by Brig (Retd) Shamsuddin Ahmed

Freedom fighters entering Dhaka on December 16, 1971

## Remembering 16 December 1971

blood our martyrs had shed.

and for every act of dishonour

the nine months of the Libera-

tion War, and by the massive

Indian army ready to pounce on

their arch enemy, the van-

quished Pakistan occupation

army would have faced total

annihilation, if Niazi had wa-

vered. Niazi showed wisdom. He

surrendered himself and his

forces on the soil of

Bangladesh. We emerged victo-

rious. For us it was indeed a

pyrrhic victory. About three

million of our people - the best

of our manhood had been killed

during nine months of libera-

tion war. Thousands of our

women folks - had been dis-

honoured. About ten million of

our people had to flee to India

and live there as refugees. It

was the day of defeat and sur-

render of the Pakistan occupa-

tion forces. It was also the day

of defeat and hiding from public

view of the handful of hated

Razakars, Al-Badar and Al-

Shams Bahini members and

their patrons, the local collabo-

rators of the Pakistan occupa-

Bahini with Maj Gén (then Ma-

jor) Manzur as sector comman-

der. The vast South-Western

area of Bangladesh including

the districts of Kushtia, Jessore.

Faridpur and Khulna (less

Bagerhat) was the operational

area of the sector. The entire

terior of our sector was already

liberated by our forces when the

Indian army under Gen Aurora

began crossing into Bangladesh

under the umbrella of joint

command of Indo-Bangladesh

forces in support of our Libera-

Alter so many year, I can

hardly express to-day exactly

how I felt on 16 December

1971. But as I am writing this

article, my eyes are getting

moist. I really do not know if

these tears smack of joy or sad-

ness. But what I do know is

that on 16 December 1971

there were no tears in my eyes.

I never felt so happy in my

whole life as I did on that day.

Our struggle for independence

was over, Bangladesh was now

a reality. It was a dream come

having accepted the terms of

surrender had its impact on the

battle field and the Refugee

Camps. All of a sudden the bat-

tle field was quite. There were

no more guns beeming and

tanks spewing fire. There were

no more shots to be fired to kill

people. Of course, our freedom

fighters aimed their rifles and

sten guns at the sky and kept

firing shots after shots in jubi-

lation. On that day they could

fire any number of rounds

without having to account for

them. Most of the freedom

fighters were on their way

home, anxious to meet their

near and dear ones about whom

they knew nothing during the

last nine months or so. They

were like birds returning home

wife and small children at

Kalyani in the border district of

Nadia of West Bengal. There the

Indian government made ar-

rangement for the accommoda-

tion of families of Mukti Bahini

officers. Suddenly the thought

of returning to Bangladesh with

my family and meeting our re-

lations and friends once again

I was fortunate as I had my

after a storm.

The news of Lt Gen Niazi

border are and much of the in-

I was in 8 sector of the Mukti

tion forces.

tion war.

T was a cold winter day. But it was bright and sunny. The day dawned with unusual quiet on the battle field. It was the 16th of December 1971. Earlier Lt Gen Niazi, Commander of the Pakistan Occupation Forces in Bangladesh, heeding the ultimatum of Gen Manekshaw, the Indian Army Chief, had offered to surrender, Gen Manekshaw's message to Niazi was loud and clear: Surrender or die. Niazi did not wish to die. He wanted to take his defeated hordes back to his country, a truncated Pakistan. In fact the Pakistan Occupation Army had been defeated in the battled filed and was on the run within days of the Indian Army having crossed the border into Bangladesh in support of Bangladesh liberation forces.

It was on the 16th of December that Gen Niazi had to accept this defeat and agreed to surrender, He had expected the US Seventh Fleet to have come and rescued his forces as promised by Gen Yahya. But 'alas' no body came. Hemmed in by the valiant freedom fighters of the Mukti Bahini, intent on taking revenge for every drop of

took possession of me for the time being. Meanwhile preparadone to our women folks during tions were afoot to shift our 8 Sector Headquarters to Jessore

EPR Sector Headquarters complex. We would have to wait for another two days to undertake our journey back home from Kalyani to Jessore, from a friendly but foreign soil to our own land.

