

# On 7 November, 1975

Professor M. Maniruzzaman Miah

It was the seventh of November, 1975. In the wee hours of the morning same cacophonous sounds awoke me. For quite a few days, a sort of uncertainty in our national political life was prevailing. Some events of far-reaching consequences were taking place. But in the absence of any authentic version of all these, Dhaka was cegag with rumours. One, that spread like wild fire was that Ziaur Rahman was under house arrest. That there was a change in the country's power structure was of course obvious from the TV-coverage of Khondker Mostaque Ahmed handing over change of the presidency, he was holding since 15 August to Justice Sayem, the then Chief Justice of Bangladesh. The electronic media also showed the Air and the Navy chief putting on Khaled Mosharraf epaulette, an expression of their allegiance with the new army chief.

As the day was about to break, I came down from my third floor University apartment and found another colleague of mine there. He was also wondering as to what the bizarre sounds could be. Both of us therefore started walking towards Nikhet Bazar. There we found a huge crowd. Disorderly, as the people were, they were however cheerful and inoffensive, which I have never seen ever. They were raising slogans, the exact wording of which I don't recollect now, denouncing all forms of expansionism, but in favour of national independence, solidarity between the people and the ranks and glorifying Ziaur Rahman who was freed by the ordinary soldiers. From National radio broadcast, it became clear right from the morning that there was another change in the power that he in the country and Khaled Mosharraf's coup-d'etat of 3 November was failed by the sepoys in the cantonment.

Recently, we see that the facts related to the events of 15 August, 3 November and 7 November are being told the way the Government desires. Interestingly enough, a debate has been there since between General Saifullah (now an Awami League MP) who was chief of Army staff still mid-August of 1975 and Colonel Jamil, who was brigade commander of Dhaka garrison at that time. Accusing each other of not doing enough to save the life of the President who was killed by some men from the armed forces. Recently Colonel Jamil had joined the wordy duel. The fact however speak for themselves. Following the 15 August coup-d'etat Khondker Mostaque Ahmed, an Awami League since its early days took over as President. And all the service chiefs were on the air to express their allegiance to him most of the cabinet members Moshataque cabinet were also members of the Awami League (Baksal).

Khondker Moshataque's rule lasted for 80 days only. Even during this short period of time he was ill at ease with the cantonment. It appears that there was a constant power struggle between the junior officer who took shelter in the President's house after the mid-August coup and some senior officers of the Army. In the backdrop of this Khaled Mosharraf interned General Ziaur Rahman and staged another coup-d'etat and replaced Moshataque by Justice Sayem as President. All this was done presumably to restore the Chain of Command, or so it was claimed.

In a recent interview serialised in a local press Hassanul Hoque Inu, General Secretary of JSD has this to say about 3 November coup.

"Faruque-Rashid surrendered after Khaled Mosharraf look over..... However they surrendered on condition of being given a safe passage out of the country... He (K. Mosharraf) tried to become the Chief of Staff accepting Mostaque as the President. He knew it for certain that Faruque-Rashid killed Bangabandhu, but even then, he did not hesitate to allow them to



The historic solidarity of the patriotic people and the soldiers on the streets of Dhaka on November 7, 1975.

leave the country safely. Over and above, he didn't try even the best to free the leaders in jail."

A few events taking place astride the corridor of power to be mentioned in this regard. One, people know about Khaled Mosharraf's 3 November coup from Indian Radio emission and not from Radio Bangladesh. Two, on 4 November a procession paraded the streets from the Shaheed Minar to Road No. 32 Khanmoudi as its head was Khaled Mosharraf's mother and his brother (now a minister). Awami League however claims that it was planned earlier.

Then came 7 November. The events of the day were however of a different kind altogether. On that day the ordinary soldiers went in a body to Ziaur Rahman's house, where he was interned and kept under constant surveillance armed guards employed by Khaled Mosharraf set him free. He was restored to his earlier position of chief of Army staff. Justice Sayem continued as President. Earlier, Khaled Mosharraf got Ziaur Rahman's resignation as Armed Forces Chief signed under duress while he was under house arrest. Lt. Col. Hamid who a senior army officer saw all this happening from close quarters has described the event in his book on the 3 November coup-d'etat of

1975 as follows: "What is surprising is that not long ago when President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed along with members of his family, the soldiers were not agitated and did not bother much, but when Ziaur Rahman was put under house arrest the officers and the soldier became very dissatisfied....."

