

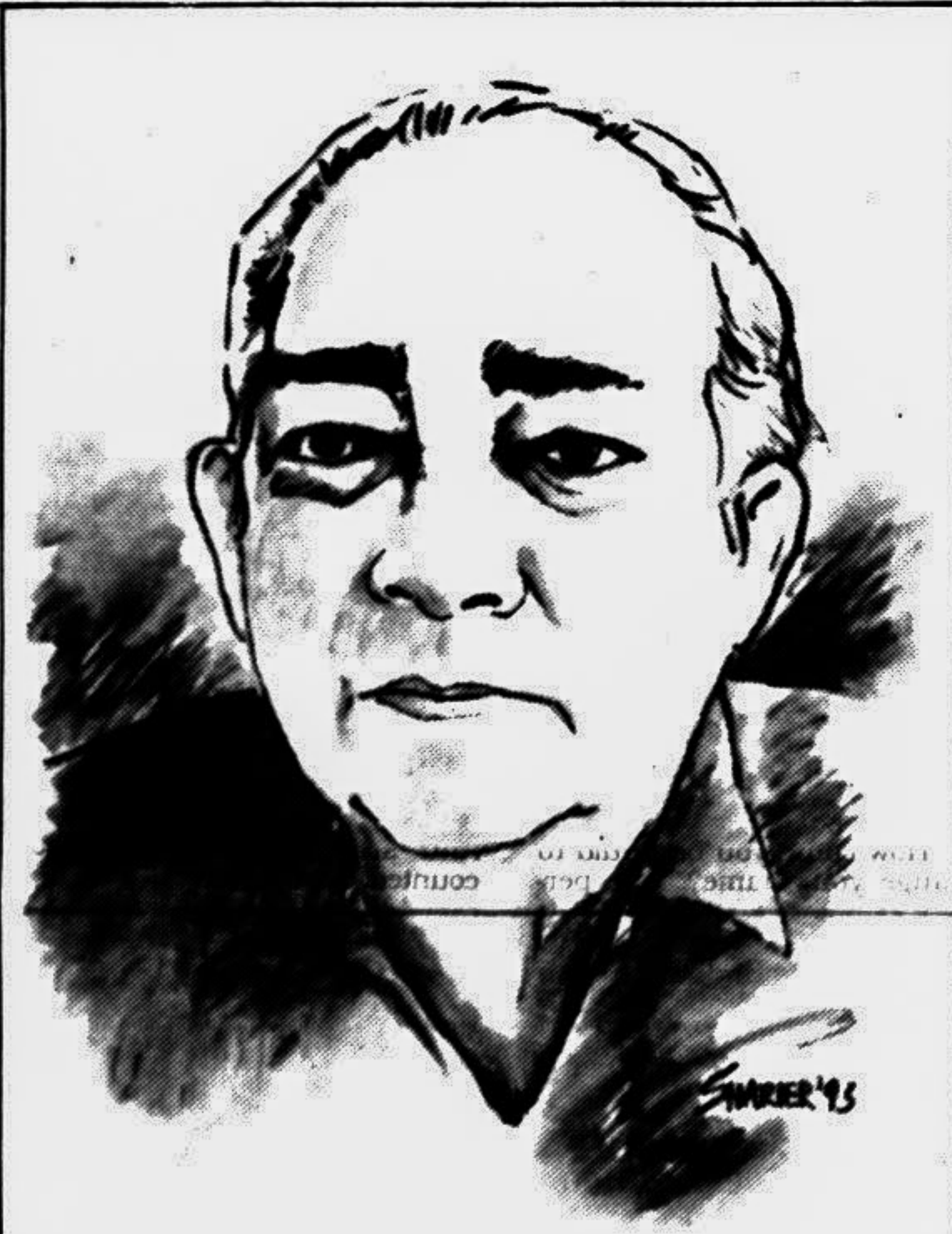
A Place in the Sun

by Kabir Chowdhury

"With his (the freedom fighter's) inexhaustible will power, this real symbol of the resurgence of Bengal will eventually give his country a place in the sun."