But 10 and behold! our refugees had already begun their trek back home. Men and women, old and young, boys and girls looked cheerful and happy as they were busy leaving their make shift camps where they huddled together for the last few months. There was a new pulsation of life in these emaciated people. Many of these people were perhaps homeless as their homesteads might have been looted and burnt by the Pakistan occupation army and their local collaborators. Many of the women folks might be utterly helpless. their husbands and sons having been killed. There would be many young girls with scars of humiliation at the hands of the Pakistani marauders. But all were going back to where they belonged - their mother land. Their country was free. They would be in the midst of their own people. No body would be oppressed anymore in the name of religion, language, caste or

As I saw the refugees moving with firm steps and cheerful face, I was momentarily transported into a new world — the Bangladesh of my dream. We would all go back home and begin building Bangladesh into a modern civilized, progressive and democratic country where all people would enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talent, practise their religion and participate in nation-building activities, where our chil dren would grow up as educated and enlightened citizens of the country and not as armed terrorists, where the poor would not be poorer and the rich richer, where fundamental human rights would be guaran teed and nobody would be above law; where justice would always triumph over injustice. truth over falsehood, right over

wrong. At Kalyani my family shared our flat with another family. It was a small Hindu family -husband, wife and a small daughter, I forget the name of the gentleman. I used to cal him Mr Pal. He was a lecturer perhaps in statistics in Chittagong University. Mr Pal took up a teaching job at Kalyani. As a refugee he was grossly underpaid. They were living in a hired house with great difficulty. My wife suggested one day Mrs Pal to move to our flat if they had no objection. She was not entirely altruistic in doing so. She was young, living along with small children in a flat. There was nobody to look after her. The flat had two rooms. On room was given to the Pals. Mr Pal took care of my family just like his own. One day as I came to visit my family, I found our two families living almost like joint family. Food was being cooked on the same cooker There was one curry dish for both the families. If my wife cooked the morning meal, Mrs Pal cooked for the evening. My wife used to say her prayers regularly. Mrs Pal did her 'Puja'

and other rituals. Nothing stood in the way of the two families living together. It was manifestation of humanity at its best, thanks to the liberation war. On hearing the news of the surrender of the Pakistan occupation forces, the Pal family thanked us and left for home the same day. We felt very lonely.

It is long 22 years that we achieved our independence, we still feel very lonely. Liberation war had brought the people very close. The whole nation was like a large joint family, so to say. We had just one identity. We were Bangalees. But to-day we seem to have moved away from the spirit of the war of liberation.



An awakened mass kindled by a heroic resolve to fight.

# My Piece of Victory

by Waheedul Haque

was once a part of a great That put a limit to AL's potengrowing thing. Growing tial of becoming a true demowithin me first of all. And cratic and nationalistic force growing outside throughout the The communists, one thought length and breadth of my little had cut loose from that shackle poor motherland. It was a grobut blundered all the same into wing sense of belonging. It has believing that Pakistan framebeen nurtured in vitro for long work was quite a workable unit 23 years by deprivation and exfor realising the emancipation of plottation. More than that a the masses. AL and their menkind - a very wrong kind of intors the communists thus human discrimination pushing joined together in circumscriban ancient people out to a difing the immense possibilities ferent and other plane of exisopened up by the 1970 electence than man's seemed to tions and subsequent developwork as some yeast and snowments. But this fact did not balling like James Watt's steam hold us from nursing excited was pressing against whatever anticipations about something was bottling it all up. unforeseeable turning up any That great thing grew and

grew and dared the world's mightiest. And that beat a nine And that turned up on the month long perennial killing now great — let us say holy-day of March 7. Sheikh Mujibur machine into an ignominious Rahman, son of Sheikh Lutfar defeat. A moment of victory and Rahman of Gopalganj but a povindication rose high above the litical progeny of Huseyn Shadebris of gruesome war making heed Suhrawardy, had been afit worthy of all of stupendous ter the death of his guru the sacrifice. For every moment of supremo of AL. On that day he the time spanning the last two became the unquestioned decades that victory has been leader of the whole Bangalee undermined relentlessly by us - and not built up into the people: I told myself, here was mighty heave it was designed to my leader and rushed to exebe to lift our people out of the cute my utterly selfish and glocenturies-old morass it was riously enlightened flash of a decision of all my life - rescustuck up in. When I felt inside me that great growing thing of ing my wife Sanjida from her hole of exile at Carmichael Colbeing a part of a wonderful lege campus, Rangpur. Pakistan awakening of millions, I was able to comprehend victory as army invaded the campus on the black 25th night and went big and all-encompassing it restraight for and killed a beautially was then. But now I can only cut that up and take a porful young woman, believing she was Sanjida, and her husband tion suiting my present capacity Professor Kalachand Roy. as a shrinking individual separated from all thoughts and strivings of being a part of The Rubicon was crossed on splendours whole. The War of March 7, and victory almost

