation as that of 1975 without any form of international connection or green light was nearly impossible (The Business Standard, 2021).

Cold War Context and U.S. Foreign Policy

The 1971 Diplomatic Defeat and Kissinger's Personal Resentment

During the 1971 Liberation War, global politics was sharply divided into two blocs. On one side were the Soviet Union and India, who offered complete support to Bangladesh's struggle for freedom; on the other were the United States and China, who backed the territorial integrity of Pakistan (Hossain, Z., 2023).

The then U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, had used Pakistan as a diplomatic bridge to establish relations with China. Consequently, Washington viewed the emergence of Bangladesh as a major diplomatic defeat. American researcher Lawrence Lifschultz and British journalist Christopher Hitchens demonstrated in their works that, like Chilean President Salvador Allende and Vietnam's Thieu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ranked high on

Henry Kissinger's political adversary list (Hossain, J., 2023).

Bangabandhu's Non-Aligned Policy and Sovereign Stance

Following independence, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman adopted an independent, neutral, and Non-Aligned foreign policy outside both the socialist and capitalist blocs. He addressed the United Nations General Assembly in Bengali, asserting the Bengali nation's right to self-determination and practising sovereign foreign diplomacy on the global stage (The Business Standard, 2021). Fearing an expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence in South Asia, the U.S. administration viewed Bangladesh's secular and non-aligned stance unfavorably (The Business Standard, 2021).

The Role of International Intelligence Agencies and the CIA

The most authoritative investigation into the direct involvement of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Bangabandhu's assassination was conducted by American journalist Lawrence Lifschultz (Hossain, J., 2023).

Lawrence Lifschultz's Research and Eugene Boster's Stance

In his seminal book *Bangladesh: The Unfinished Revolution* and his investigative series *Anatomy of a Coup*, Lawrence Lifschultz presented detailed evidence (Hossain, J., 2023):

- **Ambassador vs. CIA Station Chief:** Eugene Boster, the then U.S. Ambassador to Dhaka, was strongly opposed to any U.S. involvement in plots surrounding the assassination and had issued written directives to that effect (Hossain, J., 2023; Lifschultz, 2005).
- **Philip Cherry's Covert Meetings:** Defying Ambassador Boster's orders, Philip Cherry, the CIA Station Chief in Dhaka, maintained secret communications and held clandestine meetings with Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad and the plotting military officers (Hossain, J., 2023; Lifschultz, 2005).

- **A Longstanding Connection:** The covert communications established during the 1971 Liberation War in Kolkata between Khondaker Mostaq (then Foreign Minister of the Bangladesh government-in-exile), his close aides, and U.S. officials remained active even after independence (Lifschultz, 2005).

Documentation by Christopher Hitchens

In his book *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, American investigative journalist Christopher Hitchens corroborated Lifschultz's findings with documentary evidence. He argued that Henry Kissinger provided the necessary "green light" to overthrow the Bangabandhu government during or around the time of his visit to Dhaka (Hossain, J., 2023).

International Intelligence Forecasts and Prior Warnings

An analysis of declassified international documents reveals that long before August 15, 1975, various domestic and foreign intelligence agencies were aware of plans to depose and assassinate Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Hossain, Z., 2023).

Several rehearsals and direct attacks took place months before the assassination:

- **Bombings and Rehearsal (March 16, 1975):** On the eve of Bangabandhu's birthday, simultaneous bomb blasts occurred at three locations in Dhaka. The U.S. Embassy subsequently identified these blasts as a dress rehearsal for the main attack (Hossain, Z., 2023).
- **Direct Attack (May 21, 1975):** Bangabandhu was targeted in a direct attack while returning home after inspecting a new television station, resulting in injuries to two individuals. Though the incident was kept undisclosed for state security, the then Deputy Director General of Police confirmed the event to a Political Associate at the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka (Hossain, Z., 2023).
- **Diplomatic Meetings (August 1975):** Just a week before the coup, Major Ziaur Rahman met with a senior official from the U.S. Embassy (Hossain, 2023). Lawrence Lifschultz highlighted the authenticity of this secret communication through his research and investigative interviews (Hossain, Z., 2023).

