

# Heroes Who Came in from the Cold

Two Bir Uttams of the greater Barisal region emerge from the shadows

By Aroop Talukdar

WHILE names of many freedom fighters remain unknown even today, it seems that few people remember the martyred soldiers, even if they were decorated highly posthumously. Though the whole nation should remember those who fought and died for freedom of this nation, many remain unknown.

One such forgotten hero is Shaheed Subedar Major Khandaker Fazlur Rahman of Aulia para village in Bakerganj thana of Barisal. Although awarded the Bir Uttam for bravery in the battlefield, the name of this valiant freedom fighter was unknown to the people of this region, even to the Muktiyoddha Sangsad of Barisal for the past 27 years.

Recently, the name of Fazlur Rahman came to the light.

That day Salma Parveen, daughter of Fazlur Rahman came to the Muktiyoddha Sangsad of Barisal to get a recommendation for sinking a deep tubewell at their village home. Enayet Hossain Chowdhury, executive committee member of the Sangsad was present there. Parveen went to him and said, "My father was a freedom fighter, I'm his daughter. Please, recommend for installing a tubewell at our village home".

Astonished, Enayet Chowdhury later became more surprised when he came to know that Parveen's father was not only a freedom fighter but also a recipient of Bir Uttam title for his heroic dedication and gallantry in the war fields of 1971. He fought for his motherland to his last. Fazlur Rahman is one of three freedom fighters from the greater Barisal region decorated with the Bir Uttam. The other two are Captain (later Major) Shahjahan Omar and Havildar Abdus Sattar.

Shaheed Fazlur Rahman's credentials had remained unknown even to his family members, until Salma Parveen received her father's Bir Uttam certificate from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Jatiya Sangsad last year among the other decorated freedom fighters.

Parveen very eagerly and delightfully showed her father's certificate to Enayet Chowdhury, who wasted no time to gather other information about this martyr.

Fazlur Rahman's 90-year old mother Amrunnessa Begum is now bed ridden at her village house with old age complications and cannot speak clearly. His widow Mamtaz Begum died in 1990. Their three daughters are married. Fazlur Rahman and Mamtaz Begum had no son. Shaheed Fazlur Rahman was a member of the then East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) before the liberation war. In 1971 he was on leave at his village home at Bakerganj of this district. When the liberation war was started in March '71, he was directed to report at the Rangpur Cantonment. His leave was cancelled immediately.

Fazlur Rahman went there but after some days he revolted and with his company members went to Kuchibihar crossing the nearest border. Later Fazlur joined as a soldier of Swadhin Bangla Armed Force at the middle of 1971.

During November '71, he was posted at Hatibandha thana in Lalmonirhat which came under the Sector 6. By then, situation was very tough, as the freedom fighters were in an eyeball-to-

eyeball position with the Pakistan occupation army some half a mile away from Singmari border outpost where freedom fighters set their camps.

On November 22, a fierce battle began between the freedom fighters and the Pak army. Fazlur Rahman was the commander of a combined group

More than one hundred 'Razakars' surrendered during that time.

Many Pakistani soldiers were killed in that furious gun-battle, dead bodies of whom were taken away by two army trucks in the dead of night.

These five shaheed freedom fighters including Commander Fazlur Rahman were buried at

years? Who will answer these questions?

ABDUS Sattar, a veteran of the War of Liberation, has remained out of the limelight for 26 long years. Awarded the Bir Uttam, the second highest medal for valour in the field of battle, for his

lar army in 1987, while serving in Chittagong as a Havildar.

Sattar joined the Pakistan army as a sepoy in 1969. During the War of Liberation two years later, he served as the platoon commander of 'Alfa Company' of 3rd East Bengal Regiment in subsector number three under Captain Chowdhury. Earlier, he worked as a Naik in the Record

my family and could lead a bit better life like some others", Sattar said. "I know, many so-called freedom fighters got much help, used scopes to make their fortunes after the Liberation War which I did not do. Now, you may say, it is my failures in life... may be..." he added, his eyes full of tears.

Sattar narrated more of his untold stories, each one laced with pain. As a freedom fighter, almost none helped or backed him, not even his superior officers whom Sattar knew since the battlefield days of 1971. Everywhere he was deprived of his legitimate claims, due respect and minimum facilities to live with dignity.

Ten long years have passed since his retirement from active service in 1987, but he still keeps himself aloof from all sorts of ceremonies observed in remembrance of the Liberation War of 1971. Despair haunts his everyday life.