tle of that is now left in me. If my dear little home broken for 23 years of injustice and indigever. Take of a Major Zia calling nity was needed to join us in a for resistance against the Pakmanner that the whole became istani on behalf of Sheikh Mumore, much much more than jibur Rahman and sovereign the parts, how many years of a Bangladesh decided my course next round of sacrifices would and I left with four companions we need to materialise our tryst to join the war we certainly were with that still-receding victory? in by now. We arrived Calcutta I had overcome in my first on April 3. We were able to get days of youth that fascist streak our youngest comrade to be involved in the first Mukti Bahini so common in all who worked for the emergence of Pakistan. training camp who in a matter Taking Hindus to be belonging of days started going on operato some other kind of plane tions deep into occupied counthe thing that was to be played try. Qazi Iqbal was caught in on all of us by Pakistan - yes, May-end, dynamite in hand, in even by my Pakistani intellec-Kushtia. He was all greed to extual friends, on two decades plode an army train and burnt later. That was the first hurdle out discretion and time. He was to be crossed before one came tortured all of six months and to any idea of a true nationhood more till on December 15 when or any entity of a plurality of all inside the Dacca jail broke man involving into a meaningful loose. Nurul Saghir was also society. Awami League for all its under training but he ended up opposition to Pakistani machias a desk man at the Bangnations and its sure stride toladesh Secretariat at Theatre wards a Bengali nationalistic. Road, Kamal's (Mushroor-ul position was very much an off-Huq Siddiqui) was a case in shoot of Muslim League and all reverse. From a desk man we of its leaders and members sufopted to go to front and at the fered from the ML world-view. cost of indomitable heroism and

one eye - he came out of the war with a Beerottam. Syed Hasan Imam did spectacularly as an element constituting the Sadhin Bangla Betar.

I eked out a life dining on

fuchka on a 60-paisa-a-day

budget, sleeping the night out on a stool at Dr Moni Biswa's chamber and earing all this and a share in our people's war effort by working as the director of a big musical squad working for the motivation of the refugees, the freedom fighters and also the Indian people including both leaders and masses. The 100-strong squad did wonderfully well, thanks to unsparing labour put in by Mahumudur Rahman Benu and Shaheen. But the heroic musical war owed all is success to Dipen Bandyopadhyay, the mentor of the writers of Bengali of the sixties and seventies. It was he who thought of the squad, materialised it and funded it through the sahayak samiti of the West Bengal artists, writers and intellectuals. At some point the patriot nonpareill Zahir Raihan came to be involved in the squad which was presided over by Sanjida Khatun.

, Had I had any feeling of achievement at any point of the war? Plenty. I entered thrice into the occupied country and reached Dhaka every time. If nothing else these forays, with a hefty price on my head, helped rescue at least 30 men and women. I have a sense of satisfaction to this day for having completed my self-imposed mission with total success.

The Bangladesher Mukti Sangrami Shilpi Sangstha our squad was invited to the September 20 world conference on Bangladesh at New Delhi convened by J.P Narain. What with Mustafa Manowar's decor and lights and Syed Hasan Imam's narration and Shahriar Kabir's script and what with the immaculate rendition of the songs and music by the squad members — the audience of international dignitary was simply, carried away. The message of Bangladesh - its tragedy and heroism —went home. I felt I had a piece of achievement there.

The war ended on December 16. I had no money to buy me a journey back to Dhaka. With a pumpkin in one hand and some rice in the other waiting to commute to my hole in garia, I heard Bhabani Sen holding forth to a very big gathering spilling the Wellington Square. He outlined the salient points of the victory with insight befitting. But what I heard was an elucidation of a plan and a lowdown on the outlook at the very outset - in the first week of April to be precise - spelled out to him by me. That was an achievement of a lifetime, I told

## The Last Battle

Continued from page 7 teries of mountain artillery, one battery of 120 mm mortars and four medium guns were ferried across Meghna river.

immediately on establishing the bridge-head on the west of Meghna river, allied forces started advancing along Narsingdhi-Demra axis and secured Narsingdhi on 11 December Simultaneously, small pockets of resistance left by the Pakistanis at Bhairab were also eliminated.

