Four Former Aides of Mujib Slain

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Lt. Col. Sayed Farook Rahman and his wife talk to reporters in Bangkok.

By Lewis M. Simons
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BANGKOK, Thailand, Nov. 5—Four former top aides of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, imprisoned since the president was killed in a bloody coup Aug. 15, were killed Monday morning in Dacca's central jail, Bangladesh Radio announced Wednesday.

Bangladesh Radio announced that President Khondakar Mushtaque Ahmed, who ousted Mujib in August, had resigned and would be replaced by Supreme Court Chief Justice A.M. Syeem.

The broadcast came as a group of Bengali officers in Bangkok, ejected from Bangladesh after Monday's coup, charged that the coup and the killings were part of a move toward military dictatorship.

Although the broadcast did not identify the four officials killed, informed sources said they were Tajuddin Ahmed, a former finance minister; Nazrul Islam, Sheikh Mujib's vice president; Mansur Ali, former prime minister; and A.H. Kamaruzzaman, former minister of industries.

(Reports in New Delhi quoted by United Press International said, however, that the killings had occurred last week and had helped spark Monday's coup.)

The government announcement said that a high-level judicial commission had been set up to investigate "the brutal murder of four prominent persons" in the jail and denid that the military had been involved in the "heinous crimes."

The Bengali officers ejected from Dacca after this week's coup said here, however, that the killings were the work of the senior military officers who seized power Monday.

"These killings were the first step toward straight military dictatorship," said Lt. Col. Sayed Farook Rahman, who claimed that Monday's coup had been staged to prevent the country's drive toward democracy.

Farook, who said he was related by marriage to the late vice president, said that the four had been killed "because they were the only possible civilian challengers to the new military rulers. They're out to destroy all possible civilian leaders."

In August when the group of young officers, most of them majors and captains in their 20s and 30s, killed Mujib and his family, they quickly turned over power to a civilian Cabinet that swore to restore quickly the democracy Mujib had eliminated.

Last month President Mushtaque announced plans for ending martial law, restoring parliamentary democracy, lifting all political restrictions, giving the press back its voice and freeing the judiciary. Recent travelers from Dacca said that for the first time, the country's economy was somewhat stable and there was some optimism in the air.

A group of officers led by Brig. Gen. Khalid Musharaf, none of whom had been involved in the August coup against Mujib, apparently opposed the government's plans and staged the counter-coup.

The ejected officers speaking before Mushtaque's ouster said he and his civilian government were under the control of the newly promoted army chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Khalid Musharaf.

Khalid, who had been a close follower of Mujib, succeeded Maj. Gen. Ziaur Rahman, who was arrested Monday during the counter-coup along with the air force chief of staff, M. G. Tawab, and two of his moat senior aides.

Khalid took control after it had been decided that Farook, 14 other young officers, 2 top noncommissioned officers and 12 wives and children would leave Dacca for Bangkok.

Farook and the other officers left Bangladesh to "avoid widespread bloodshed." Their departure for Bangkok apparently defused a 21-hour standoff in the squalid streets of Dacca between infantry troops led by Khalid and armor and artillery forces loyal to President Mushtaque.

"Our main guns would have caused a bloodbath among the diplomats, their wives and children," said Farook. Asked if there wasn't a certain irony in his concern after he and his fellow junior officers had coldbloodedly murdered Mujib and his family Aug. 15, he replied, "We killed only those who had to be removed. Our original plan was to kill just Mujib, but we had no choice. We had to kill the others too, although we're very sorry about that."

The standoff in the city's streets between the opposing military factions began at 2 a.m. Monday, when the infantrymen moved out of a sprawling military sector on the outskirts of Dacca. The armor and artillery officers had been tipped off about the movement and they quickly had their heavy weapons trained on the infantry units. At 7 a.m., Rashid said, he met with President Mushtaque and informed him of the situation. Mushtaque, Rashid said, telephone Khalid and "told him that if he wanted power so badly all he had to do was come and take over. He said if he wanted to, he could shoot the president, but please don't cause any further bloodshed."

Other information broadcast by radio Bangladesh Wednesday indicated that the military leaders were cracking down hard on members of Mushtaque's government although the president himself seemed still to be of use as a figurehead.

The radio announced that four ministers of state had "resigned" and that two of them had been arrested immediately for "corruption and misuse of power."

Mushtaque had quickly shifted Bangladesh's pro-Indian, pro-Soviet foreign policy after the August coup and established diplomatic relations with Pakistan and China. What the new leadership has in mind as domestic and foreign policies is unclear.

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