

# UNFORGETTABLE ZIA



Special Supplement on the Occasion of 18th Anniversary of Death of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman

## Ziaur Rahman: A man and a leader

by MM Rezaul Karim

It is, indeed, universally acknowledged that Shaheed Ziaur Rahman left an indelible mark and occupied a highly significant place in the history of Bangladesh. His contribution to the creation and development of Bangladesh was unique. No other leader succeeded in playing such an important and combined role during the war of liberation to create Bangladesh as well as to develop Bangladesh through a democratic process after its creation.

His declaration of independence on the 27th March 1971 over the radio was heard by many and later reverberated throughout the country. His clarion call thus heralded the glorious war of liberation by giving direction and instilling confidence among a fearful, fleeing and rudderless populace. He demonstrated an unparalleled sense of patriotism, boldness and leadership by uniting a dishevelled nation and giving them hopes for a better future, while all other leaders, including elected representatives of the people, were busy in saving themselves by fleeing across the borders into India. Zia's call particularly motivated the Bangladeshi men in uniform in his own East Bengal Regiment, the East Pakistan Rifles, the Ansars and others and helped them to regain their most prized confidence and sense of discipline. They then regrouped themselves and later formed as the core of the Mukti Bahini to stage the heroic fight to liberate the fettered nation.

Zia was a gallant and successful Sector Commander, who imbued among his comrades the spirit that prompted freedom fighters to make the supreme sacrifice for their land and people. He restored democracy by introducing a multi-party political system in 1977 after it had been shattered by the Awami League's introduction of one-party rule of Bhasu in early 1975. In that way, he saved the nation from being a totalitarian state and put it on the right track in keeping with the wishes and democratic aspirations of the people. Another contribution Shaheed Ziaur Rahman made, almost unwittingly, was to introduce a two-party system by establishing a new political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

There are, however, several quarters in the society who claim that Ziaur Rahman had been an autocratic military ruler. He was, no doubt, a military ruler for some time, from 1975 to 1977, but it would be most unfair and incorrect to suggest that he was autocratic. Those who knew Zia closely would agree that he would patiently listen to people and often act in line with their just and objective advice. As for the period of martial law, it was an

accident of history that during the two year period, except from 3rd to 7th November 1977 when he was arrested and detained following Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf's coup d'etat, he became first de-facto and then de jure ruler of the nation as deputy chief and then chief martial law administrator.

Again, one should not also be oblivious of the fact that Zia served during this entire period of two years under the presidency of the Awami League leader Khandaker Mushtaque

unflinching determination and megalomaniac efforts held out a glistering promise for nation's future. His down to earth prescriptions of small and simple remedy for bit and complex problems, won him profuse praise. For example, by way of introducing the policy of digging canals as well as excavating new ponds and improving existing ones, he sought, with considerable success, to reduce the havoc wrought by continuing floods by way of providing more facilities for storage and drainage of waters throughout the country. His emphasis on

rare trait of character of leaders not only in our country but in most of the developing world. This uncommon characteristic of the late President was known and duly recognised both at home and abroad. I had the privilege of arranging his state visits to Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and China where I happened to be the first head of Mission as Minister Charge d'Affaires, High Commissioner and Ambassador respectively. In all these countries, full awareness of Zia's personal honesty in financial matters and his strict guidance to his politicians and officials in this respect helped reinforce confidence of the host countries to promote bilateral relations with Bangladesh, specially in respect of aid and trade.

I had the great privilege of knowing Ziaur Rahman personally as a friend from 1966 when he was an instructor at the Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul along with two other Majors, namely MA Mannaf and Khaled Mosharraf. The friendship was renewed after liberation during his brief visit to London where I was acting as Head of the unofficial Bangladesh Mission. During my subsequent assignment in the Foreign Office our relations continued. I detected a fleeting glimpse of disappointment in him at his being unfairly bypassed after liberation to his legitimate post as the Chief of Army Staff, though he used to hold his feeling at a closely guarded secret. The commendable interim agreement he concluded on the sharing of waters of the Ganges made him pay several visits to Delhi where I was assigned as Deputy High Commissioner and had to be involved in the negotiations under his broad guidance.

