

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 Khandoker Fazlur Rahman of Aulapara 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 Mukti Jodha 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 Mukti Jodha 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 certificates to Enayet Chowdhury, who wasted no time to gather other information about this martyr.

Fazlur Rahman's 90-year old mother Amirunnessa Begum is now bedridden at her village house with old age complications and cannot speak clearly. His widow Mamta Begum died in 1990. Their three daughters

are all married. Fazlur Rahman and Mamta 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 Kuchibhar 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 combined group

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

Many Pakistani soldiers were killed in that furious gunbattle, 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 Nalik 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 Mukti Jodha Command Council of Barisal could locate him earlier.

Recently, a week before the central Mukti Jodha 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 (retd.) Shahjahan Omar, now a BNP member of parliament from Jhalakathi district.

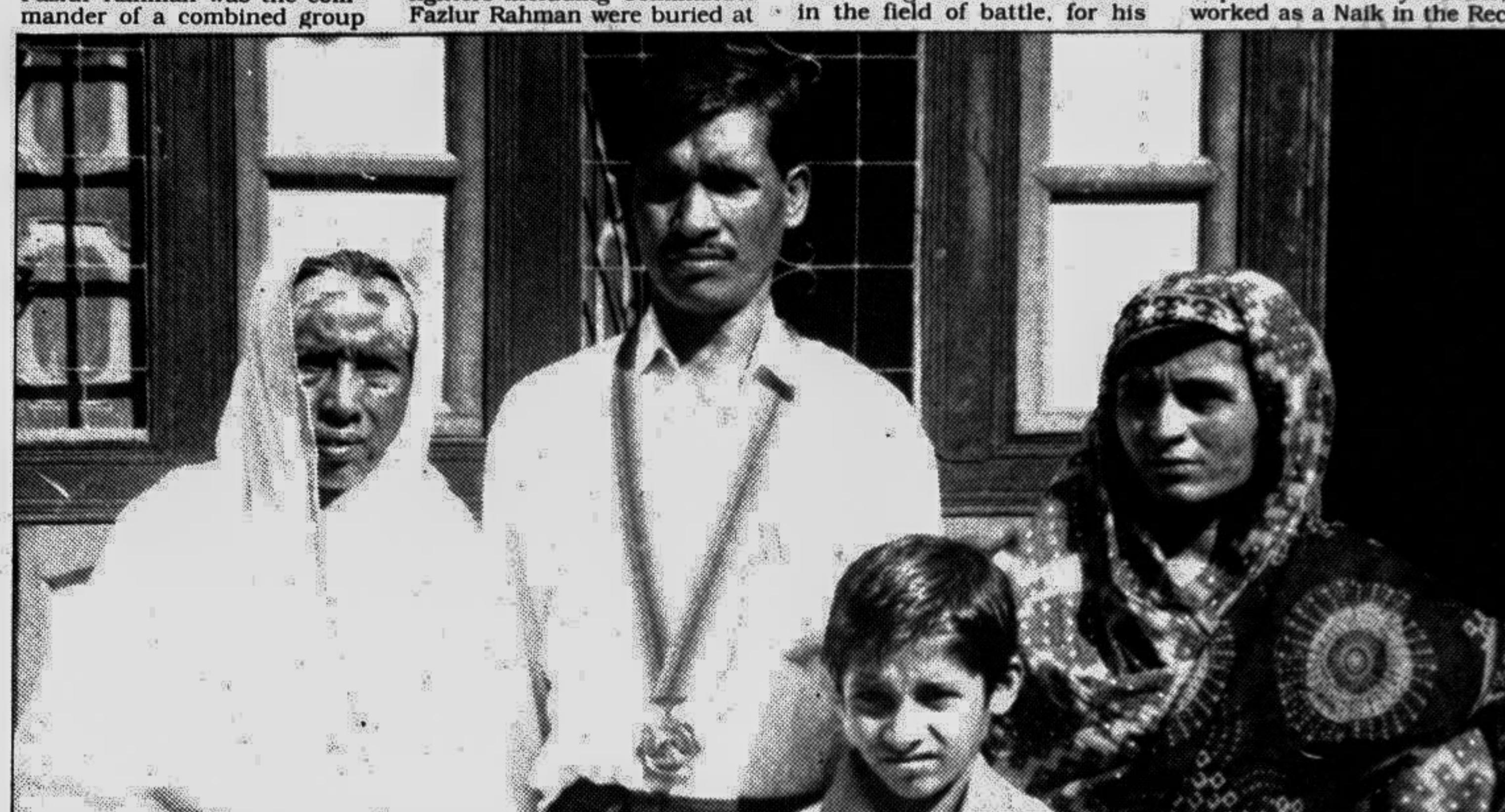
Abdus Sattar narrated his life story full of despair to some local journalists and members of Barisal Mukti Jodha Command Council when they discovered him at the Ganapara village of Kashipur, outskirts of the Barisal town on November 18 last. Actually, even Sattar himself did not know or was aware of 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 Mukti Jodha Kallyan 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 Kallyan 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