News----- that Ziaur Rahman resigned as Chief of Army staff. He surely did it under duress. His signature was taken on a blank sheet of paper. On behalf of Khaled, one Brigadier Rouf went to him and got his signature on the letter of resignation. Zia, under house arrest, was compelled to do it."

Lt. Col. Hamid has also given a vivid account of events taking place inside the cantonment, particularly how Zia was freed. There is a translated version of what he has written.

"How Ziaur Rahman, a captive, was freed? He was detained in his own residence guarded by a platoon of the First Bengal Regiment employed by Khaled-Shafayet. The sepoys uprising began around midnight. Right from that time the revolution arises and the sepoys came out from different units on their own will and gathered around Zia's residence.

"They resolved to break into the house and free him when Major Mohiuddin, Subedar Anis and some soldier of 2 Field reached firing from all around. The guards of First Bengal who kept Zia confined fled through the rear once they realised what was happening.... Then they (the revolting army people) broke into the house. They shouted for the do or to open. Zia and Begum Zia came out in the corridor at the back. A large number of soldiers entered the house and there was a lot of excitement.

Mahiuddin said: 'we have come to take you Sir, please come with us.'

Zia said, 'Listen, I have retired. I am not involved in anything. I am not going anywhere. I really don't understand anything.'

"At one stage Mahiuddin, Anis and the other soldiers took Zia on their shoulders and seated him in the jeep waiting outside. And there was an outburst of slogans all around like, 'Allahu Akbar'.

"Ziaur Rahman Zindabad" "All soldiers are brothers."

Every body become happy. They raised slogans, "Ziaur Rahman Zindabad"

Ziaur Rahman become free but discipline among the army was at its height. No one had any respect to command or orders, the age old concept of submission to superiors without questioning, evaporated. Some officers and their wives were killed. It appeared as though discipline in the army become a thing of the past. But Zia started working hard to rescue the army from this anarchy. Lt. Col. Hamid writes as follows:

"I was looking for Zia. He was mourning. He asked the ordinary soldiers to stop all kinds of indiscipline. They placed a set of demands. Zia asked them to surrender their arms. "He hold them in clear terms to deposit their arms and to come within the bounds of discipline. He asked them to go back to the barracks and not to shed any blood."

A few conclusions are self-evident from the above. One, the very players of 7 November uprising were the soldiers from the rank. Two, the coups of 3 November could not master any support from any quarters. It was more to fulfill the personal ambition of one person only. That is why could not be achieved. Three, Ziaur Rahman had no role in any of the event of 15 August 3 November and 7 November circumstances eventually brought him in the center stage of politics after the event of 7 November. He had no choice in the matter.

What is the significance soldiers' revolt of 7 November?

The events of the day have in fact far reaching consequences. For us the significance may be summed up as follows.