Even local people do not know that there is a Bir Uttam living in their midst. Local villagers still know that there is one 'Havildar Sattar' in their village who was once a freedom fighter — but nothing else! Not even the Muktiyoddha Command Council of Barisal could locate him earlier.

Recently, a week before the central Muktiyoddha Command Council of Dhaka sent a letter to Barisal district committee to locate the whereabouts of one Abdus Sattar who is a Bir Uttam and a great freedom fighter living somewhere in the district. His name was also recorded in the gazette notification as a Bir Uttam title recipient, but there was no address. People of Barisal division for long 26 years knew the name of one local Bir Uttam, who is Captain (ret'd.) Shahjahan Omar, now a BNP member of parliament from Jhalakathi district.

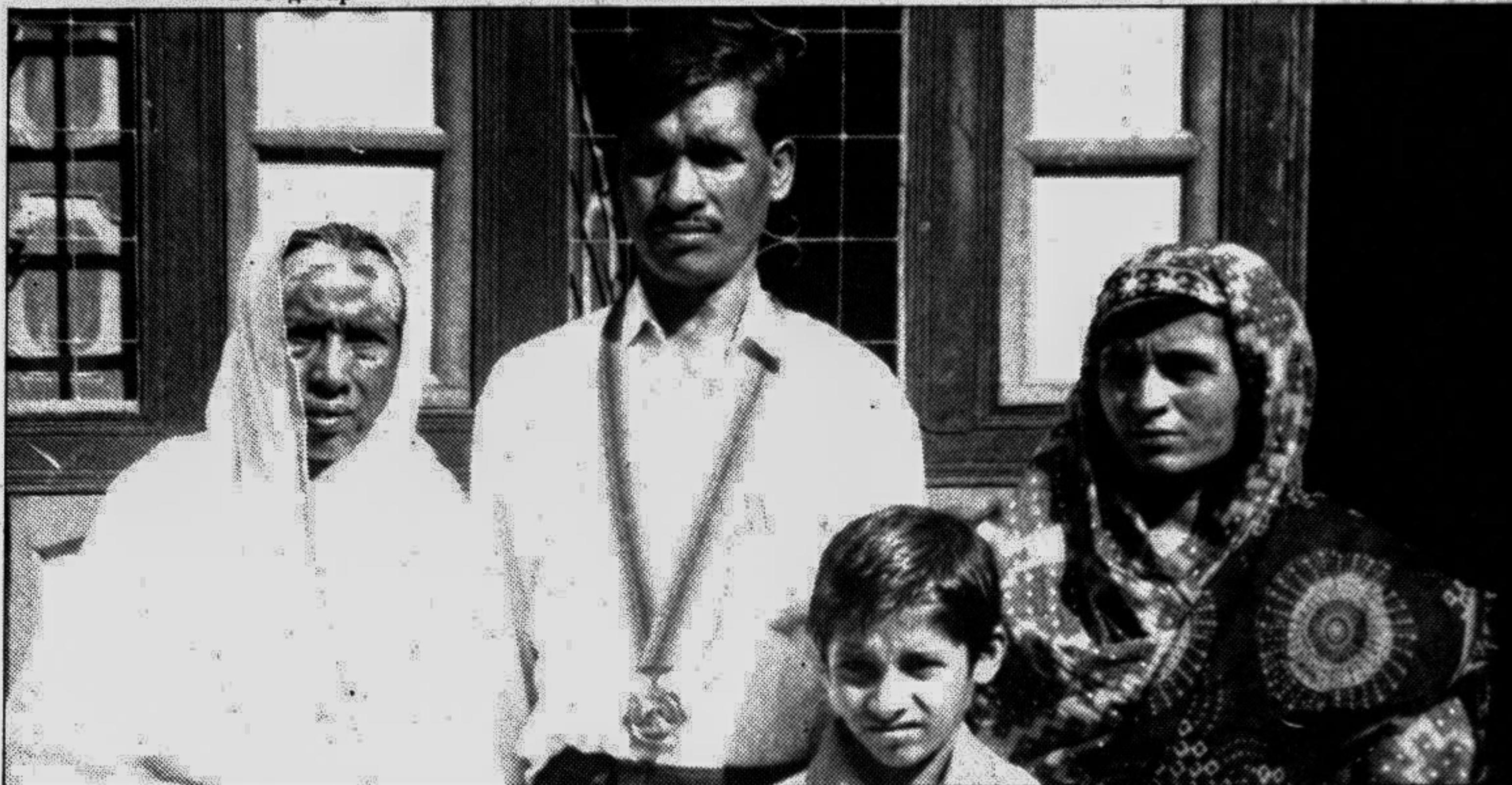
Abdus Sattar narrated his life story full of despair to some local journalists and members of Barisal Muktiyoddha Command Council when they discovered him at the Ganapara village of Kashiapur, outskirts of the Barisal town on November 18 last. Actually, even Sattar himself did not know he was a Bir Uttam. He was aware of what it meant to be decorated with Bir Uttam.