International Reaction and Media Perspectives

The stance of global superpowers was reflected in international media coverage and analytical perspectives following the August 15 assassination (Hossain, Z., 2023):

- **Indian Media and Political Allegations:** Members of the Indian Lok Sabha and Indian media outlets (such as the daily *Jugantar*) directly held the United States and the CIA responsible for the coup (Hossain, Z., 2023).
- **Analysis by Iranian Newspaper *Kayhan*:** Shortly after the event, the Iranian publication asserted that the assassination was the outcome of a deep military-diplomatic conflict between the Soviet Union and the U.S. bloc (Hossain, Z., 2023).
- **Prompt Recognition by Pakistan:** Immediately after the coup, U.S. ally Pakistan extended swift diplomatic recognition to Khondaker Mostaq's new regime and announced food and relief assistance, reinforcing the presence of an international axis (Hossain, Z., 2023).

Judicial Limitations and the Incompleteness of the Political Tragedy

Politician and researcher Dr Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin pointed out that following the repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance in 1996, the trial of Bangabandhu's assassination conducted in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh was essentially a criminal trial [6].

- **Legal Limitations:** Under Sections 302/34 and 120(A) of the Penal Code, sentences could only be passed on those directly firing bullets and the primary executioners (Lenin, 2023).
- **Untried Treason and Conspiracy:** The broader political conspiracy, the institutional roles of the Army Chief and Deputy Chief, and the covert dealings of international superpowers were not brought within the scope of the criminal investigation (Lenin, 2023).
- **Admission by the Investigating Officer:** Former DIG Abdul Hannan Khan, the chief investigating officer of the Bangabandhu murder case, acknowledged that due to time constraints and circumstantial limitations, the investigation team was unable to examine the international nexus (Hossain, Z., 2023).

Conclusion

The assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not merely an isolated military uprising by a few aggrieved army officers; it was a deep international conspiracy aimed at redirecting a newly independent state within the equations of the global Cold War (Bhattacharya, 2021). Domestic reactionary forces and international geopolitical powers converged to subvert the founding spirit, secular foundation, and sovereign foreign policy of independent Bangladesh (The Business Standard, 2021).

To address this historical tragedy comprehensively, three key steps should be taken: establish a high-powered, independent National Inquiry Commission to investigate the August 15 conspiracy; pursue diplomatic channels to urge foreign governments (especially the U.S.) to declassify relevant intelligence archives; and systematically preserve all related research, analytical materials, and foreign intelligence records in national archives for future scholarly study.

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Brutus, Shimar, and the Indemnity: A State's Test of Morality

*Latiful Kabir, P.Eng.**

Three deaths, separated by nearly two thousand six hundred years. In Rome in 44 BCE, at Karbala in 680 CE, and in Bangladesh in 1975. All three were political assassinations. In all three, the assassin came from within the household — someone trusted, someone considered one's own, who wielded the blade. And in all three cases, after the killing, the slain grew larger than the living had ever been. The dead Caesar proved more powerful than the living one; in Shakespeare's play, his ghost ultimately rules the stage. The defeated Hussain of Karbala rises anew each Muharram as an eternal victor. And Bangabandhu, whom they tried to erase, has remained, for fifty years now, the central figure in Bangladesh's political discourse.

But one question sets these three events apart, and it is the subject of this essay. In Rome, moral grandeur settled on the assassin — Shakespeare called Brutus “the noblest Roman of them all.” Shimar of Karbala, by contrast, has never been called noble by anyone. Nor have the assassins of 1975. The question is not whether morality was absent from the other two events. Rather, the larger question is this: why did moral weight come to rest on the killer's shoulders only in Rome, and never on the victim's? To understand this asymmetry, we must look beyond literature — to what the state did after the killing.

By Max Weber's definition, a state's legitimacy rests on its monopoly over legitimate violence. Bound to this is a second pillar — the rule of law, which determines when that violence is legitimate and when it is not. A political assassination tears directly into that monopoly: someone has exercised ultimate violence without the state's sanction. What the state does next determines whether it reconstitutes its own legitimacy or dismantles it from within. If it brings the killer to justice, the state declares that violence is legitimate only within the law, that no one holds the authority of private judgment. If it rewards or shields the killer, the state says the opposite — that not law, but power, has the final word. This second declaration hollows the state out from within, for law then ceases to be a neutral structure and becomes merely the instrument of whoever holds power.