Two days before the fateful night he was assassinated, I received a telephone call from him in Beijing. He informed me that he was personally looking into the various details in preparation of the forthcoming state visit of the Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang. That was to be the second visit of a Chinese Prime Minister after Chou en Lai. I told the honourable President that I was constantly maintaining liaison with the Chinese authorities, who had assured me that everything about the state visit was progressing satisfactorily. He felt reassured and happy. On the 30th May about 10 O'clock in the morning, I received a phone call from the Reuters correspondent. He said, "Excellency, I have to give a terrible news to you. ... your President has been assassinated a few hours ago." I froze on the phone. When he did not let any words from my end for some time, he hung up the receiver in silence. I remained sitting down on the telephone stool, no one knows for how long.

tree plantation, protection of environment and measures to improve agricultural production are well-known. But alas, cruel fate prematurely severed the leader from his people.

As a man, the most prominent characteristic that one perceives is his incisive mind devoted to do things than to talk much. He would not spare unnecessarily or waste time, would like to come to the point as fast as possible and get cracking to implement the decision. His disciplined manner and arduous habits would make him walk for miles at a stretch on fields to see for himself progress in agriculture and irrigation as well as to meet farmers and to get a first hand knowledge of their problems.

Another commendable characteristic of the departed leader was his unparalleled honesty and corruption-free life. This now appears to be a

Ahmed with his Awami League cabinet and later of Chief Justice Sayem. Zia fought Commander-in-Chief of the Mukti Bahini General MAG Osmani in a presidential run. This substantiates the fact that the existing political parties realised that Zia wanted full restoration of democracy, otherwise they would not have participated in the election. As for the two year period of transition, without trying to justify in, one must view this in terms of reality of the situation and practice in vogue. Even in our country, a little later, General Ershad's promise of a two year period of martial law was elongated to a turbulent period of long nine years. As compared to that, martial law during Zia's period was lifted after the shortest possible time.

Shaheed Zia, unfortunately, got very little time to devote himself to nation building. His clear but unobtrusive vision,



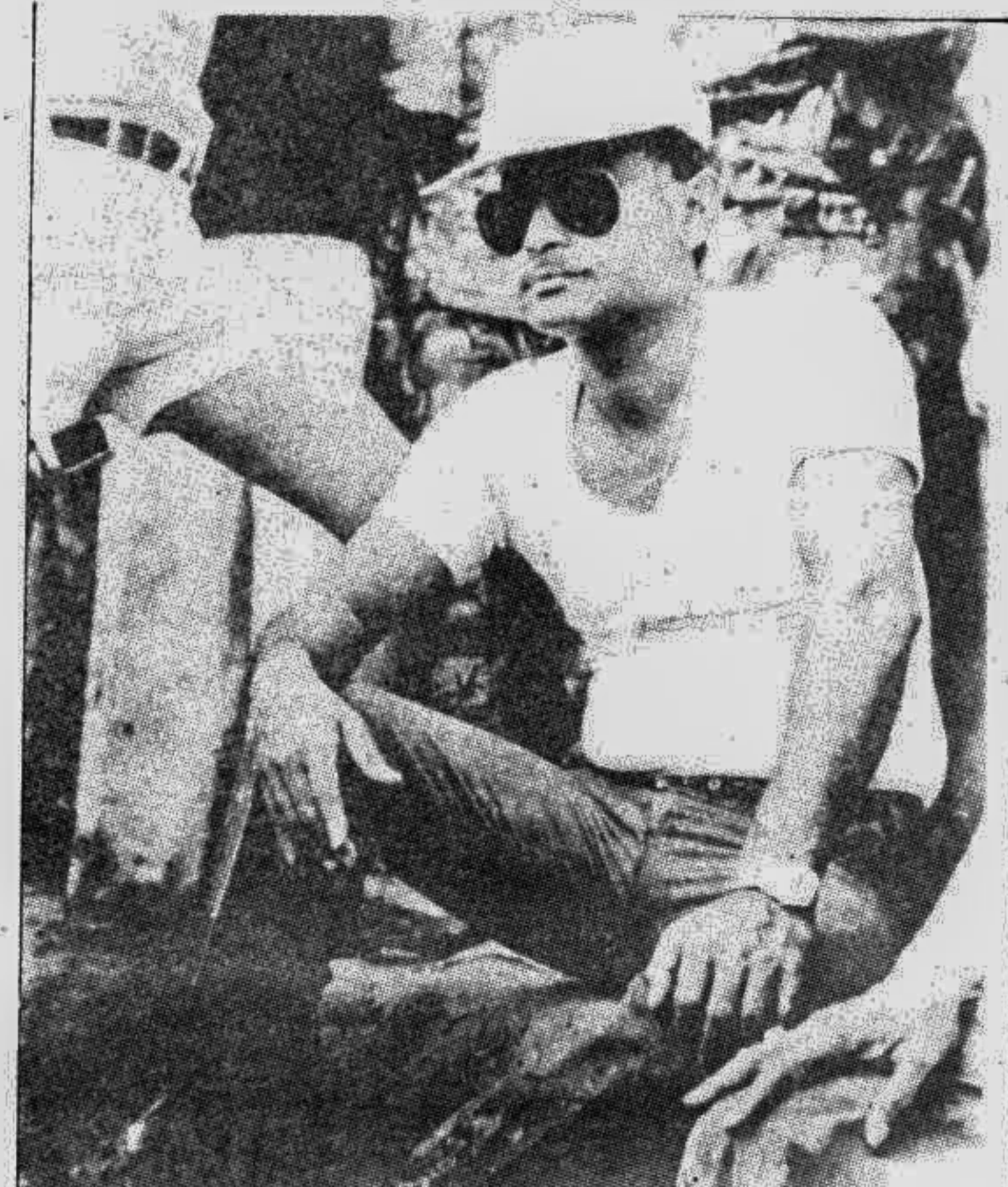
## Zia, the Architect of Nation-building