S M Ali's "After the Dark Night" is definitely a book much above the level of ordinary journalistic writing. Based on frank discussions with important people both in and outside the government of Bangladesh as well as with ordinary citizens of the land whom the author came across at the airport or elsewhere most informally, the book is the product of his personal research, motivated both by his journalistic interest and his patriotic ardour, more by the latter. I think the author's canvas with regard to time is not large. It is quite small, a period of a year or so after the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign independent republic. The period, however, was a very important one in the country's history, full of complex currents cross-currents, eddies and whirlpools in political, economic and fields of crucial significance. The author examines many vital issues in this rather small volume of only two hundred pages with an open and unbiased but sharp and analytical mind. The issues examined by S M Ali include, among others, such difficult and sensitive

even in today's context. For example, he regretfully mentions that very little attention has been paid to bringing about a qualitative change in the role of the political parties in Bangladesh. Neither the party in power nor the opposition has succeeded in creating a new mould for politics in the new republic. Ali observed this in 1972. Even after 22 years, in 1994, the situation, unfortunately, is much the same. Ali's book has a subtitle: "Problems of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman." Indeed, there were problems galore. How was one going to deal justly and satisfactorily with the question of collaborators, especially with those in the government service who had allegedly assisted the Pakistani occupation authorities? How was one to dispose of the cases of the officers who had served the provisional government of Bangladesh in Calcutta? How was one to create the Civil Service of Bangladesh with a new sense of purpose? How could the question of abandoned property be resolved with justice and equity? How could the government improve the economic conditions of the



Tribute to SM Ali

On the Occasion of His 69th Birthday

The Man Who Gave a New Life to Our Journalism

by Mahfuz Anam

"Being a journalist is a public trust and never forget it," he once told me. Credibility, he said was the life blood of journalism, and credibility was the other name for public trust that one gains over time through objective journalism.

It was only within four years of his return to Bangladesh, in 1969, after an absence of nearly three decades, that S M Ali died, in October '93. But within this short period, he gave a new life to journalism in this country, especially to English language journalism. As an after effect of the long period of military and quasi-military dictatorships since '75, and as a consequence of living under the long spells of military rule during the Pakistani days, our journalism had lost almost all the characteristics of what free and independent journalism was all about. Though our journalism had made significant contribution in our independence struggle and in the anti-audacity movement of the late '60s, yet it lacked the maturity, professionalism and more importantly, the objectivity of a free press necessary for the democratic functioning of an independent state. Advocacy journalism must be replaced by "Watch Dog" journalism, was his main message. Through the founding of *The Daily Star* in January '91

Mr. S. M. Ali showed us what he meant. His first effort was to create a new sense of mission in all those who had gathered around him in his new venture. The "mission" was to be objective, independent and responsible journalism. But how does one attain objectivity? Is it at all possible? "It may not be possible to be 100 per cent objective, but we must never give up trying," was his constant reply. If we keep the "objectivity" goal in mind and keep hammering at it then we will get closer and closer to it, he would say. Checking and re-checking of facts, going to multiple sources to verify an information, gathering multiplicity of views and looking at the same story from different angles was some of the ways to seek "objectivity", he taught.

Not allowing our personal views to cloud our professional work was another issue that S. M. Ali would never tire of reminding us about. Having a strong political tradition made each of us — journalists — politically very opinionated. This very often, without ourselves

being aware of it, made our views and our writings tilted towards one side or the other. This was something that worried Ali a lot. "Being a journalist is a public trust and never forget it," he once told me. Credibility, he said was the life blood of journalism, and credibility was the other name for public trust that one gains over time through objective journalism.

Divisiveness in our society was something that bothered him a lot. He saw how journalists themselves were afflicted by this malaise. "How can the public trust you if they sense that what you are telling them is based on your prejudice, their facts?" Throughout his days as editor of this paper, he tried his best to bridge the gap between our two leading political parties. Repeatedly, through his own writings, and through our editorials and reports on the economy, he tried to impress upon our political leadership, especially the two ladies, the folly of their confrontational politics. But, as we regretfully know, to

no avail. We, in *The Daily Star*, have tried, within our limited capacities — this writer's being the most limited — to uphold the teachings of our founder editor. To the extent that this paper has flourished since his passing, the credit is entirely due to his initial leadership and the team built by him during the starting years. And to the extent that this paper has failed to live up to our readers' expectation, it is due to our failure to carry out the teachings of our extraordinary founder.