In 44 BCE, the Roman Republic could not contain Brutus's question: is it legitimate to kill a tyrant outside the law? A straightforward yes gives every ambitious general license to kill anyone by declaring, “he was a tyrant” — and the state itself becomes an arena of vendetta. A straightforward no legitimizes Caesar's dictatorship. After Caesar's assassination, the Republic reached no answer. The result was civil war, long lists of mutual slaughter, bloodshed, and finally the restoration of order through Augustus's abolition of the Republic itself. In Rome, order displaced liberty. Because the state failed to bear the burden of moral reconciliation, that burden found refuge elsewhere — in Cicero's philosophy, and, a millennium and a half later, in Shakespeare's pen. Brutus's grandeur is thus largely a literary construction. Whatever lay in Brutus's own mind, it was literature that granted him moral superiority. Because the state itself never reached a settlement on the killing of Caesar, literature had to carry that weight.

Karbala differs from Rome at its very root, because there the state itself is the perpetrator. The Umayyad caliphate will not, cannot, try Hussain's killers — for the state itself would then stand in the dock. That door to reconciliation is closed forever. As a result, morality survives outside the state there, even against it — in the marsiya, in the majlis, in the annual re-enactment of Muharram. Here too, the burden of the state's moral reckoning falls to memory rather than to the state itself. But Shimar never becomes a Brutus. Herein lies Karbala's lesson for political theory: when a state permanently closes the door to reconciliation, society builds an alternative moral institution of its own, one that ultimately outlasts the state. The Umayyad caliphate lives today only in the pages of history, but Ashura remains alive. The collective memory of a society defeated the very state that sought to erase it.

The fifteenth of August shows a third path, and it is the darkest chapter of all — because here the state did not simply fail to reach a reconciliation, as in Rome, nor did it merely refuse one, as in Karbala. Here, the state turned the very absence of reconciliation into law. The Indemnity Ordinance was not merely an evasion of punishment — it was

an institutional attempt to use the machinery of state law to grant a kind of legal legitimacy to the killing itself. Rome was paralyzed in its search for a legal answer; the Umayyad caliphate, in the arrogance of power, refused to seek moral reconciliation at all. But in neither case did anyone turn the law itself into the assassins' shield. The Indemnity did not merely protect the killers — it crippled, for decades, the neutral structure of Bangladesh's judiciary and the state's own moral legitimacy. It told society that in a change of power, law is no permanent principle, only the whim of the victor. In this sense, the experience of the fifteenth of August is distinct, and carries a particular warning for the modern state.

Later, many years later, the state walked back the other way — the ordinance was repealed, trials were held, sentences were carried out. In other words, Bangladesh's moral position first inverted itself, and only much later, through a long legal process, was it partially restored. This oscillation is the crux of the matter, because in post-2024 Bangladesh, the meaning of this transformation and reconciliation has again grown unsettled — the dust of politics has not yet settled here. When a state itself repeatedly wavers over its own moral position, society too suffers prolonged division. In this context, one matter must remain open, because its reconciliation is still unfolding within society itself: some see the fifteenth of August as a martyrdom akin to Karbala; others see it, as the killers' own faction claimed, as the removal of a dictator.

The question here reaches beyond the limits of post-assassination reconciliation into something larger still: is the state merely an instrument for maintaining order, or is it also a moral institution? For Aristotle, the state exists not merely for life, but for the good life — in his view, the state's ultimate aim is the formation of the citizen's character. The republican tradition of political thought — from Cicero, through Machiavelli's republican writings, to later thinkers — holds that liberty survives on civic virtue, and that the erosion of that virtue is the first sign of a republic's decline. Brutus becomes a hero within the republican tradition precisely because he placed civic duty above personal loyalty. His tragedy lies in this: when institutions are not strong enough, personal virtue alone cannot prevent political assassination — instead, it invites lasting disorder across the state. Islamic political thought states the

same truth in a different register — that authority is a trust (amanah), and that the foundation of its legitimacy is the establishment of justice ('adl), not mere power or inheritance. Hussain's stand is therefore not merely a religious event but a profound statement of political theory: that Shimar, and Yazid, who backed him, may have held on to power, but forever lost moral legitimacy in the court of history.

What emerges from these three deaths is this: a political assassination does not, by itself, reveal a society's morality. Rather, what the state does — legally and institutionally — after the killing, and the nature of that reconciliation, reveals whether the state has passed its own test of morality. When the state cannot reach reconciliation, morality takes refuge in literature and philosophy — as happened in Rome's case. This same pattern is visible in Bangladeshi literature following 1975. The essential point is this: when a state, in its hunger for power, refuses to settle the truth, or fails to do so through weak legal structures, morality ultimately survives in the collective memory of a people — sometimes running parallel to the state, sometimes directly against it. And if a state itself institutionally turns non-reconciliation, or injustice, into law, it corrupts and hollows out the very idea of "law" from within. Moral grandeur, in the end, is not merely one person's private achievement, but a reflection of the state's overall moral and legal responsibility. A state that evades that institutional responsibility for the sake of momentary political convenience must, in the end, answer to the unappealable verdict of society, memory, literature, or history's own court.