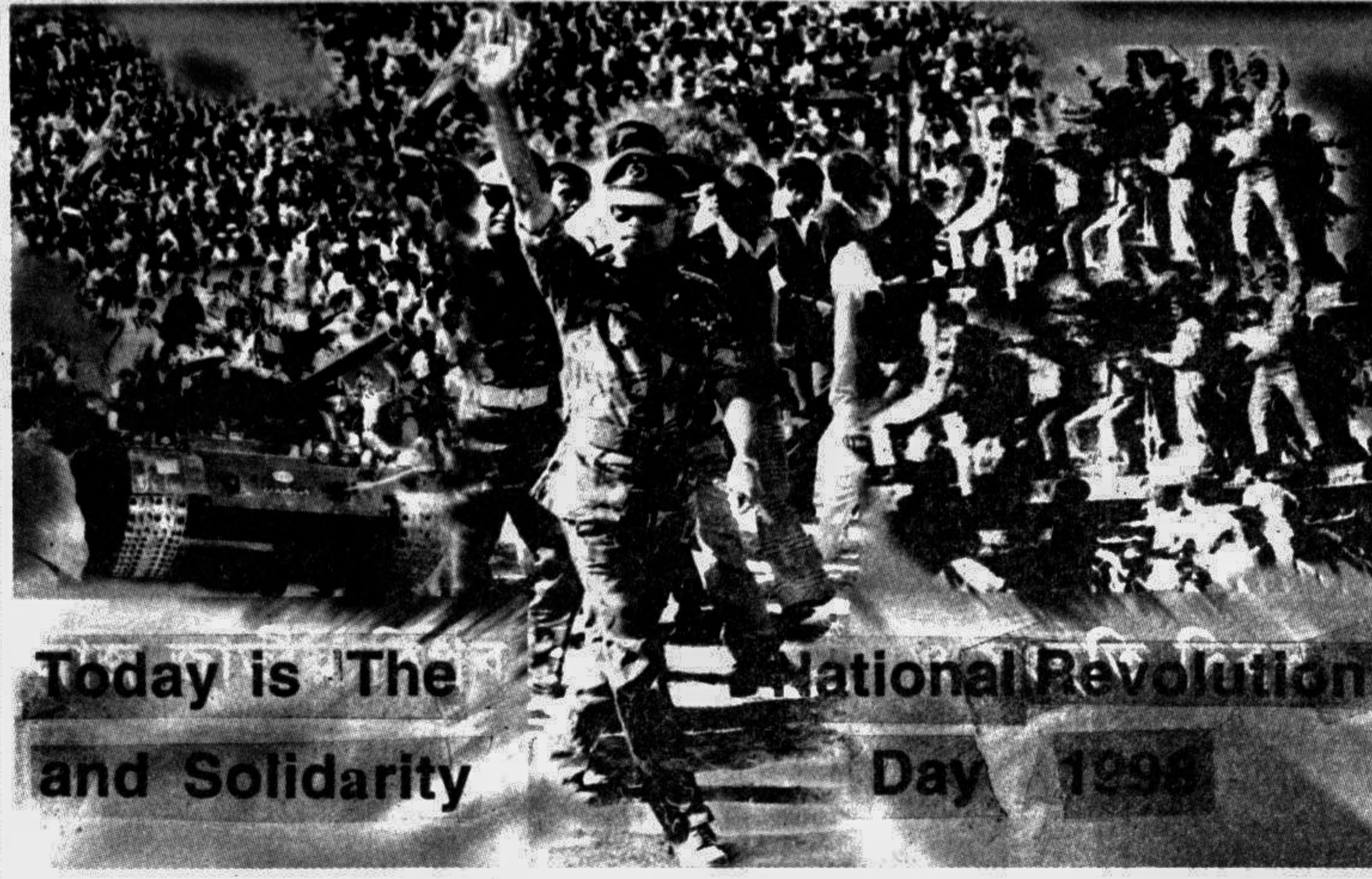
a) A number of coups and counter-coups in 1975 broke morale of the armed forces and spread indiscipline among the army. Only Ziaur Rahman could bring them out of chaos. His image as the declarer of independence of Bangladesh, his proverbial honesty, his inexhaustible organising capacity and above all his position were his assets in the apparently impossible task.

b) Uprising of 7 November actually against all forms of expansionism and a patron-client relationship with another country.

c) The 7 November revolt was also a rejection of the one-party concept of Baksal.

d) The 7 November uprising was also a harbinger of formation of a really patriotic government not being influenced by any outside power.

All may not be the interpretation of history. But facts remain facts. It is unfortunate that these are also mutilated now. This attitude of the power there be in the country cannot do good to the country in the long run. Truth will ultimately prevail.



Today is 'The National Revolution and Solidarity Day 1975'

## Significance of a National Day should not be Mixed up With Politics

Mahub Anam

Translated by Neamul Haque

7th November is the mutiny day. Some people observe it and some do not because of their political differences. It gets no harm. Putting a notable significance on it the previous governments used to glorify the day on behalf of the nation. They termed it the day of revolution and consolidation. It was also declared holiday. But after coming into power the present government had cancelled the holiday. Placing a great importance on it the opposition B.N.P observe the day with due respect. There is another cause for which BNP observe the day. On 3rd November after the revolt of Khaled Mosharraf the chief of army staff Ziaur Rahman was arrested. But he was released by the revolutionary soldiers and people afterwards. The announcer of the independence and a brave freedom fighter Ziaur Rahman was the founder chairperson of B.N.P the biggest opposition political party of the country. For that reason BNP observe the day.