It is really regrettable and a shocking experience of our lives to learn that, in our society even sensible people neglect a freedom fighter of such heroic and honourable history.

It is possible in our country, but nowhere else. Abdus Sattar has only a very small piece of land, two cows and a little cottage to live in with his mother, wife and others. He is the father of three sons and a daughter, who is now married. Sattar's earnings consist of eight hundred taka a month service pension and a meagre quantity of rations. With that, he cannot even pay for the education of his sons.

Such is the fate of a Bir Uttam in Bangladesh today! However, after the publication of the untold story of this ill-fated freedom fighter recently, the Muktiyoddha Kalyan Trust in Dhaka has acknowledged his existence where he applied for some financial help. But as a retired member of the armed forces he was refused any direct financial help but he was provided a job at the Kalyan Trust recently.

That is some consolation for a freedom fighter who put his country and comrades before his own life.



Abdus Sattar Bir Uttam with family

under the command of Captain Matur Rahman. It was then a fight between a few dedicated freedom fighters and the Pakistan occupation army, comprising two companies of regular army, two companies of UP Cap, nearly 1500 'Razakars' and a contingent of artillery force.

Fazlur Rahman was at the front-line position with his company. Pak army, which retreated amid heavy gunfire, was later reinforced.

Captain Matur had wireless contact with Fazlur Rahman. Suddenly, Captain Matur received a shocking call that Fazlur Rahman had been hit. Matur anxiously wanted to know the condition, then Fazlur Rahman lied and said, "nothing serious, sir..." But after sometimes, Matur could hear the fading voice of Fazlur, "my condition is worse, sir..." but don't tell it to my company soldiers, please..." he requested to his superior with a choking voice.

Captain Matur was hardly 500 yards away from the spot. He tried to go to Fazlur Rahman who was close to death. But Fazlur was then at his last breath. He requested his Captain to say prayers through the wireless set. Matur Rahman recited the prayers. As the recitation was over, the wireless set gradually turned voiceless amid rattling sound of gunfire, booming sounds of explosions and shells in the bloody war field of Hatibandha.

The battle ended several hours afterwards, leaving five freedom fighters dead and more than 30 others wounded on the spot. They were later sent to Siliguri Army Hospital in India for treatment. But the valiant freedom fighters did not concede an inch of the motherland to the Pakistan occupation army.

After two days the freedom fighters captured Hatibandha.



Shaheed Fazlur Rahman Bir Uttam

Baura, near Hatibandha thana old mosque. But today, there is nothing, not even a nameplate by which the grave of Fazlur Rahman can be identified. So neglected they are!

After Hatibandha was liberated and the Bangladesh flags hoisted atop homes in the area, the freedom fighters went to the grave yards of these six martyrs to pay respect to them saying, "Your names will be ever written in the minds of the people of Hatibandha... you'll never die... you'll be remembered for generations to come..."

Now, a question may be raised as to why the names of many valiant freedom fighters, such as Shaheed Khandokar Fazlur Rahman did not come to light earlier?

Why Fazlur Rahman is being remembered after long 27

Section at the Chittagong Cantonment.

During the battle with the Pakistan army at Goainghat, he received several bullet injuries. When he fell, Pak soldiers bayoneted him and left him for dead. But moments before losing consciousness, he threw his last grenade at the enemy soldiers.

Later, other freedom fighters rescued him from the bloody battlefield and took him to a hospital at Shilong in India for treatment where he was treated for long three months.

Sattar survived, but the wounds left him crippled. The valiant freedom fighter returned to his motherland, independent Bangladesh after the war's end. Later, as regular course he joined the Bangladesh army and worked in different places.

As Sattar had no requisite academic educational qualifications, he was not commissioned and could not become an officer in his life.

Sattar said, "I've come back from the jaws of the death and I'm proud of my country's freedom and becoming a freedom fighter."

Sattar received many medals for bravery and devotion to duty. These include the Rana Taraka, Samar Medal, Mukti Medal, Joy Padak, Sangbidhan Padak, Nirapatta Padak, Jyestha Padak etc. These medals and crests are still in his box as precious preservation. He was awarded the Bir Uttam by the government in 1972 as one of the heroes of the Liberation War.

Yet, since then still today he received little except disregard, neglect and distress from every quarter, even from the government. This question from thousands of neglected freedom fighters all over the country shocks us everyday.