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The 15th of August 1971: A Day I Witnessed, the Haunting Memory I Carry

Shawkat Ahsan Faruk*

The Chancellor of Dhaka University, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was scheduled to visit the university. Considerable preparations were under way. Everything was being arranged and organized - walls were being whitewashed and painted, and our university was being given a fresh new look.

There was a programme that day at the Arts Building in which the university teachers were formally scheduled to join *BAKSAL*. In preparation for the occasion, *Gonobahini* had become particularly active, seeking to demonstrate its strength. Master's examinations were under way, and both students and teachers were busy with their examinations. Having failed to organize any protest or demonstration, *Gonobahini* detonated three bombs on the Dhaka University campus on 14 August - one in front of the Arts Building library, the second near the Science Annex, and the third in front of Curzon Hall.

The bombs were named *Nikhil*. In November 1974, *JaSaD* leader and BUET lecturer Nikhil Ranjan Saha had been killed while making a bomb, and the bomb was subsequently named after him. Since there were certain flaws in the original design of the *Nikhil*, Anwar Hossain, a lecturer in Biochemistry at Dhaka University, improved it. On his instructions, members of *Gonobahini* detonated three *Nikhil* bombs on the university campus on 14 August. Anwar Hossain was the younger brother of Lieutenant Colonel Abu Taher, the field commander of *Gonobahini*.

At that time, Sirajul Alam Khan, the principal leader of the *JaSaD* and *Gonobahini*, was staying at the house of Chittaranjan Sutar in Bhabanipur, Kolkata. When a state of emergency was declared in Bangladesh on December 28, 1974, Sirajul Alam Khan went to India. In between, he had come to Dhaka twice - the last time being in July 1975.

After August 15, a leaflet was circulated on behalf of *Gonobahini*, with the headline, **"Murderer Mujib has been killed, the Fall of the Tyrant is Inevitable."**

Mahiuddin Ahmed, then a *JaSaD Chhatra* League leader, wrote in his book that Colonel Abu Taher had

expressed his regret, saying: *"They made a great mistake. They should not have allowed Sheikh Mujib to be buried. Now there will be a shrine there. They should have thrown the body into the Bay of Bengal."*

Failed Intelligence, or Something Strange?

The conspirators could not rely entirely on the organizational weaknesses and activities of *Gonobahini* and therefore adopted an alternative course of action. Khondaker Mostaq Ahmed organized Colonel Rashid, Colonel Faruk, Major Shahriar, Major Dalim, Major Noor and others. Although some sections of *Gonobahini* had close links with those who carried out the 15 August killings, the conspiracy extended well beyond them.

During the first week of August, Khondaker Mostaq attended a reception for the Governor in *Brahmanbaria* district. With an insinuating smile, Mostaq asked Governor Ali Azzam, **"You have become governor, but will you be able to start your work!"**

Earlier, on the afternoon of 13 August, State Minister for Information Taheruddin Thakur met Bangabandhu at *Ganabhaban*. After the meeting, he met Khondaker Mostaq. Mostaq told Taheruddin Thakur that he must remain in Dhaka that day.

On 14 August, Mostaq had large catfishes cooked and sent it to Dhanmondi No. 32, as Sheikh Mujib liked catfish very much. Colonel Rashid went to Mostaq's house on *Agamasi* Lane on the afternoon of 14 August, accompanied by Major Noor. At the house, Rashid told Mostaq that he should remain at his own residence the following morning.

For so long, so many conspiracies had been under way and so many things had been happening-yet did the country's intelligence agencies detect nothing? It was a catastrophic failure.

Bangabandhu had immense faith in the people of Bangladesh. He also loved his country and its people genuinely and profoundly. He carried such faith in his heart that he could not imagine that anyone would actually kill him. Because of that trust, even as President, he chose not to live in the government's secure residence, *Ganabhaban*, but

instead remained at the vulnerable residence at Dhanmondi 32. **What a trust on his people!**

The Night of 14 August, 1971

The three bomb explosions carried out by the revolutionary *Gonobahini* had somewhat disrupted the festive atmosphere at the university. On that day, Ragib, a student of Dhaka University, *Bangabandhu* had been working at the university for several days on the writing and artistic preparations for the visit. *Bangabandhu* was scheduled to arrive in the morning.