In commemorating the 69th birthday of S. M. Ali, we proudly say that his presence in Bangladesh from 1969 to 1993 gave a new life to journalism in this country. His leadership and the example were emulated by others resulting in an all round improvement of both the people and of the institutions in print media. We most proudly remember our founder and pledge, once again, to rededicate ourselves to being better journalists in the boldest and the most ethical sense of the term.

Remembering S M Ali

by Chanchal Sarkar

S M Ali belonged to that set which included our collective guru Tarzie Vittachi, Amitabha Choudhury whose journalistic instincts were probably sharper than any of us Denizil Peiris, Victor Anant, Alan Chalkley, Masaki Kasagi, Chayong Chavalit, Kim Kyu Whan and some others.

In S M Ali's lifetime newspapering in South and South East Asia changed visibly. Before the sixties and fifties there were journalists from the subcontinent (including Ceylon, now Sri Lanka) scattered over most of the good papers in the region but few of them were editors.

S M Ali broke that mould when he became editor of the *Bangkok Post* which has again changed radically now and carries very few regional by-lines. Ali, on the other hand, encouraged journalists from the subcontinent to write. I would like to think that some of the credit for this goes to the Press Foundation of Asia which gathered roundtables in the region many distinguished journalists from the Indian sub-continent and from the rest of Asia. Their meetings in programmes all over the region brought about an Asian feeling so much so that some of us involved in those programmes in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia felt we belonged to all those countries and didn't feel out of place in any of them.

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When he moved to the Press Foundation of Asia it was to a body which had been through a very difficult time and was about to break out of the stocks into which the Marcos regime had put it. There had been an effort to diversify and start up in other countries but there was a shortage of funds. S M Ali helped to tide over PFA's difficult days — his attractive smile worked wonders — before he joined UNESCO as its representative in South East Asia.

UNESCO was good for him but his mind was set on something that had been his ultimate dream — a newspaper in Dhaka which he would edit. When it began he didn't have too much time left but S M Ali put his stamp on the paper and a whole school of new journalists were trained at *The Daily Star*. He was not simply the Editor,

he was an inspiration to those who wrote. His conferences brought in the several sides of his paper and of course he wrote a good deal himself. Throughout his moves he kept his writing ligaments flexible and he was his usual very versatile writer doing edit columns and lighter writing. This was a great boost and morale-raiser to the young. Those of us who visited him in Dhaka found the atmosphere in the paper very warm and welcoming.

We all hoped that is last phase *The Daily Star* phase, would continue for long and that S M Ali would grow from strength to strength. Unfortunately that was not to be but out of his experience and difficulties there should emerge a paper of which he would have been proud.

I like to think of S M Ali as part of a movement sparked off by Tarzie all whose disciples were his friends and friends among themselves. It was almost like a revolutionary movement in a sense set by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in *Pather Dabi*. We met in Manila, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Jakarta (rather less there) Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Calcutta, Delhi, Kerala and Colombo (Pakistan, East and West, were on the periphery officially not encouraging but the journalists there were full of sympathy and friendship). Convivial people as we were we have a lot of fun and were got to the point where political frontiers ceased to have much meaning.

More than some of us S M Ali was even more of an Asian because he did long spells in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore and Manila. And that is how I remember his face in which the eyes would close Chinese fashion when he smiled and his eternal companion.

The cigarette would forever be smoking between his finger. His last stretch in *The Star* must have been among the most satisfying where he had something to fashion out of potter's clay on his wheel.

In the last few years the casualties among those touched by Tarzie have been heavy but I didn't expect S M Ali to go so soon. He was younger than I am.

ones as the recovery of arms from the intrepid freedom fighters just returned from the war fronts, need for political cohesiveness in war ravaged Bangladesh, tightening of civil administration, Maulana Bhasani's politics, nationalisation programme of the government, rural development, Indo-Bangladesh and Sino-Bangladesh relations, and the character and contents of Bengali nationalism. S M Ali talked with Sheikh Mujib, Tajuddin Ahmed, Abdus Samad, Maulana Bhasani, Muzaffar Ahmed, Badruddin Umar, a number of civil servants, planning commission officials, foreign diplomats, businessmen of Bangladesh, both Bengali and non-Bengali, and a host of other individuals, and arrived at his conclusions in the light of his own findings.