"I got really nothing and no help by which I could maintain

## The Week in Review

### AL Retains Pabna-2

Awami League candidate AK Khandaker won the Dec 10 Pabna-2 by-polls defeating his nearest rival, ARM Selim Reza of BNP by 20,000 votes. With a turnout of 75.3%, the JP candidate, Sajjad Hussain Bachchu received 389 votes and Mohammad Krishak of Krishak Samik Mukti Andolan received 233, out of a total of 1,42,100 votes.

Khandaker's victory enabled the ruling party to retain the seat which fell vacant after the death of Ahmed Tafazzul on June 28 last.



### BNP Cries Foul

The BNP rejected the Pabna-2 results, termed it the outcome of massive rigging, demanded resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner and enforced a 12-hour hartal on Dec 13 as a mark of protest.

The hartal left at least 175 people injured across the country in sporadic clashes involving law enforcers and AL-BNP activists, and 123 people were arrested for 'picketing'.

The BNP-led seven-party alliance demanded fresh elections in the Pabna-2 constituency.

### Air Crash Claims 100

A Thai airliner with 146 persons aboard crashed near an airport on Dec 11, on its way from Bangkok to Surat Thani (located 503 kms from Bangkok). The death toll crossed the 100 mark but there were also survivors.

The airline, released a passenger manifest that indicated that most of the 132 passengers were Thais, but there were also several Western and Japanese names in the list. Thai communication and Transport Ministers sister was also in the list.

### Air Folly Claims Haan

Abdul Qudus, a minor of 11 years on Dec 11 was accused of 'misconduct' with a stewardess of Singapore Airlines, Haan Hong, while coming to Dhaka from Singapore where he studies.

The boy allegedly 'touched' her, and was arrested and presented before a Child Affairs Court. Stewardess Haan lodged a complaint with Cantonment police station.

### Reds Kill Reds

Eleven left-wing extremists were killed on Dec 12 in Jessore when two rival outlawed parties got into clashes with one another. Two of the dead (the opposing team leaders) were wanted criminals and were involved in several cases of murder, looting, mugging and extortion. Nine have been arrested in this connection, according to police sources.

### Delhi Slow-go on Tariffs

India agreed to withdraw all non-tariff barriers from Bangladesh exportable during the two-day Bangladesh-India trade talks which ended on Dec 9. They agreed to withdraw the non-tariff barriers and reduce the duty slab by 50-60%. However, India was yet to accept Dhaka's request for providing zero-tariff facility.

Bangladesh's export to India is worth about 65 million US dollars a year while her import stand at about 1,000 million US dollars.

### BCS's Big Bang

A five-day international computer exhibition organised by Bangladesh Computer Society (BCS), began on Dec 10, at IDB Bhaban at city's Agargaon area, with the view to promote the country's information technology sector. It was the biggest computer show ever held in Bangladesh, which attracted over 100,000 visitors.

Inaugurated by Finance Minister Kibria, the BCS International Computer Show, bore special significance because four major companies Apple, Intel, Nonce and Goldkist participated in it, along with 40 other companies.



The wonderful world of computers: Visitors marvel at the BCS show at the IDB

### Lethal Robbery

Two security guards were killed on Dec 10 allegedly by dacoits and Tk 4.22 lakh was taken from the cash box of HRC company in the city's Kawanbazar area. Two people were arrested in this connection and the money recovered from Tangal area the next day.

### BIMST-EC Begins

A three-day meeting of BIMST-EC began in the city on Dec 17 in a bid to give concrete shape to the new economic block grouping three SAARC and two ASEAN countries, namely, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Areas of cooperation were explored and the organisational foundation laid.

BIMST-EC was launched in Bangkok in December last year at a meeting of the five South and South-East Asian countries.

### Honour for Shaheed Janani

The Begum Rokeya Padak '98 was awarded to 'Shaheed Janani' Jahanara Imam (posthumous) for her leadership and contribution towards progress of the woman folk.

Imam's younger sister, Umme Salma Chisty received the Padak on her behalf from the Prime Minister at a function in the city.

### Hold on Dhaka-10

The High Court on Dec 9 ordered a 10-week stay of operation of the Election Tribunals judgment declaring void the polling at 51 centres out of 76 in Dhaka-10 constituency. This means repolling will not take place in the 51 centres, as demanded by BNP's Abdul Mannan within the next ten week, unless ordered by the high court.

## Paying Tribute to Martyrs on Victory Day



Wounded war veterans



Nazrul Institute



Bangla Academy



Bangladesh Police Association