I met Ragib in front of TSC. He was writing “*Please Use Me*” on a newly constructed dustbin. Various banners and festoons were being hung along the routes through which *Bangabandhu* would travel. Everything had to be completed during the night. He had brought several other artists with him and was supervising their work while also writing himself, brush and paint in hand. We remained there until around three or half past three in the morning. After finishing his work, *Ragib* headed towards his home in *Shahbagh*, while *Kawsar* and I set off towards the hall.

We had already been instructed that students should remain in their rooms at night. The two of us were walking along the road in front of Bangla Academy towards Room 146 of *Fazlul Huq Hall*. When we reached the corner of *Doel Chattar*, I said, “*Come, let us drop by Bottola.*”

Bottola had not yet awakened. It was quiet and peaceful. I woke *Jabbar* and asked him to prepare some tobacco for us. After splashing water on his face, *Jabbar* said: “*Sir, you are here so early today.*”

I have been at TSC all night. I will not be late; I am going back to my room. *Bangabandhu* will arrive in the morning. He will go around Curzon Hall and then proceed to the Arts Faculty. A few others came and sat beside us when they saw us.

Just then, two tanks crossed the High Court- Dawn had not yet broken. One tank went along *Abdul Ghani Road* towards the stadium, while the other went past Curzon Hall towards Nimtali. Why were tanks moving at such an early hour?

I became somewhat anxious. *Jabbar* prepared the tobacco, and I extinguished the small lamp. At that moment, a man arrived from Dhaka Medical College. He was a fourth-class employee at the hospital who often came to us. There was extreme anxiety on his face. He was still panting with fear and said: “*Sir, something terrible has happened. I think the army*

has staged a coup. During the night, the army brought several bodies to the emergency department. There were also several women and children who had been shot.”

We immediately left Bottola at the High Court and went to the emergency department of Dhaka Medical College. We were told that the injured people were upstairs. We went up and were rendered speechless. During the middle of the night, the army had carried out a sweep and opened fire at the houses of *Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni* and *Abdur Rab Serniabat*, killing everyone. A few women and children had survived, but all of them had been shot. On the veranda, *Serniabat's* daughter was receiving an intravenous saline infusion. *Fazlul Huq Moni's* wife was screaming in agony. Two doctors on duty could barely cope. There were only two or three nurses. *Kawsar* and I asked the doctors,

“*Can we help in any way?*”

“*We are students of Fazlul Huq Hall.*”

“*Certainly. Please help us.*”

We began handing over whatever was needed—dressing materials and other medical supplies. I had never experienced anything so terrifying before. *Moni Bhai's* sister-in-law was somewhat able to speak. She said only one thing: “**No one is alive.**”

There were one or two children in the hospital. Despite the doctors' desperate efforts, they could not save *Arzu Bhabi* - *Moni Bhai's* wife. It was probably around half past six by then. While we were there, we heard that little *Sukanta*, the martyr *Serniabat*, and *Abdur Rab Serniabat* had all been killed.

Later, I learned that *Abul Hasnat Abdullah*, the elder son of *Serniabat*, had been hiding under laundry and therefore had not been found. It should be mentioned here that *Abdur Rab Serniabat* was *Bangabandhu's* brother-in-law and a member of the Cabinet. *Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni* was the son of another of *Bangabandhu's* sisters, and *Arzu* - *Serniabat's* daughter, and *Moni's* wife.

While still at the medical college, we received the news that *Bangabandhu's* house at Dhanmondi [Road no.] 32 had been attacked in the early morning. No one there had survived. We heard that the bodies were in the morgue.

The morgue of Dhaka Medical College was then a tin-roofed structure. The door was locked. However, through the gap between the door and the lock, we could see inside. A 100-watt bulb was burning. The

Dom-the morgue attendant said, "Sir, they brought them here during the night. There must be fourteen or fifteen of them. They just threw the bodies in."