By Sadeq Khan

IN the UN system as it evolved after the Second World War this century, the nation-state is recognised as the inviolable unit, albeit subject to transformation by domestic compulsion irrationality of post-colonial boundaries of newly-independent states made it an imperative for each nation-state to redefine its national character, taking into account its multi-national and socio-cultural compartmentalisation that awaited a process of integration under nation-state leadership.

This requirement of the historical process of nation-building was very well understood by Shaheed Ziaur Rahman, the national martyr. The creation of a nation-state and the process of nation-building is a historical process. The historical memory of an organised society, its traditional values and its material experiences contribute to the development of a national spirit. The elite class by their articulation and writings gives expression to the geo-political aspirations of that organized society. And the historical process obtain fruition in the state constitution, which in turn remains open to transformation by popular will in the course of time and restructuring of the world order. The class contradictions and other factors of socio-political evolution no doubt determine the direction of a national destiny. The days, the international civil society with its satellite broadcast and non-government welfare activities is also tending to bend national destinies, whether for better or for worse only history can tell. But that an active and essentially autonomous process based on the state constitution plays a paramount role in nation-building was very clearly understood by late President Ziaur Rahman. This nation owes it to his leadership in thought as well as in inspiration for the initiation and continuation of a health and confident nation-building process that is proving indomitable.

History testifies that the class-consciousness and core-values of the toilers of the soil in these parts put up the most persistent resistance against British colonial domination from the very beginning. The hundred years between the Battle of Plassey and the Sepoy Mutiny were filled with occurrences of bold resistance by the Bengal peasants in the form of Fakir rebellion, the revolt of Balaki Shah, the Bamboo-caste of Titumir, the Farazi movement, the indigo rebellion, and the like. They were directed at the field-level against the cohorts and collaborators of colonial exploitation, namely the Zemindars and the usurers. The British managed to suppress by the end of the nineteenth century, the physical capacity of resistance of these rural communities, and



their urban representatives, but their psychological capacity for resistance was unimpaired. That is why, behind the open stage of a country crowd of civil society that went along with colonial concessions, an undercurrent of consciousness of core values of embryonic nationhood ran in the wings. Those core values were reared by Sufi Islam, whose advent in fact led to the flowering of Bengali as the medium of expression of native culture and philosophy as against Sanskrit, the language of exclusive discourse by the Brahminic elite of the preceding era. In the folk literature of the middle ages, one finds evidence of the cultural integration in these parts under Sufi Islam, in the accout of debates between Sufi Sheikhs, Buddhist Yogis and the high-caste Brahmins or in later accounts of Gazi Pir or Satya Pir which advocated paramount regard for humanity a core value. That cultural integration involved many folk traditions of Nath-Jugi Boursid Bishnab, or Baul- Moursid ideas in its embrace as well, characterising the social tolerance of the Sultanate post-sultanate era compared to the religious and cast intolerance of the earlier Brahminic era.