Incidentally, S M Ali in his book has given us charming pictures of some individuals. In portrayal of Sheikh Mujib I think he has succeeded in presenting his subject in proper perspective, highlighting Bangabandhu's great love for his country and his people, his strong common sense, the generosity of his heart as well as his limitations and his predicament in newly independent Bangladesh where a drift toward violence was being increasingly linked to political divisiveness. Ali's assessment of the distinguishing features of Sheikh Mujib's career as the latter's indomitable courage, his continuous reliance on his own mass support and his frequent use of agitational politics as an instrument to achieve his objective is essentially correct. However, Ali also refers to the Sheikh's domineering personality and his impatience of criticism, his obvious disdain of all forms of collective leadership, although he adds that over the years the Sheikh had mellowed a great deal, though perhaps more as a man than as a politician. In this context S M Ali refers to the humane treatment Sheikh Mujib meted out to Shah Azizur Rahman and his family and to Syed Badruddin, the non-Bengali editor of the *Muslim League* newspaper the "Morning News." "After the Dark Night" makes highly interesting reading, for me at least, for such episodes and for such observations as the following: "Like many other strong men before him including Sukarno and Nkrumas, Sheikh Mujib is very much alone and, therefore very much vulnerable."

I, too, share the same optimistic faith with S M Ali who died in October 1993, all too suddenly. He worked at home and abroad for about four decades as a distinguished journalist, winning the love, respect and admiration of all he came in contact with, professionally or otherwise. "After the Dark Night" along with his other contributions will keep his memory ever fresh in our mind.

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INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY Charity Begins at Heart

by Ekram Kabir

WISDOM says one should come forward with one's head up and a consecrated heart to help others — whoever is in distress: from an individual to a community and at national or international levels.

Keeping this ideal in perspective, the United Nations General Assembly, in 1985, designated December 5 for an annual celebration by communities, peoples and governments of all that is achieved through voluntary efforts of volunteers around the world.

And by now, International Volunteer Day (IVD) has already been marked in more than half the countries of the world. Bangladesh, in this respect, is no exception, because it is a country that needs all the voluntary works what one individual, one organisation or the international community as a whole can offer.

The UN volunteers programme, in general, acts as international focal point for Volunteers Day and supplies some basic promotional material, directly or through the national sources like environmental clean-ups, prize for volunteers' efforts, street parades, sports events, poster competitions, blood donations, street theatre, repainting community buildings, gifts to hospitals or schools, conferences and debates, fund-raising drives, stamp issues, concerts, dances and traditional ceremonies etc.

Volunteerism in Bangladesh has almost always been practiced by the charity and non-governmental organisations, perhaps, more than the government agencies. For example, International Voluntary Services (IVS) — a private non-profit and independent organisation founded in the US in 1953 — started its operation in

Bangladesh immediately after its War of Independence. It recognises the need for basic training in the key areas of food production, marketing, cooperative development, small enterprise development, resource conservation, health-care and income generation. IVS does not organise, nor does it manage its own projects. Project initiative and management remain the responsibility of the local organisation. Local people have requested, need and want help in solving the problems of their choosing.

They are people with particular skills, motivated to share some of their valuable time with other people with corresponding needs and complementary skills.

IVS provides assistance through workshops, demonstrations and on-the-job training. Working together as international partners, people can pinpoint the causes of their problems, come up with possible solutions and work in ways which result in change. The collective, rather than individual, action of educated and trained community members is a powerful force for change and growth. IVS has been working in Bangladesh since 1972 as a sup-

port organisation. It has provided 24 years of innovative services to the development of Bangladesh, particularly in the promotion and strengthening of NGO community. IVS seeks to improve the quality of life of the disadvantaged through the transfer of skills and technology while informing the strengths and capacities of local groups. Through the technical assistance, IVS has been playing an increasingly significant role in the development of emerging NGOs. IVS also helps people and their organisations to obtain the skills and resources necessary in solving their own problems. IVS does this through technical training and the transfer of skills, leadership development and management training.

It believes that the concept of "volunteerism" denotes a frame of mind more than a level of skill or earning capacity. IVS volunteers are not amateurs, nor are they necessarily technicians. They are people with particular skills, motivated to share some of their valuable time with other people with corresponding needs and complementary skills. In this context, IVS believes that the transfer of skills through training is a vital element for individual and community empowerment in the effort to combat poverty, hunger and inequality.