The first thing I noticed was an exceptionally handsome young man, just beyond adolescence. Then I saw little *Sukanta*. I recognized *Moni Bhai* by the vest he was wearing. I also saw *Abdur Rab Serniabat*. The floor of the morgue was covered in blood. Bodies lay piled one on top of another. I had never seen so many bodies together in my life. Someone came and told us that the army was coming again. *"Leave quickly. You never know what might happen. They may bring the bodies from Dhanmondi 32 here."*

We entered one of the wards. There I saw a junior student from my department undergoing treatment. *"Shawkat Bhai,"* he called out. I went over and sat beside him, blending in with the patients. Several soldiers walked along the veranda of the medical college. They appeared extremely agitated and were moving hurriedly, rifles in their hands. We heard the details of the night's events from those who had been in the ward. There was panic throughout the medical college. The army did not remain there for long. They did not bring any bodies from Dhanmondi 32 to the medical college. After the army left, people gradually emerged again from different places.

In front of the medical college outpatient department, I met *Sheikh Maruf*, the younger brother of *Sheikh Moni*. He had come after hearing the news, hoping to see his brothers, sisters and loved ones. I explained to *Maruf*, *"This place is not safe for you at all now. You should also go somewhere safe."* *Maruf* left, completely bewildered. He was turned to stone by the grief of losing his loved ones. I had never seen a face like that before. Knowing that the roads were unsafe, *Kawsar* and I came to the emergency gate through the inner corridors.

Major *Dalim* was announcing over the radio that a curfew had been imposed throughout the country. We crossed the road cautiously and entered through the gate of Dhaka Hall. When we entered Dhaka Hall from the medical college gate, we saw many people getting dressed and coming out. *Bangabandhu* was expected to arrive shortly, and they were preparing to welcome him with flowers. The news had not yet spread.

When we reached the southern bank of the pond at Curzon Hall, I saw a large police contingent assembled for security. I said to one of the officers:

"What are you doing here? Everything is already over. The army staged a coup during the night. They killed everyone in the houses of Abdur Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni. Then, in the early hours of the morning, they killed Bangabandhu and everyone in his house at Dhanmondi 32. I have just seen the bodies of Moni Bhai and the others at the medical college."

Everyone gathered around us, eager to hear more. It was unbelievable. The police officer looked astonished. *"What are you saying?"* He spoke to someone on his walkie-talkie and confirmed the news. He then called all the police officers who had come on duty at Curzon Hall. Someone from Fazlul Huq Hall came out after hearing Dalim's bulletin on a transistor radio. A shadow of grief descended. Those who had been mildly shocked were now crushed under unbearable grief. The police officers formed a line and left through the gate of Fazlul Huq Hall.

During the twenty-three years of the Pakistan period, *Bangabandhu* had spent eleven years in prison over eighteen separate periods of imprisonment. In March 1971, he was arrested and taken to West Pakistan. The military governments of *Ayub Khan* and *Yahya Khan* had filed numerous cases against him, yet they had not dared to lay a finger on him. And yet, a handful of conspiratorial soldiers of his own country did not hesitate for a moment to assassinate *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* - the Father of the Nation and the greatest Bengali of a thousand years - along with his family. They spared no one from the family and relatives of the dreamer of *Sonar Bangla* -not his blood relatives, brothers, sisters, or nephews. On that day, at Dhanmondi 32, *Bangabandhu's* only younger brother, *Sheikh Naser*, was also present. He had come to Dhaka from Khulna on some work; fate had brought him there.

Only his two daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, survived because they were outside Bangladesh.

I do not know whether *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* had a single day of peace during the three and a half years after independence. In the name of power, he lived as though he were trapped in a blazing cauldron. There is perhaps no parallel to such an event in world history. The man who gave us our country - how could a conspiracy go so far as to completely wipe out his family from the very country he had brought into being?

Bangabandhu! the flowers in the ceremonial tray prepared to welcome you became offerings at your altar within moments.

I returned to my address-Room 146 of Fazlul Huq Hall.

Another chapter of Bangladesh had begun!

*** *Shawkat Ahsan Faruk*** is a prominent writer and poet whose captivating works have left a lasting mark. His impressive works include titles like "*Je*

smriti dhusar hoyini" (*Memories that Haven't Faded*), "*Room number 146*," "*Rekhaon*" (*Lineation*), "*Nokhotrer Prokash*" (*The Radiance of Stars*), and "*Pathker Pathsala*" (*Readers' Classroom*).

[Note: The original paper was written in Bengali and later translated by the Executive Editor, Professor Dr. Jamila A. Chowdhury, to ensure consistency and coherence across all articles of this "Special Issue" during the editorial process.]





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