Shaheed Fazlur Rahman Bir Uttam

Captain Matiur was hardly 200 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 pray to them through the wireless set. Matiur 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.

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

Why Fazlur Rahman is being remembered after long 27

years? Sattar has recently come to public knowledge.

Now living in Barisal, Sattar fought a fierce face-to-face battle with Pakistani occupation army at Goainghat of Chittagong area in Sylhet on 29th of November 1971. During that engagement, his subsector commander was Captain Anwar Hossain Chowdhury, later awarded the Bir Uttam by the government in 1972 as one of the heroes of the Liberation War.

In that frontal battle Sattar was seriously wounded, having sustained several bullet injuries on his body. He was left for dead at the battlefield amid spray of bullets from the Pak army. Sattar, now about 50 years old, retired from the regu-

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

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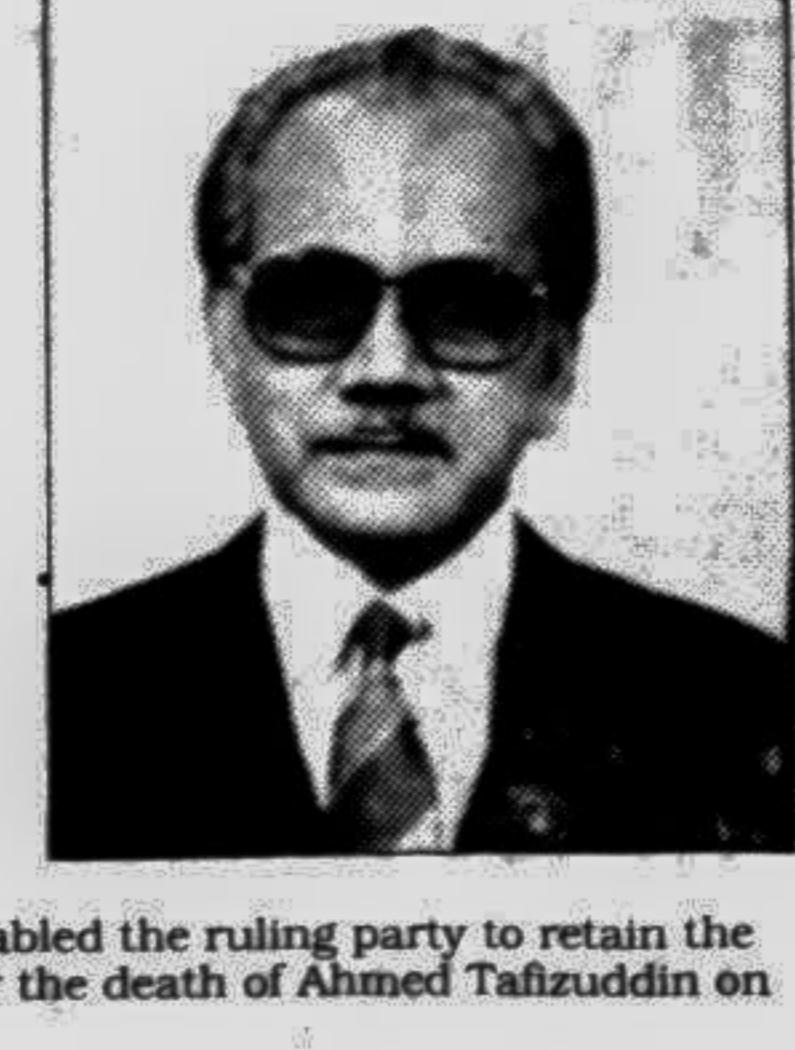
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The Week in Review

AL Retains Pabna-2

Awami League candidate At 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, Sajid Hussain Bachchu received 389 votes and Mohammad Krishanullah of the Samik Mukti Andolan received 233, out of a total of 14,210 votes.