However, when one thinks of "volunteerism", its gestures of goodwill, help and encouragement, it really makes the world go round, especially when so much news is sad and bad here in Bangladesh. International Volunteer Day is worth celebrating, as helping each other is part of tradition of every society and civilisation. It brings out the very best of men and women, and with it, some inspirational stories.

Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy A Pioneer of Democracy

by Prof. Roushan Ara Hoque

TODAY is the 34th anniversary of death of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the great charismatic leader and politician who had left an important landmark in our political arena by introducing Westminster-type democratic process. By his wise statesmanship he formed the first opposition party to criticize and keep vigil against any tyranny of the ruling party and became the political "messiah" of the common people by opening to them a new horizon for achieving basic rights through democracy. Following his golden path we have achieved democracy in our country for which we, of course, feel indebted to him.

Born in 1892 in an illustrious Muslim family of Midnapur, from his early life Suhrawardy had been imbued with the liberal principles of humanism, and being educated at Oxford he had been inspired with the political philosophy of Westminster Palace. Throughout his life, he cultivated those two principles and dedicated his life in achieving them. As a Deputy Mayor (Calcutta) under C R Das he worked hard to establish the fundamental rights of the workers of that area. Being impressed with his humanitarian feeling they had elected him as their Member to the Bengal Legislative Assembly. In that capacity he opposed the passing of The Whipping Bill of the British on protest that the Indians are not animals as to be whipped by the British and that they are as good as the British people.

The greatest contribution of Suhrawardy was the beginning of the process of majority rule in Bengal. As an undisputed leader of the Muslims he had represented them in the Third Round Table Conference in London in 1935. Being impressed with his organisational abilities Jinnah offered him the membership of Muslim League and in 1936 he became the General Secretary of Provincial Muslim League of Bengal. As Minister of Labour and Commerce under A K Fazlul

Huq he passed The Labour Welfare Act, The Maternity Benefit Act and The Bengal Tenancy Amendment Bill of 1938 by all of which mitigated the sufferings of the deprived multitude.



In the All India Muslim League Conference held at Lahore in 1940 he, as a good Parliamentarian and a spokesman of the Muslim Delegation of Bengal, by his strong arguments in favour of the proposal placed by Sher-e-Bangla, convinced the attending delegates and it was passed and known in history as The Lahore Resolution of 1940 which later on laid the basis of plurality of Muslim States in Muslim majority areas of pre-partitioned India. As Minister of Law, Suhrawardy formed the Constitution of Pakistan on the basis of the Lahore Resolution giving the right of Provincial Autonomy to all provinces. He was also able to sign the Murree Pact of 1955 which stipulated the Five State Principle. This recognition of regional individuality and Parity of Rights had ultimately paved the path of demanding provincial autonomy by the eastern wing of Pakistan's, the denial of which had ultimately led to the liberation and the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. During the election of 1954

Suhrawardy was successful in forming a United Front with other parties of this wing and had won almost all the seats except 9 and Fazlul Hoque became the Chief Minister of East Pakistan. In 1956 Suhrawardy became the Prime Minister of Pakistan and convened a session of Parliament in Dhaka where the Joint Electorate Bill was passed and equal rights of both the wings were guaranteed. To fulfil the 21-point programme of Awami League, he abolished the Public Safety Act, released all political prisoners and tried to remove disparity between the wings, maintain balance of trade and distribute foreign earnings equally between the East and the West.

In the sixties the turmoil mounted up. He was arrested on false charges. But due to strong public pressure he was released from jail. This detention strongly affected his health. But being uncompromising to accept defeat he continued strong movement against the military rule and the "basic democracy" of Ayub Khan.

Suhrawardy enlightened the people about the true spirit of the democratic system of government. He told them that the pre-condition of democracy is the restoration of the basic rights and the freedom of speech of the people and that, as democracy means government of the people, by the people and for the people, it is only the people who can give the final verdict regarding the process of administration and no single individual has any final opinion in it. Any decision taken jointly by the people is sure to be the best for all. By his eloquent speeches in innumerable public meetings he had convinced people that the "basic democracy" of Ayub Khan was nothing but a deceptive process of establishing autocratic rule.

This great political philosopher did not live long to materialise his mission. On his anniversary day, let all of us take new pledges to remain ever vigilant to safeguard the democratic process of our beloved motherland.