By December 14, the allied forces contacted Pakistani defences at Demra on the Sitalakhya river. The Indian brigade took up position at Demra while two of the Bangladesh battal ions rushed north and captured Rupganj after crossing the Sitalakya river on the same day. Another Bangladesh battalion crossed the river in the general area and proceeded towards Dhaka.

The outskirts of Dhaka were already under heavy shelling from the Indian Artillery and the Mukti Bahini boys were fighting many street battles within the city. People were in a jubilant mood with the approach of the allied forces. Men. women and children all alike would come to the rooftops and even the open streets to wave their hands in welcome to the attacking Indian planes while the pale and gloomy Pakistani soldiers would huddle themselves in trenches, frightened beyond imagination. Niazi was still indecisive. So was Dr Malek, the civilian governor of

the province. By December 15, the allied forces had crossed most of the water obstacles protecting Dhaka and were mortaring the city from a few miles. Indian artillery kept pounding military targets in and around the city.

People within Dhaka city became restive. As truck loads of Pakistani troops started pulling back to Dhaka cantonment, in many areas of the city people had started, coming out in small groups to go forward and welcome the allied forces. Even at that final hour of defeat the Pakistanis were full of vengeance and while escaping to the cantonment, they shot many civilians who had come out of their houses.

From Major Rafiqul Islam's "A Tale of Millions." The author was a sector commander of the Freedom Fighters.

ACK in Dhaka, the fateful hour drew closer. The commando troops of the Indian Army, who were told by the Mukti Bahini that the bridge was unguarded, drove to the city in the small hours of 16 December.

Major-General Nagra of 101 Communication zone, who was following advance commando troops held back on the far side of the Mirpur bridge and wrote a chit for Lieutenant General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi. It said: 'Dear Abdullah, I am at Mirpur Bridge. Send your representative!' Major-General Jamshed, Major-General Farman and Rear Admiral Shariff were with General Niazi when he received the note at 9 am.

Major-General Farman asked General Niazi 'Have you any reserves?' Niazi again said nothing, Rear Admiral Shariff. translating it in Panjabi, said: "Kuj palley hai"? (have you anything in the kitty?) Niazi looked to Jamshed the defender of Dhaka, who shook his head sideways to signify 'nothing'. 'If that is the case, then go and do what he (Nagra) asks, Farman and Shariff said almost simultaneously.

General Niazi sent Major General Jamshed to receive Nagra. He asked our troops at Mirpur Bridge to respect the ceasefire and allow Nagra a peaceful passage. The Indian General entered Dhaka with a handful of soldiers and a lot of pride. That was the virtual fall of Dhaka. It fell quietly like a heart patient. Neither was its limbs chopped nor its body hacked. It just ceased to exist as an independent city. Stories about the fall of Singapore, Paris or Berlin were not re-

Slightly after midday Brigadier Bagar went to the airport to receive his Indian counterpart, Major-General Jacob.

Major-General Jacob brou ght the 'surrender deed' which General Niazi and his Chief of Staff preferred to call the 'draft ceasefire agreement.' Jacob handed over the papers to Bagar, who placed them before Major-General Farman. General Farman objected to the clause pertaining to the 'Joint Command of India and Bangladesh'. Jacob said, But this is how it

was come from Delhi'. The document was passed on to Niazi who glanced through it without any comment and pushed it back across the table. to Farman. Farman said, 'It is for the Commander, to accept or reject it. Niazi said nothing. This was taken to imply his acceptance.

From Brigadier Siddig Salek's "Witness to Surrender". The author was a Pakistani officer.

OMBING halt ordered by General Manekshaw in response to Niazi's surrender proposal signed on 15 December was valid upto 9 am. on 16th December and accordingly a radio watch was established to receive confirmation or otherwise from Niazi. The belea guered Eastern Command asked for extension of the deadline by another six hours, which was accepted and confirmation sent to this effect at 10 am.

Things now moved on fast Major-General Jacob the Chief of Staff of the Indian Eastern Command flew into Dhaka by a helicopter exactly at 1 pm with the terms of surrender. Niazi initialled the terms at 2.45 pm and set the stage for the signing cerémony to be held at Dhaka

race course at 4.30 pm. Pakistani troops at Demra surrendered to the Joint Command at 1.45 pm at 3 pm Major Moin (later Major-General) started for Dhaka. Around 2 pm I got a message from 57 Mountain Div to be present at the Airport to receive Lt. General Aurora at 3.30 pm.