Khandaker's victory enabled the ruling party to retain the seat which was vacant after the death of Ahmed Taifuzzuddin 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 Quddus, 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

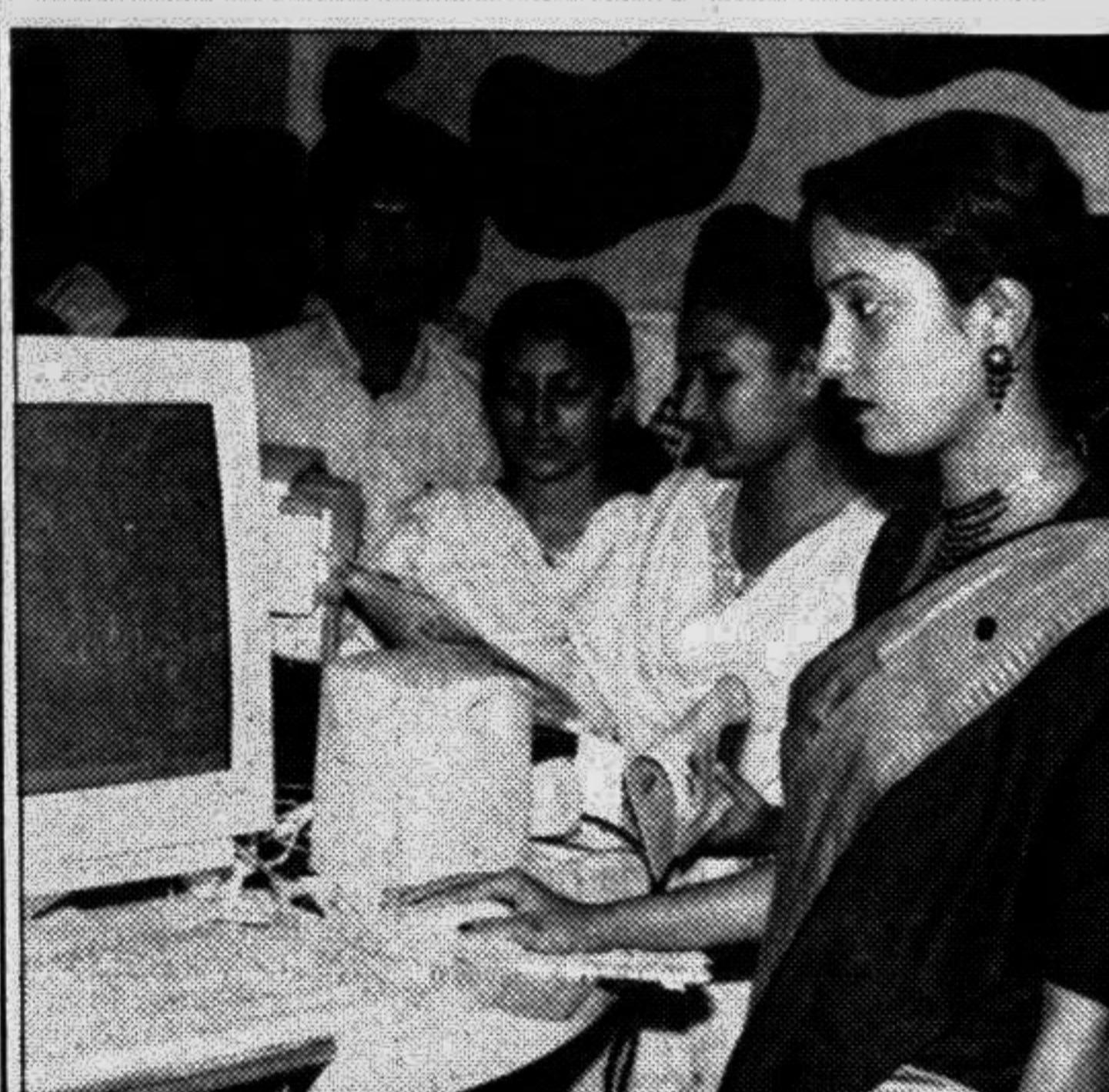
India agreed to withdraw all non-tariff barriers from Bangladeshi exports during the two-day Bangladesh-India trade talks which ended on Dec 9. They agreed to withdraw the non-tariff barriers and reduce the duty slab by 50-60%. However, India was yet to accept Dhaka's request for providing zero-tariff 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 Samity (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, Nortel 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 Kawranbazar area. Two people were arrested in this connection and the money recovered from Tangail 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.