In the 1st decade of the twentieth century, separate recognition of the core values, of a nascent sub-national spirit was briefly given in the administrative exercise. Of establishing an unit comprising of East Bengal and Assam as a new province under British India. That initiative was abandoned, but in the years to follow through movements like Kr-

ishak-Proja charter of demands, and at the lag-end of the colonial rule, by the historic Lahore resolution, that spirit obtained a civic expression. It is for the implied assurance of self-determination in the Lahore resolution that the people of these parts voted for Pakistan. That assurance was never fulfilled. The language movement was particularly rewarded by the recognition of Bangla as one of the state languages of Pakistan. But repeated warnings of Moulana Bhasani from mid-fifties that the people of these parts would have to say good-bye to Pakistan if the spirit of Lahore resolution was not implemented, went unheeded. Upto late fifties, Sheikh Mujib wanted parity within Pakistan as against the right of self-determination, but in mid-sixties, he changed his mind and proclaimed six-points programme. A sub-national consensus was thus obtained, and there was an unprecedented upsurge of that articulate will of the people. When the military rules of Pakistan, through massacre and arbitrary occupation, tried to

At a very depressing moment of the history of our nation-in-the-making, 26th of March, 1971, the -them Major Zia's faint voices on the radio from the broadcast relay tower in Chittagong, defying the bloody occupation of Yahya's army units and declaring independence of Bangladesh, came as music of emancipation to the ears of over humiliated na-

tion-hood. In this discouragement shall not harp on that point. We shall limit on discussion of the nation building process that our people had to suffer under Mujib, as a sequel to the compromise with Indian armed forces to be at the steering wheel of the joint command for the final thrust of the liberation war, at the peak of nine months after that declaration of independence.

Whether the majority people of these party Muslims or Bengalees never occurred as a point of debate in our public mind. Both are matters of their natural identity, and there is no contradiction in that identity. Nor that identity alien, to the co-existence of other religious or tribal communities who form part of our national polity.

In a despotic flair peculiar to his nature, Sheikh Mujib demanded that every Bangladeshi citizen must become Bengalee in culture and spirit. He offended the tribals, and sowed the seeds of division in our otherwise harmonious national polity. By this and other misdirected policies gave rise to disrespect, mistrust and conflict between communities and ethnic entities.

Even after his fall, the nation passed through very uncertain times until the Sepoy-people revolution brought Zia to the helm of national affairs. Zia grasped the essentially multi-ethnic character of the modern nation-state, however, insignificant the percentage of minority ethnic communities might be in our overwhelmingly generous population. He also realised that nation-building and national role in the particular geo-political context evolves with new potentials in a historic process. As such the role of Bangladesh as a nation state model amidst the disparate communities and states of Eastern India, Burma Thailand etc. who are our immediate neighbours would be enhanced by our adoption of multi-ethnic national spirit based on the state constitution. And he gave a candid call for the nation to veer around the slogan of Bangladesh nationalism that has since become the guiding principle of our nation-building architecture. That process is gaining in strength with the passage of time and with the growth of broad national consensus despite the machinations and subversions by the fifth column within the country and by the hegemonic aggressions from without. What is more, the core value of our nationhood as identified by Zia and enshrined by constitutional amendments continue to be the guiding force behind all national endeavours, not withstanding usurpers of state power who tend to stab the nation-building process in the back and try to whip up a civil war psychosis by misinformation and disinformation.

## Zia — A Visionary Leader

By Reazuddin Ahmed

THE people across the world remember their heroes and pay their respect to those who served the nation with dedication. They follow their ideals and implement those for building the nation. The people who became the national heroes served the nation and the people selflessly. Such national heroes fought against the enemies of the nation to liberate and defend their motherland and built the nation with statesman like foresight. They planned the national development with vision and sagacity. People gain by remembering them and following their ideals.

Shaheed president Ziaur Rahman was one such person who emerged as a liberation war hero in 1971 and later became a visionary in building a modern Bangladesh. Today is the death anniversary of Ziaur Rahman. It is the befitting occasion to remember him, to pay respect to him and to evaluate his achievements. But it is not very easy to evaluate Zia in short because his achievements are really great. He made remarkable contributions as a soldier, president, politician and as a reformer. Zia is often referred to as a soldier or as a president. This many not be the proper way of evaluating a national hero. Zia should be seen in totality for his objective evaluation of his life and achievements because his

honesty, dedication, sagacity and foresight will continue to guide the nation and inspire the new generation.