Some other oppositions, specially the Islamic parties also observe the day because Ziaur Rahman introduced the Bangladeshi nationalism by blending religion and Bangali nationalism. J.S.D also observe the day as the contributing a lot in constituting and commanding revolution. This is for the first time on November 3, JSD leader Hassanul Hoque Inu wrote a continuous post editorial in Bhorerkagaz named 'The mutiny was in favour of the spirit of war of independence'. The facts and informations he supplied in it clearly reveals that the political ideology of JSD as well as the high ambition of Khaled Mosharraf were responsible for the constitution of the mutiny of 7th November.

Many people blame Ziaur Rahman for coming into power through backdoor. But those, who love to look into the facts of history must have to term this blame baseless. During the time of mutiny Zia was arrested and his party B.N.P. did not come into being at all. Ziaur Rahman was also about to be arrested during jail killing. In his post editorial Mr. Innu said, the arrangement of compromise that allowed the majors flee and led the rise of Khaled Mosharraf was an ill document. The soldiers did not accept it, from November 3 to November 7 it was a sign of instability and uncertainty. The failure of post liberation government prompted the first revolt. This brought Khondker Mostaq Ahmed one of the Awami League leader into power. But the pro-Awami League army officer Khaled Mosharraf ended the 83 day administration of Khondker Mostaq Ahmed. Innu in his post-editorial also gave a description of the role of the soldiers (Sainik Sangsta), during mutiny on the 7 November who conceived the political ideology of JSD. Since November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the daily events of that period revealed a lot of unknown informations. Amidst the chaotic situation at one stage the Chief Justice ASM Saem was made the president of the country. In that particular context, Saem was the compromise candidate. In this book 'The last days in Banga Bhaban' justio Saem described many

the late president. He did put almost in a balanced way. He said, "On last 15<sup>th</sup> August some retired and in-service army officers had killed the then president and his family members through a revolt. After taking over the power as president of the country Khandkar mustaq Ahmed proclaimed the Martial Law. In fact, the army had no involvement in this incident. People expected that the law and order situation would become normal and justice prevail. But we all have been disappointed. Security could not be ensured. More over recently some political leaders have been brutally killed within the jail house. At this stage the former president Khondkar Mostaq Ahmed requested me to take the responsibility of the president. To save the country from this critical juncture I am directing the patriotic army to extend their active support". Next day was 7<sup>th</sup> November and Friday. President Saem



Ziaur Rahman with jubilant soldiers after being freed on November 7, 1975.

again addressed the nation on that night. He said, to run the state administration in this changed situation we have taken some measures. To run the administration orderly a martial law administrative structure has been constituted. In this structure the president himself would be the chief martial law administrator. There would also be three deputy chief martial law administrator. They are the chief of army staff, Maj General Ziaur Rahman, the Naval Chief Commodore Mosharraf Hossain Khan and the air force chief Air vice martial M.G. Toab. On 7th November 1975 at late night in a radio address general Zia said, in this current situation following the requests from the people, army, navy, airforce, BDR, Police, Ansar and other I had to take over as the chief martial law administrator and the chief of the army staff for the time being. I will try my best to discharge my duties in this connection inshallah. (Ref: Abu Sadat Saem. The Last Days in Banga Bhaban, P-60). President Saem in 37<sup>th</sup> page of his book said, in a crucial and critical juncture I did agree to take over as president. There was serious chaotic situation. A few army officers kept the chief of army staff Major General Ziaur Rahman arrested. Before that, on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1975 in the early morning President Sheikh Mujibur Rahaan was killed. Soon after the killing martial law was proclaimed. By Khondkar Mostaq Ahmed, a close associate colleague of