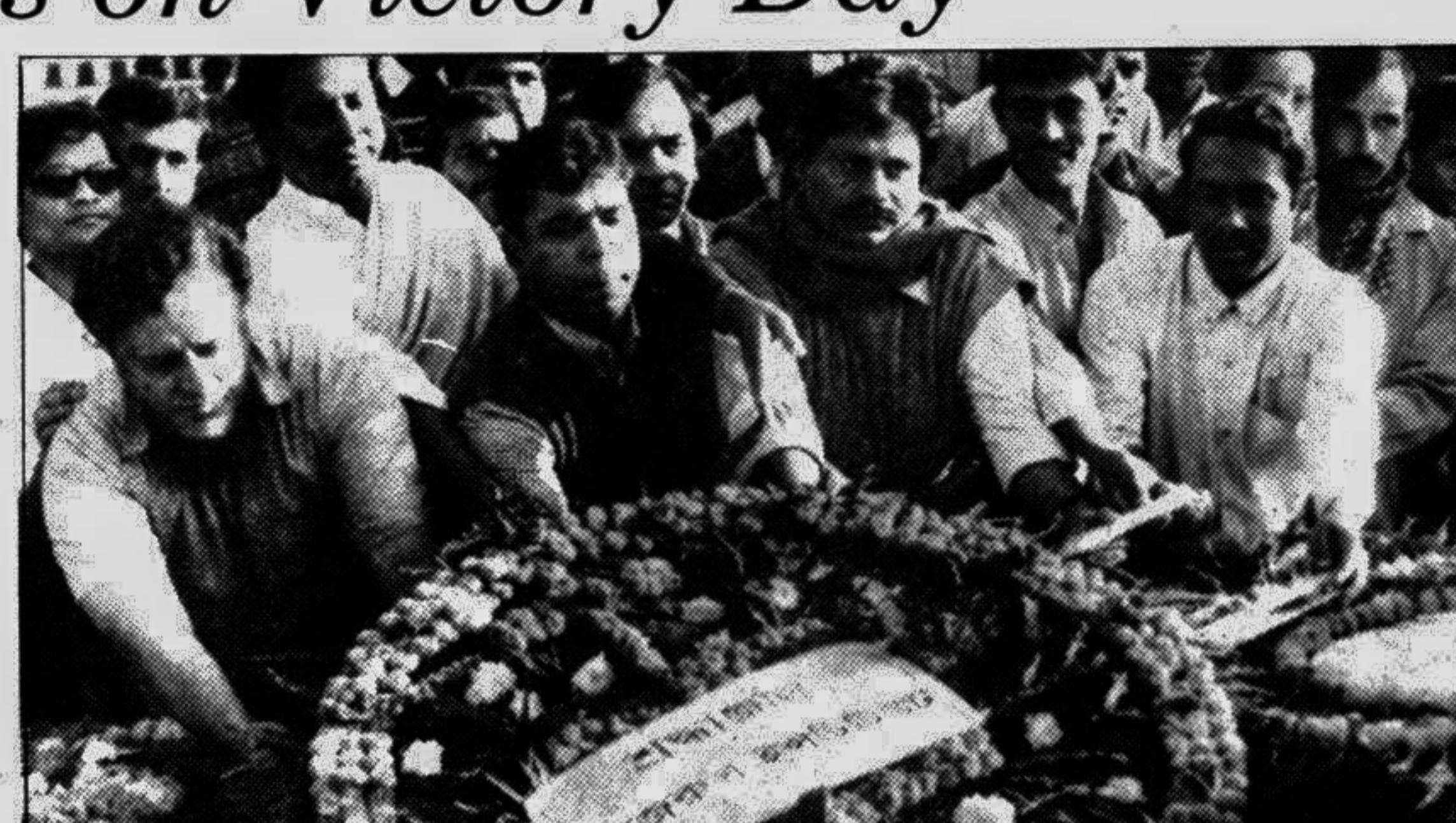
Hold on Dhaka-10

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 78 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 weeks, unless ordered by the high court.

Paying Tribute to Martyrs on Victory Day



Wounded war veterans



Nazrul Institute



Bangla Academy



Bangladesh Police Association