The Demra-Dhaka road was not yet safe. The fallen enemy out of jitter and vengeance kept their fingers on the trigger. I. therefore, told Lieutenant Colonel Khiljee the Pakistani battalion commander of the area, to escort me through his troops to the Airport. So at about 3 pm I drove through and reached Airport at about 3.30

Dhaka Airport bore the look of a war-torn battle field, yet it radiated a welcome smile on the wictory day.

Amongst many who went to receive Lt General Aurora at the Airport Lieutenant General Niazi was the centre of attraction. He had a gloomy, depressed appearance. It was an experience of life to witness a General defeated in a theatre of operation with a record of disgraceful genocide to his credit. As scorned at him, his entire being appeared to be disheveled and full of utter disgrace. He was more than defeated for defeat has also a grace which Niazi did not have.

We did not have to wait for long, soon a fleet of helicopters appeared on the sky and landed on the tarmac with General Aurora and his party. Group Captain Khandker, Chief of Staff (Operation), Bangladesh Forces was also a member of this party. Airport formalities soon over, we started for the Ramna Race Course.

From Major General (Rtd.) K M Shaffullah's book, "Striking Strength". The author was a sector commander of the Bangladesh Liberation Forces and later Chief of Army Staff.

TE drove straight from ↑ the Airport to the Race Course in a long cavalcade interspersed with vehicles of all sorts loaded to capacity with people making their way to the historic venue. My car was driven by a sailor of the Pakistani Navy.

The Surrender Ceremony was enacted at the historic Race Course where nine months ear lier Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

had flung the gauntlet of rebellion at President Yahya Khan.

The Course was one seething mass of humanity wild with joy. shouting and gesticulating and the cry "Joy Bangla" was everywhere, the voice of Sonar Bangla. As Gen Aurora was inspecting guards drawn up by Indian and Pakistani soldiers, we were totally engulfed in a sea of humanity. We forced our way through

to the spot where surrender

document was to be signed. A small table and two chairs in the centre of the Maidan, with the two main adversaries seated, Dewan and myself behind, some hundred of the press and cameramen in front. several thousand pressing in all round set the scenario for this historic moment. Six copies of the instrument on thick white paper spelt out terms which required the surrender of all Pakistani Land and Naval forces as also all para-military civilian armed forces. They would lay down their arms and surrender the places where they were currently located to the forces under the command of Lt. Gen. Aurora. The first copy was signed Niazi, then followed Aurora. Either through emotion or deliberately, the enemy Commander did not sign his full name but just "A A K Nia." I pointed this out to Gen. Aurora who in turn spoke to Niazi. Niazi completed his signature and with this Bangladesh was free of a monstrous tyranny that had burnt and raped, looted and killed a poor and innocent people in their tens of thousands. As these thoughts crowded into my mind, Genera Niazi, choked with emotion and near tear, unbuttoned his epaulettes, unloaded his revolver and handing them over to Aurora, touched his forehead to General in total submission and the ceremony was over.

From Vice Admiral (Rtd.) N. Krishnan's "No Way but Surrender." The author was C-In-C, Eastern Command, In-

TIAZI'S orders to surrender had not yet reached all his troops. Nor did we in Chittagong know that the surrender ceremony had taken place at 4.31 pm on the historic Race Course ground.

Least concerned was perhaps one of my most trusted JCO's Subedar Aziz, and a 15year-old freedom fighter. At Bhatiari (Chittagong) both of them were going into an attack with others. They had already driven the enemy across canal and took up position. The young freedom fighter hailed from a nearby village, which had already been liberated. The day before, I had allowed him 12 hours leave to go home and meet his parents. "No, sir", proudly he had replied, "I shall go home after we have captured Chittagong. It will be very soon. Is that not sir?"

While General Aurora and Niazi were signing the document our boys were fighting to capture Bhatiari. It was past 4-30 pm. Enemy artillery opened up and landed in the midst of our attacking forces, Subedar Aziz and the 15-year old boy were seriously injured. Then, as the sun leaned heavily on the western sky both of them quietly breathed their last. Just at dusk, a Pakistani major came with a white flag upto the broken bridge at Bhatiari. They had received Niazi's order and wanted to surrender.