declaration of independence from Ziaur Rahman. If there was no such declaration we would have never been able to stand on our own feet. But it is a matter of regret that such a great and noble act did not get any recognition. Like a brave and true soldier, Zia did not bother for the recognition. But this act of ignorance seriously disappointed thousands of his admirers. During that period I happened to meet Ziaur Rahman. In a reply to my question Zia said, my conscience prompted me to declare the independence. At that time I did not know whether I would be alive or not in the war field. No politician was available around. I knew that my act did put my relatives in danger. Even that I was on my way. I fought. The country became independent. We have finished our duties. Now it is the task of politicians. They will run the country. Soldiers are back to the cantonment and will remain there. This reveals the character of Ziaur Rahman. He had a trust in civil society and democratic system. On 7<sup>th</sup> November through the passage of united move by the people and soldiers Zia was freed and in course of time become the president of the country. Before that the government of Khondkar Mostaq Ahmed was ousted by Khaled Mosharraf on November 3. A famous and sacrificing politician of the country Oli Ahad in his book Jatio Rajniti-1945 to 75, said (P-500). On 7<sup>th</sup> November after the successful united revolt by the people & soldiers the chief justice Saem had

become the president and chief martial law administrator. It was Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf who elevated himself to the rank of major general and became the chief martial law administrator and before being killed he nominated justice Saem as president of the country by virtue of his position. In page 502 of the book it is written that, on 4<sup>th</sup> November in a presidential announcement Khaled Mosharraf was promoted to the rank of Major General with effect from 3<sup>rd</sup> November. Beginning from the same date Zia's resignation was effective. The leader of the revolt arrested Zia. On 7<sup>th</sup> November Zia was freed and reinstated in his position. It is to be noted that, though justice saem was nominated president by Khaled Mosharraf on November he continued his office after the incident of 7<sup>th</sup> November even. As president justice Saem was although almost impartial but the party in power did not send and condoleance after his death. The present Government has cancelled the holiday of 7th November, because Ziaur Rahman came into power through the passage of this revolt. Zia himself did not arrange any revolt. In fact, he had no scope of doing such thing. He was arrested. The leaders of the revolt were given mercy. But Zia, who led the nation from a rackage to the path of prosper became guilty. It is fact that, the era of Zia is a glorious part of our history. He gave way to the multiparty democratic system from a dictatorial one party BAKSAL system. Awami League, NAP, CPB and other parties were given their chance to do politics. He brought back home Hasina, the daughter of Sk. Mujib and returned the family property to her. These noble gesture were of no use only because of political differences.

It is true that, Zia founded a popular political party and threw a challenge for Awami League. Still it is working and it is the part of democracy. For this reason his achievements and contributions can not be wiped out or ignored. We would be targeted as number one enemy is not a fair deal. The ruling party people say that they could not speak out the truth for long 24 years. But it is true that, for that reason Sk. Mujibur memories were wiped out? Not at all. Though political opponent, the previous government never had shown any disregard to Sk. Mujib - more over during the period of Begum Khaleda Zia president Abdur Rahman Biswas visited the mazar of Sk. Mujib at Tungipara Showing tolerance for the political appointment was a tradition during British period but this tradition is getting out from our culture. A mere ordinance can not wipe out the significant events of our national history. 7th November cannot be ignored only by showing that Zia came into power on that day. People were encouraged by the gesture the present Government showed to the behind the veil hero of 7<sup>th</sup> November. But for whom they came to power to day were ignored by them just because of political reasons. Is it not double standard? Can Mowlana Bhashani, Shere-e-Bangla be subsided just because of political differences?

# ALIVE IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE

by Sadeq Khan

For two decades since 1975, the citizens of Bangladesh have been enjoying a holiday on November 7 to commemorate the day of Sepoy-People uprising. That day in 1975 changed their lives, put an end to chaotic bids for power after the fall of Sheikh Mujib's BAKSAL raj, defeated a foreign interventionist bid, and firmly asserted the spirit of independence.