Even the critics of Shaheed president Ziaur Rahman can not undermine his role in the liberation war and restoring peace and discipline in the country in the post '75 Bangladesh. When Zia came to the centre stage of power, the country was in total anarchy. There was no government in the first week of November, 1975. The whole nation was as helpless as it was on 25th of March, 1971. In 1971 Major Zia gave the nation a sense of direction and called for taking up arms to liberate the country. A determined people turned back at his call and defeated the occupation forces. It was Zia who fulfilled a soldier's obligation by liberating the country. Again General Zia stood by the people when the conspirators were trying to undermine country's sovereignty. Those who saw the anarchy in those days in 1975 will definitely agree that General Zia appeared as a savior of the nation. But I know there are many overromanticised people who will say that Zia's role has been exaggerated. But it is not true. I am to say that Zia has not been properly evaluated until now. Those who want to undermine the contribution of Zia, should not forget that a soldier's duty is to defend his motherland and Zia did it in

1971 and 1975.

In 1975 General Zia was brought to the centre stage of power through a revolution. The people and soldiers jointly organised that revolution to defend country's sovereignty. Zia was brought to radio station from captivity. He did not seize power by promulgating martial law. The country was already under martial law on November 7 when Zia was installed to power by the people and the soldiers through a revolution.

Seventh November was the turning point in our national life. The country was set on a long march towards democracy. The so-called democrats and elected representatives of the people killed democracy and established one party Baksal rule. Is it not true that multi-party democracy was killed through establishment of Baksal? Is it also not true that the multi-party democracy was restored by Ziaur Rahman? What the critics will call Zia — a killer of democracy or a savior of democracy? It is true that Zia was a soldier. A soldier's image in most third world countries is that he takes position against democracy. But there are exceptions. It was Ziaur Rahman who allowed political parties to function under multi-party democracy. The 1979 parlia-

ment was represented by different political parties. The noted parliamentarians were elected to that house.

President Zia emerged as a politician through formation of a nationalist front. Such a front was then required to or-

ganise the nationalist forces. The nationalist forces were then fragmented and scattered all over the country. Zia saw tremendous political potential in that force. So he formed the nationalist front to bring all nationalists under one banner.



The front was then converted into Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Formation of BNP was a significant event in our political history. The launching of BNP was a deterrent to those who wanted to rule Bangladesh perpetually with extraneous support. Ziaur Rahman launched BNP to create a balance of power in our society. As a politician Zia felt the urgency of forming a party that could nurture and protect democracy. BNP did it when General Ershad was trying to perpetuate autocratic rule in Bangladesh. If a politician's success lies in seeing things beyond his nose, then Zia was definitely a successful politician because he filled the vacuum in our political arena by launching a strong party that is needed for sustenance of democracy.

President Zia will be remembered for so many reasons. He restored discipline in the administration and charted a road map for Bangladesh to make the country a self-reliant one. He took over the administration at a time when Bangladesh was a bottomless basket. But Ziaur Rahman, within shortest possible time, pulled up Bangladesh from the shambles. The nation got a dignified position in the committee of nation as a member of security council and vice-chair-

man of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). Zia undertook initiative to make the country self-reliant in food and his action plan was so successful that Bangladesh could export rice in early 80s. The country's industrial policy was liberalised and private sector was given the driving seat in industrial development of the country. During his time democratisation process started. It is needless to say that Bangladesh had to suffer most because of wholesale nationalisation at the dawn of independence. He streamlined administration through sweeping measures. The talented people were attracted to the civil service through competitive examination.

In foreign policy Zia scored many successes. A new born country under his leadership played significant role in establishing peace in middle east. Bangladesh was a member of Al-Quds committee and Zia was given the pioneering role to end war between Iran and Iraq. Bangladesh's victory in the security council election was a great honour and recognition of this country's role in establishing world peace. He will be remembered for his initiative to bring all the countries of South Asia under the umbrella of a regional organisation which later became the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Zia was a vision-

ary. He saw the potential in such an organisation for promoting peace and development in this part of the world. Zia took the initiative to form a south Asian regional organisation during the difficult time of cold war. In the post cold war era regional groupings are mushrooming across the world. But Zia dreamt of such an organisation at a time when no one in South Asia saw the possibility of bringing the seven countries together because of their acrimonious relations. Even Zia was misunderstood for taking this move. But he was undaunted in implementing his dream. Today SAARC is a potential organisation and this regional group can play a vital role in promoting regional peace, harmony and economic development.

Zia had firm conviction in institutionalising democracy and the society. He took certain steps that will be remembered for long. The newspapers enjoyed freedom during his time. He took initiative to set up press institute of Bangladesh and formed press council. He took all these steps to strengthen democracy and institutionalise freedom. Zia introduced a brand of politics that enthused younger generation to participate in nation building activities. A frustrated people saw silverlining in the clouds under the leadership of Ziaur Rahman.