. Later someone gave me a lin in his car and we drove straight to the Chittagong Circuit House. I had a small packet containing a big-sized flag of Bangladesh. I carried it for this particular occasion. A boy lowered the Pakistani flag and hoisted our national flag on top of the Chittagong Circuit House. I looked up. It was a clear blue sky. The flag started fluttering majestically.

An old man embraced me. His son, a soldier, had died in the war. He was clam and serene, his eyes were closed. and in deep contentment he breathed deeper on my chest. None could read those mute agonies engraved in a benumbed soul-neither the wailing wind, nor the moaning sea.

From Rafigul Islam's 'A Tale of Millions".

### Nixon-Kissinger's Tilt Policy units of the Mukti Bahini and

home. That almost meant ten

months and a first tally of mil-

lions killed and a crore up-

rooted, tens of thousands

raped. How did I buy my piece

of victory, what was my price

for it? A dear brother lost and

Continued from page 7

Liberation was not all a de-

prived people's exertion to burst

the colonial seams it sewed

within a nice leather ball - it

was a gigantic effort to reach

out to history and discover a

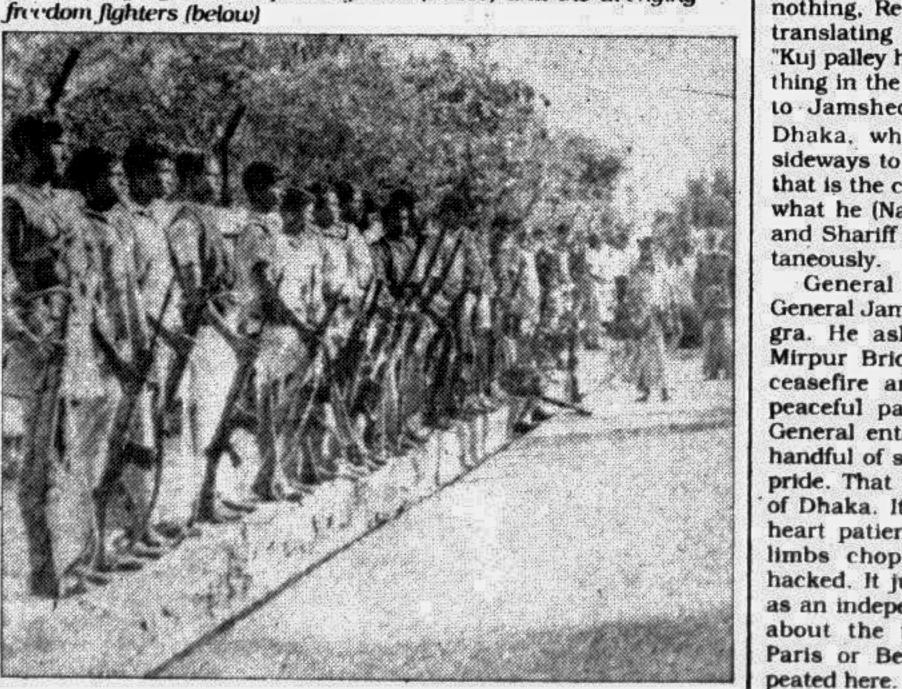
soul, its very own soul. Very lit-

some collaborators were killed in front of the TV camera. After the war media interest shifted to the Biharis in Bangladesh. However, in the comprehensive history of the War that I am sure will be eventually written. the role of the foreign news media will have to find a special

Thanks to the television, the radio and the print media, we could follow the advancing

the Indian forces as well as the retreating Pakistani soldiers. TV pictures of jubilant people greeting the liberating forces was seen by us with a sense of joy and relief. But I had mixed emotions when the Pakistani troops surrendered on 16 December. The fate of Bangabandhu was the uppermost thought in my mind. Is he going to come back in our midst safely? My joy was boundless when we heard about his release from captivity and the

tumultuous welcome accorded to him by the people of Dhaka on 10 January, 1972. I myself returned to Dhaka with my family on 26 January to take up my post in the newly created Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Victory Day brings back the memory of those exciting days. Let me hope on this day that we will be able to bring back the idealism, the patriotic fervour and the willingness of the entire nation to work together for a common goal. Just like we did in 1971.



The atrocity by the occupation forces (above) and the avenging