That day truly established the sovereign will of the people to carve their future on the basis of their own historical experience, social values and constituted principles of statecraft. That day laid solid foundations for return to multiparty democracy, and for respect and recognition of ethnic minorities in the fold of Bangladeshi nationalism, rejecting the BAKSAL bid to turn every national into a servile "Bangladesh" prototype. That day began the true process of nation-building, based on the grassroots rejection of colonial shackles of all sorts, of the British, Panjabi and the Indian Dada variety, and re-assertion of moral and material values historically engendered in the peoples psyche.

revolution. And it was certain in stark contrast to the countrywide extrajudicial killings of millions by Rakki Bahini in the Mujib era.

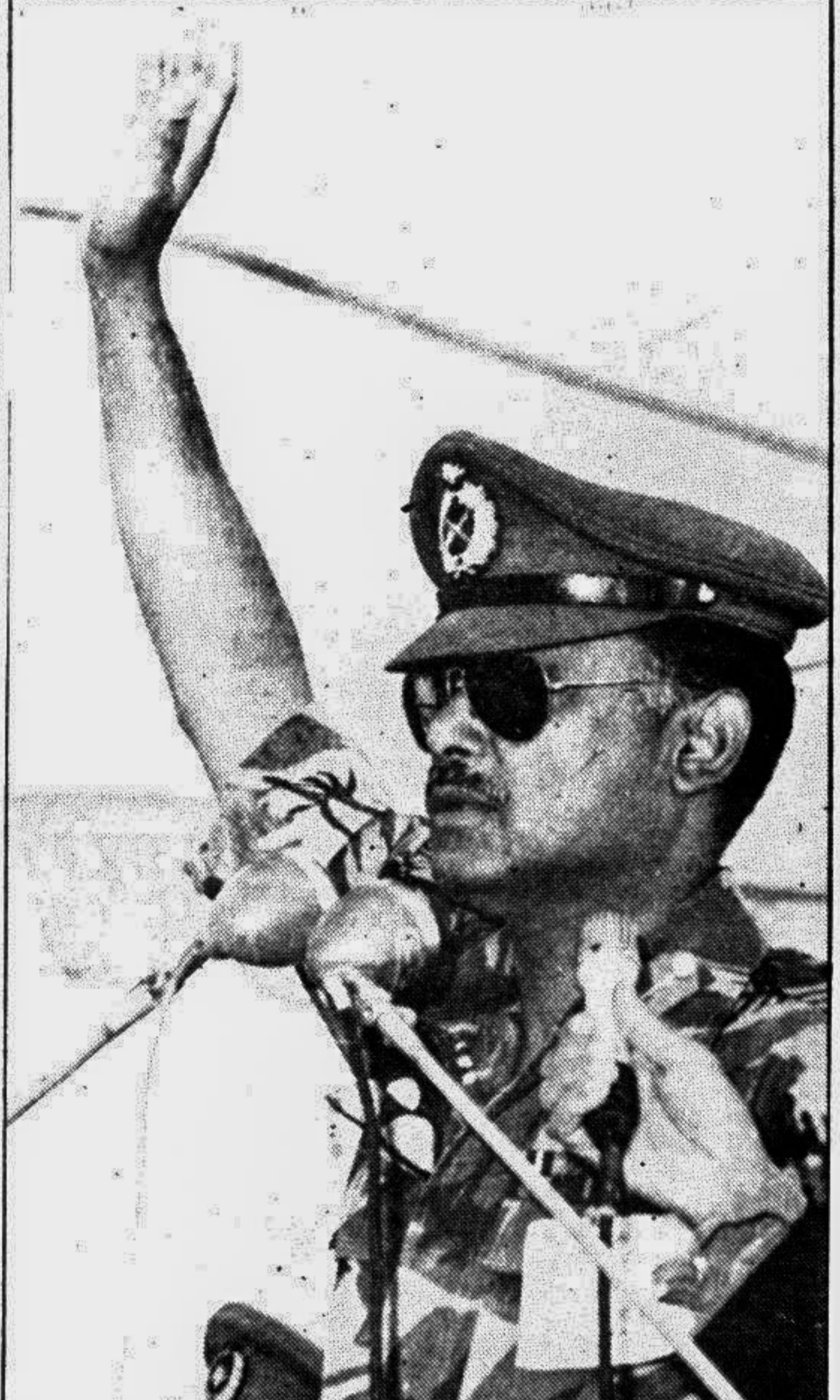
Of late, one of the misguided freedom fighters, clonel (reid.) Shaqat Jamil who happened to be on the wrong side in that revolution and who had arrested Zia to lead his units with the coup d'etat under Brigadier Khaled Mojharraf to topple the then President Khondkar Mostaque Ahmed on November 3, gave a press interview. In effect, he acknowledged that had it not been for the bold leadership of Zia, who was freed by the sepoys, and had it not been of the massive support that Zia inspired in the sepoys-people uprising, the defence capability of the nation would have been decapitated by the killing for all officers of the armed forces by a clandestine group of conspirators calling themselves "Biplobi Shaunik Sangstha". They were in fact counter-revolutionaries advancing a RAW (Indian secret service) design to soften grounds for Indian "police action" on the excuse of suppressing anarchy and restoring order in a nation that was not yet ready to stand on its fact Under the inspired leadership of Zia, with the mass of the sepoys and the people solidly behind him, the nation firmly stood on its feet all right, and a new order began, unmistakably defeating the BAKSAL clique. For two decades thereafter, the nation building process in Bangladesh has been able to achieve wonders in terms of socio economic strides and in international relations. It has given the lie to indian propoganda that with its small territory and large population squashed in an underdeveloped corner of the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh would prove to be not at all viable as an independent state. Although still in the category of east Developed Countries, Bangladesh has proved its metal in survival against many odds, and has confidently undertaken development initiatives that would carry its people proudly into the twenty-first century with sovereign dignity. Bangladesh was also confident enough to moot the idea of regional cooperation and lay the foundations of a regional peace building process through SARRC. Bangladesh is certainly set to obtain its appropriate recognition

That day released the nation's energies for self-reliant community endeavours for self-reliant community endeavours to wage a war against poverty, freeing them from the tentacles of BAKSAL octopus in a decisive and irreversible manner. IN the two decades thereafter, the community organisations have grown into pride institutions of the nation, making significant contributions, in partnership with government organisations, in generating self-employment, empowering vulnerable groups in society, and developing skills for disaster management and scopes for social service, in itself a source of employment for the educated young people of the country.

That day made the promise of freedom for private enterprise in productive endeavours and employment of human and material resources of the nation. That day was the turning point when the nation resolved not to let itself be treated simply as a market for supply of raw materials to more industrialised economies and for dumping of manufactures and consumables from other lands. That day marked the beginning of progressive steps to untie the

knots of bureaucratic holds over commerce, industry and services of the nation, including agricultural input and support services, and of the straitjacket of a command economy. In the two decades thereafter, Bangladesh has been successful in building the base for a competitive national economy to feature in the world market, and to begin develop its own capital market, however modest.

And finally that day saw the floral crowning of a militant national leadership that braved the threats of foreign intervention, saved the nation's military expertise and fighting spirit, and by an unambiguous demonstration of sepoys-people solidarity and support for the patriotic leadership of Zia tested in the liberation war, put an end to counter-revolutionary machinations. The surprising thing was that very few lives were lost in that great uprising and very little violence resorted to in any part of the country. The population solidly stood behind the uprising, and the isolated usurpers of power took fright, fled or surrendered with out a fight. It was a peaceful popular



in the comity of nations.

But sadly another bout of counter-revolutionary gambles have started after those two decades of nation building. They seek to undermine the Sepoy-people revolution and slowly turn Bangladesh into a vassal state of India. A vested group within the ruling coalition is out to undo the fruits of nation building in Bangladesh, and re-write history. In ceaseless propoganda, Gobbles-style, they are seeking to malign the revolution of 7 November, 1975 and its achievements. They are openly advocating to turn our competitive national economic base into a "complementary" economic adjunct of India. And they have revived all the old BAKSAL terror tricks and propoganda camouflage to pursue a whole range of anti-state designs. But they will again be foiled by the solid resistance of the people. They have cancelled the holiday on November 7 from last year, but they cannot erase the memory and inspiration of the Sepoy-People uprising from the peoples minds. November 7 is alive in the heart of the people.